

**Accomplishing Public Work:
Encounters with Park Rangers**

Jonathan Ablitt

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Abstract

The aim of this ethnographic study is to advance the understanding of the situated contingencies and implications of working in public view. It does so by tracing the quotidian work practices and face-to-face interactions of the Urban Park Rangers in Cardiff, UK as they routinely go about their rounds, maintaining and managing urban park space. Their maintenance and management work is inevitably public, and a central organisational aspect of it is the regularity and ordinariness of their encounters with members of the public. As legitimate 'approachables' and 'auditables', it is a practical requirement of their job to regularly account for their practice, and such characteristics as 'professionalism', 'strategy', and 'system' are displayed as in-built features of their work activities. Analyses pay close attention to the participants' observations and category work, and show how the categorial device of 'public worker'—'member of the public' is omnirelevant in the relational organisation and mutual elaboration of their practice and the space. The parks themselves are collaboratively, ordinarily, and emergently assembled through practical action and interaction.

Not only must they account for their practice, but as 'stocked characters' (Goffman, 1971) the Park Rangers are also approached about troubles outside of their technical remit: burst river banks, what time the boat hire opens, what the rugby score was, and so on. Their public availability and visibility produce them as constituent features of the urban fabric to the point that they become practically responsible for myriad public troubles, and must 'pick up the slack' of other practitioners and organisations. It is therefore proposed that 'stocked characters' are vital to the accomplishment of public space as public space. The experience of 'being in public' is ordinarily contingent on the assumption of the express availability of some public worker to ask for help, information, assistance, or who you can go to with some trouble and whose category-boundness to the space obliges them to help to the best of their ability. Public work, then, is shown to be radically constitutive of public space.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK RANGERS AND THE STUDY OF THEIR PRACTICE

Introducing the Urban Park Rangers: Public practitioners who routinely ‘pick up the slack’

Out on patrol on a warm morning in June, the Park Ranger and I turn to head down the promenade by the Lake, picking up a few scraps of litter with our litter-pickers as we go. There isn't a lot of it, as it's early in the day and the litter team have already done their rounds. We zigzag between bins, placing the few scraps we collect directly from the end of the tool into them as we move forward. It's quiet at the moment, and the only people in the vicinity are a man and a young child who are stood by the railing looking over the Lake. As we move to the bin closest to the man, he turns and uses it as an opportunity to ask a question:

“Scuse me, could you tell me when the boat hire opens?”

“Ah they only open during the school holidays, so it'll be a couple of weeks wait I'm afraid.”

“It's gonna be 25 degrees today!”

“Yeah, lovely weather for it, I know. But the Council don't actually run the boat stage. It's a private company that runs it now.”

“That's rubbish, isn't it! It'll be busy round here later; bet there'll be no shortage of people looking to hire a boat out.”

“Yeah, we've got our work cut out for us today.”

“Honestly, what're they thinking? They'd make a killing!”

This thesis examines the situated contingencies of working in public view. It does this in reference to a particular group of local authority employees – the Cardiff City Council Urban Park Rangers – whom I have engaged with, ethnographically, for the best part of two and a half years. Cardiff, the capital city of Wales, is a city much like others: it comprises a built-up city centre, with shops, restaurants, and offices, and other spaces of consumption and work (Jacobs, 1961; Zukin, 1995; Jayne, 2006; Amin, 2006); and surrounding residential neighbourhoods and suburbs that sprawl outwards concentrically. Dotted around the city are a number of green spaces and public parks. These parks, like everything else in the city, require upkeep; and these Urban Park Rangers are some of the operatives whose job it is to do that upkeep, to keep things ticking over (see Gilbert, et al. 1996; Brody, 2006; Nagle, 2013; Hall and Smith, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017; Ablitt, 2016; Hughes, et al. 2016; Hall, 2017; Ablitt and Smith, 2019 for other recent studies of public urban maintenance work). By focusing on the everyday work practices of the Urban Park Rangers, I hope to explicate some of the contingencies through which such public work gets done, and to make a practice-led contribution to scholarly conversations on street-level bureaucracy, public behaviour, and the production of public space as a situated accomplishment.

I have chosen to introduce the Urban Park Rangers in the first instance with the above ethnographic vignette, not because it describes a particularly significant or captivating moment, but because it is a lucid illustration of the type of mundane public engagement that they routinely handle while out on shift patrolling the parks. As almost constantly publicly visible uniformed ‘boots on the ground’ who are consequently available and answerable to the public, they are regularly required to go beyond their own work role

requirements and responsibilities (which I will get to in a moment) and ‘pick up the slack’ of other practitioners, services, organisations, and companies. The Urban Park Rangers are one of two main Park Ranger teams which come under the management of the Cardiff Council Parks Services department, and the one that is responsible for the practical maintenance and management of Cardiff’s 137 public parks (Outdoor Cardiff, n.d.), as well as the enforcement of parks specific by-laws and certain environmental laws.¹

They should not be confused with the Community Park Rangers – the other Park Ranger team – whose collective role is geared towards education and conservation and whose geographical remit is weighted more to the suburbs. Instead, the Urban Park Rangers, with their distinctive red uniforms, are permanently headquartered in Cardiff’s two largest and most central parks, Bute Park and Roath Park, where the majority of my ethnographic fieldwork was conducted. They also have less frequent scheduled rotas across some of the other 135 parks and simultaneously respond to call-outs in roving ‘mobile patrols’ in their van. The Urban Park Rangers, referred to henceforth as the ‘Park Rangers’ or just simply ‘Rangers’ are tasked with, *inter alia*: keeping the parks safe and clean for members of the public, enforcing parks-specific by-laws and environmental laws (most notably the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996) through the issuing of fixed penalty notices where possible;² and the conservation of

¹ It is only in this introductory chapter that I will rely on more traditional and ‘authoritative’ ethnographic writing to provide a background on these public practitioners. In what follows, I will treat ethnographic descriptions as *prima facie* resources in which the category work that produces the reality of the emergent situation is displayed.

² In practice, the issuing of fixed penalty notices for dog fouling is fairly uncommon. The Rangers’ preferred tactics for maintaining order in the parks is through ‘soft enforcement’ (see Pendleton, (1998) for an interactionist study of park wardens’ ‘soft enforcement’ methods).

flora and fauna within the parks, and maintaining their general aesthetics. For the sake of clarity, the Urban Park Rangers are perhaps more akin to what one might imagine a 'park warden' or 'park keeper' to look like. You would be forgiven if your mind's eye takes you straight to an image of an armed wildlife ranger, but that is not the case here. The Rangers in Cardiff carry radios and litter pickers, not guns, batons, or handcuffs. It will be noted from the above description, then, that there are obvious overlaps between their practice and those that technically come under the Community Park Rangers' responsibilities (particularly in regard to conservation). This is a central political issue that characterises public work in the neoliberal climate of economic austerity and job cuts.

At the time of writing, there are only 13 Urban Park Rangers remaining. The team has been significantly 'slimmed down' through budget cuts (at Council level), and some of the Rangers are on precarious 'agency' contracts. A Ranger in a sub-team lost their job while I did my fieldwork, and at least one other had their hours cut substantially. These are highly skilled workers – and as one of the supervisors described, the team is “like a Swiss army knife” because they “have people from all sorts of professional backgrounds with all sorts of skills”. These skills range from manual and practical (one is a former bricklayer, another is a professional wildlife conservationist used to rescue sea turtles on beaches in Brazil before relocating) to technical and academic (at least one of the Rangers has a masters degree in Environmental Planning and wrote, of his own volition, a strategic report on restructuring the Ranger service to improve it). Beyond the individual vocational skills and experience that each brings to the team, the Park Rangers are adept in public engagement (they are recognised for this by other departments and organisations who have asked them to provide public relations

training for their own employees) and they are generally encouraged to be innovative and entrepreneurial in decision-making and direction. A silver lining of the small and close-knit team is that it creates the conditions for this entrepreneurialism, with individual Rangers able to float ideas for improvement to practice. Two Rangers tasked themselves with the additional job of surveying and cataloguing the trees in the Roath Park arboretum, while another offered to lead tour groups on educational walks in teach members of the public about the horticulture that the parks boast. As such, their everyday maintenance work is complex, physically and intellectually demanding, and as will be shown herein, situatedly indefinite and nebulous. Such open-ended work role requirements already make the Park Rangers an interesting case to examine in the study of situated work practices inasmuch as the ethnographic appeal may be to ‘uncover’ the spatiotemporal ‘becomings’ of those quotidian things that need to be done.

The nebulous character of the Park Rangers’ work perhaps lends itself to an ‘unpredictability’ which may be exhilarating for the intrepid ethnographer; a routine patrol may (and is designed to) expose some unanticipated trouble which will change the trajectory of that shift’s focus. That being said, as will soon become clearer, my ethnographic position here is not to play the role of the intrepid explorer, but rather to highlight the emergent ordinariness and relative banality of the Rangers’ own investigative endeavours, and to show how they handle the unanticipated issues they encounter in an orderly way. It is the ordinariness of their daily work activities that make them interesting: a small team of 13 Park Rangers, who have been relatively underfunded and under-resourced for the last decade, are tasked with the routine maintenance and management of 137 urban parks. These are clearly not ideal

practical conditions for doing the work, but it still gets done, and it gets done well. The scholarly allure is compounded by the fact that they do this situated searching, identifying, engaging, and rectifying of emergent troubles *in public view*. It is this publicness that is most centrally explored in this thesis.

As an aside, I hope that this thesis will – at the very least – showcase the important work of these highly competent practitioners, and demonstrate its centrality to the quotidian making and remaking of the city at ground-level. It may seem like a mammoth task to cover that much ground and do meaningful maintenance and management work simultaneously, but the Rangers manage it, and they manage it well, to the point that their work has been recognised by other organisations and teams, and the Council cabinet. Their maintenance practices keep the city and its public parks ticking over on a day-to-day basis, picking up the inevitable slack following successive cuts to the manual workforce over recent history. Resources are spread excruciatingly thinly across the city whose maintenance requirements have not diminished in the same way as the workforce has. The ‘tinkering trades’ (Goffman, 1961: 322) are increasingly overlooked and taken for granted, not least by proponents of the neoliberal political agenda destined to discursively erode the value of the ground-level worker, and whose self-preservation relies on this continued erosion in order to maintain hierarchies of power and consolidate surplus value into profit. Without maintenance practitioners like the Urban Park Rangers, the cracks in the urban fabric that they routinely patch up would inevitably deepen (Amin, 2006; Graham and Thrift, 2007; Hall and Smith, 2015). The city is built by the workers, and it is rebuilt over and over again every day. This thesis will shed light on the mundane practices that contribute to this routine rebuilding.

To return to the introductory vignette: this illustrates a brief conversation arising from a situation in which a Ranger is called upon by a member of the public who has an enquiry regarding a service within the perimeter of the park, but which does not fall under the Rangers' technical remit. As stated, like many public services across the country, the boat stage was privatised and now operates as a for-profit business. The Ranger does not work for the boat hire company and has no say in its operating schedule. However, notably, rather than relinquishing responsibility altogether, he has learnt the schedule and subsequently provides the man with the necessary information. The aggrieved man complains, to which the Ranger responds with empathy and redirects liability to the private company. The man continues the complaint providing his reasoning as to why the boat stage should be open on a warm, busy day. The Ranger's final response that "we've got our work cut out for us today" is hearably double-pronged inasmuch as a busy park typically means the increased likelihood of some park-related trouble requiring the Ranger's intervention, but also that there will probably be more disappointed people complaining about the boat stage not being open.

This situation is just one example of a regular issue that the Rangers face, whereby their public expectations are at odds with their *formal* work responsibilities. Similar moments will be analysed in later chapters in greater depth and with recourse to membership categorisation practices. For now, as a way of introducing the Rangers and their routine practice, it should be noted that a central organisational trouble is their visible accountability to the park in the first instance, and their consequent inability to entirely disattend situations in which there may be a public expectation for them to

attend (even if it is not formally part of their job). When it comes to how people assemble and make sense of the visual contexture of the park *in situ*, notions of public and private sector divisions of labour and accountability are not necessarily immediately available. What is plain to see, however, is a worker wearing a red sweatshirt and a hi-viz tabard with 'RANGER' screen-printed on the back in a similar font and format to the police (silver-white lettering encased in a blue rectangle). A uniform is a tell-tale sign that the wearer is accountable in some way, to some space, or some organisation, or both. When someone wears a uniform in a park, they will be the go-to person for any park-related enquiry or issue. A uniformed Ranger in a park is something like Erving Goffman's (1971: 307) 'stocked characters' in public space:

“In orienting himself in public places, the subject accords a special status to those whose job is to keep supplies on hand, traffic moving, and everything in working order. Whatever the source of their pay, these 'stocked characters' have a plant function, ensuring that a social order is maintained. Thus in public places there are the police to appeal to when something goes wrong; there are street cleaners and road-repair men; there are newspaper vendors and doormen – routinely appealed to, of course, for informational services they are not paid to provide.”

The park scene is visually assembled to include the Park Rangers as constituent features, as incumbent custodians, as information points, as customer service agents, as authorities to which one ought to report troubles to. Whether or not they have any formal ties to the privately owned and operated boat stage (to confirm, they do not), it is an unavoidable part of their job that they should be required to attend to enquiries about it and offer information in response, by mere virtue of the boat stage being

recognisably situated within the confines of the park. It is a practical imperative of the job of Rangering to deal with – in some way or another – any trouble that can be reasonably considered a park-related matter. This is a simple fact of the experience of the publicly visible worker; they must pick up the slack and take on responsibility for things that they are not paid to do. A situation in which the Ranger would ignore the man's approach, or claim complete ignorance of the boat hire programme, is inconceivable. After all, the Rangers spend a lot of time in the parks, and whether or not they are technically responsible for providing information on the opening hours of the private business, they *should* know about this, and as a publicly funded workforce they have a tacit obligation to members of the public as stakeholders. As 'stocked characters' they are routinely obliged to offer information on such things as the opening times of cafés in the vicinity, the whereabouts of the ice cream van, if it is going to rain, who won the rugby, what kind of pesticide the gardeners use on the roses, and so on. One of the aims of this thesis (discussed at length in Chapter 4) is to trace this observable social fact in terms of the categorisation work displayed in the occasioned encounters in which the Park Rangers are produced as legitimate 'approachables'. Through what situated mechanisms are the Rangers available to be approached by members of the public, and what recognisable relevancies are at play in the formulation of their subsequent enquiries?

Their public visibility and accountability not only makes them 'approachables', but also, as inferred above, 'auditables'. This is another centrally constitutive fact of their work experience. In the kiosk in which they are headquartered (that they use for meetings and breaks) is a rack on the wall. On the rack rests a neat row of litter pickers. The policy as long as I have known them has been for each Ranger to carry a litter picker

when they are out on pedestrian patrol around the park. Despite there being dedicated litter teams, it has been established (by the Rangers themselves) that their continuous public visibility opens their practice up to audit and criticism with regard to the state of the park at any moment in time, and it has been deemed useful to their practice to carry these tools with them in order to display their utility via their orientation to maintenance. Of course, this is not simply 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959), rather, it is the practical requirements of their job that places them in the position in which they are obliged to 'pick up the slack' and collect any missed rubbish. The litter teams typically do a sweep twice daily, but if the Rangers are out on patrol anyway, they might as well exploit the affordances of their practical mobilities and keep the parks clean as best they can. After all, as the most visible ground-level practitioners, they will likely be the ones to receive the complaints if the parks are dirty. Managing public expectations is a by-product of the job; pre-emptively handling issues that may cause complaints and distract them from their other maintenance and management jobs is a practical requirement of Rangering. I discuss this specific issue of their litter picking troubles at length in Chapter 4.

For the Rangers, then, the parks are a work domain; and park troubles, litter, dog poo, and so on, are all produced as work objects. Equally, being largely pedestrian practitioners, they have to grapple with the further issue that their pedestrian practice is also visually available as specifically *work* practice, all the time. There is no time that uniformed Rangers can walk in park space without being assumed to be out on patrol or, at least, on shift. Indeed, on one memorable occasion, our lunchbreak was delayed by some 40 minutes because the ordinary activity of walking to lunch *became* a *de facto* enforcement patrol when we came across fresh dog faeces along the way

back to the headquarters, and then seeing two men and a dog walking up ahead. When the simple act of walking is seeable to an observer as constituting archetypal Rangering practice, the Ranger is bound to the space in a way that a custodian would be, and is therefore bound to the dog faeces as an actionable work object. They cannot ever be 'off the clock' when trouble presents in park space. The Rangers were thus required, in this situation, by their categorial position in the visual contexture to approach the men and interrogate them on their alleged dog fouling, with a view to issuing them with a fixed penalty notice. In this way, the strength of the spatialised obligations of the Rangers is shown to be extratemporal in the sense that end-of-shift and lunch breaks do not relinquish responsibility for the maintenance and 'policing' of the space, and as such there is little justification for ever being 'off-duty' in park space, particularly if the observer can see visible characteristics of the Rangers being in a position of authority in the space, through their red uniforms, radios, and other observable traits. Even when on lunchbreaks offsite (while still in uniform), the Rangers tell of comments they have received from members of the public inferring their laziness and negligence as they are accused of 'slacking off'. This issue cuts to the core of all of their public work, and it is argued herein that 'public worker'—'member of the public' is an *omnirelevant* organisational device (Sacks, 1995; Fitzgerald, et al. 2009).³

Neutralising criticism like this is therefore central to the job of being a public worker, and Chapter 4 deals with this issue, showcasing the situated methods that the Park

³ An omnirelevant device is one that is "composed of collections of categories that are always potentially applicable, and that, when invoked, have priority in terms of organising action within – and only in – situated interaction" (Fitzgerald, et al., 2009: 48).

Rangers use to display their professionalism, utility, and so on. A central question of that chapter is: what does professionalism look like in public work? How is an action seeable as work practice in the first place? Looking into the contingencies on which public work is produced and recognised can render visible a certain politics of public space. As this thesis will show, the political is seen in the particular. Ordinary, taken for granted, mundane practices can be remarkably political.

The case for the study of the mundane politics of public space

There is a long history of sociological scholarship of mundane public politics, from Robert Park (1937, 1950) of the Chicago School who studied urban race relations, to Egon Bittner's (1967) study of 'peacekeeping' on Skid-Row, and more recently Setha Low's (2010) cultural ethnographic focus on the everyday politics of 'the plaza', and Robin Smith and Tom Hall's interactional work on homeless outreach, most notably in the explication of stigmatisation in action (Smith, 2011) and how outreach work is infused with the broader 'politics of urban kindness' (Hall and Smith, 2015). The study of public space is as pertinent now as it has ever been. Public space has been foregrounded in popular discourse in recent times due to the 'unprecedented' restrictions established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The embodied knowledge and tacit competencies that people demonstrate in their navigation of shared space has entered public consciousness as norms change, inattention is reconfigured, expected personal space radii widen, bodies become obstacles, and movement in proximity to others becomes clunkier. The re-spatialisation of public space-sharing practices has shone the spotlight on otherwise routinely overlooked and unnoticed embodied actions. The pandemic has certainly brought public parks to the fore of political discourse as they have become some of the only spaces that people

can use for leisure and generally exist in for extended periods outside of their homes. With people gravitating to parks during 'lockdowns', they have become more 'policeable' spaces; social media discourse has pointed to the unequal policing (and in some cases the complete closure) of public parks, with local authorities closing relatively the working class Brockwell Park while keeping parks in more affluent areas such as Primrose Hill open (Bakare and Walker, 2020). People who have never before had to doublecheck the correctness or validity of their position in public are faced with uncertainty as to the appropriateness of their public activities.

Indeed, for many, the COVID-19 pandemic may have been the first time they have felt the sharp end of the politics of public space in any notable way. However, what this thesis will show, is that this politics has always existed. Public parks in particular have already entered the popular political discourse with a recent tide change towards holistic 'ecosystem services' environmental strategies whereby urban green spaces are not just appreciated for their aesthetic value, but also for their perceived benefits to mental and physical wellbeing, as well as their potential for carbon offsetting and sustaining wildlife (for example, growing wildflower meadows in place of lawns in public parks such as Bute Park in Cardiff) (Hughes, 2019). But it is not so much this formal politics that this thesis deals with, although of course as has been argued, formal and mundane politics are not entirely detached. That being said, my concern is quite specifically with this *mundane* peopled politics of public space, which has also always been available to be seen – especially in urban public park spaces – in even the most mundane interactions, certainly long before the pandemic. While it may be felt more directly by normatively 'policeable' 'alternative' publics (rough sleepers, street

drinkers, prostitutes, loiterers, drug users, etc), local moral orders permeate *all* public interaction and reflexively organise it in sometimes taken-for-granted ways.

Now, the popular imagination of the politics of public space may look to scenes of mass protest and territorial occupations, and there has been a lot of critical, political, often radical, sometimes activist work on this (see Stavrides (2012) on the 'squares' movement; Pickerill and Krinsky (2012) on the 'Occupy' movement; and Crawford (1995), Mitchell (1995), Batuman (2003), D'Arcus (2004), Till (2013), and Bryan (2015) on general rioting in public space) or even to other more mundane forms of bordering and popular territorialisation (Ince, 2012) such as 'commoning' (Stavrides, 2015, 2016) or guerrilla gardening (Blomley, 2004, 2005; Thompson, 2015). My own ethnographic work in urban parks also deals with this more 'on the nose' mundane territorialisation politics (see Ablitt, 2020; and Chapter 5 of this thesis). However, it is not so much my place to decide what does or does not count as 'politics of public space' and formulating a philosophical definition is outside the remit of this thesis. What I will suggest is that the politics of public space is also recognisable in the mundane vernacular of routine copresence; in everyday talk and ordinary practical action. The case being made in this thesis is for the primacy of local-level interaction in tracing and making sense of the emergent contours of contemporary society. What we can know about the social, we can know from the particulars of what people routinely do in their everyday lives. Moreover, the politics of public space is best known and defined in and through the practices by which people routinely make sense of and navigate it.

The point is that studying public space is important because almost everyone exists as a member of the public at some point in their daily routine; but the transformative

categorial permutations of members of the public are inherently political because they establish the grounds on which people are treated. People's status in public space is practically accomplished as situated properties of practical (inter)action. That some categorial assemblages of people and practice display legitimacy while others do not is demonstrable of a highly (political) visual order. So, I will follow the ideals of Harvey Sacks and Harold Garfinkel, particularly Sacks' gloss for finding 'perspicuous phenomena' (Garfinkel, 2002: 182) to suggest that we can learn about the mundane politics of public space by finding a 'work group' who 'as their day's work' do such potentially 'political' practices as patrolling, engaging with strangers, enforcing rules, and so on, and seeing how it is that they *themselves* learn what it is that constitutes that political visual order. The Urban Park Rangers' are that perspicuous work group in this study. Their everyday work activities are organised through some formulation of mundanely political order; they routinely deal competently in the practical categorisation of people, practice and place in the course of their quotidian work routine. Knowing where exactly in the park to look for discarded heroin needles and condoms, for example, and adjusting patrolling practice to more regularly cover the geographical locations which are known as sites of antisocial behaviour is just one practice in which this categorisational politics is displayed.

The particulars of the study: A summary

Now that I have introduced the 'protagonists' of the project and made the broad case for studying everyday public practices, I will finish this introductory chapter with a final section which addresses the particulars of the ethnographic study, and which outlines the structure of the thesis argument. As was mentioned in the introductory section, the Urban Park Rangers' shift patterns are split between (1) being stationed in a particular

park, engaging in maintenance work within said park and operating what they call 'static patrols' (foot patrols around the park); and (2) being 'on-call' on 'mobile patrols' (in a roaming capacity in the van), attending call-outs, responding to issues flagged on social media, and checking up on the state of some of the smaller parks. My own engagement with the Rangers' practice over the last two and a half years has been exclusively while they have been stationed in Bute Park and Roath Park, and I have therefore spent most of my time in the field joining them on pedestrian 'static' patrols as well as helping with the manual labour involved in their routine maintenance practices.

To clarify, the data has been produced in the form of ethnographic fieldnotes, and the analyses herein are largely *prima facie* investigations of excerpts from those ethnographic fieldnotes. The situations depicted in these excerpts are always, broadly, public encounters between Park Rangers and members of the public. It is argued that it is in these public encounters that the Rangers' work is realised; looking to moments of public copresence and the focused interactions that ensue can tell us a lot about the ordinary collaborative work that gets done in park space. My reasoning for this will be laid out in the Literature Review in the next chapter, and further when I discuss my methodological rationale in Chapter 3.

To reiterate the opening statement of the thesis, the most clear aim of this study is to advance the understanding of the situated ramifications of working in public view. Through the case study of the Urban Park Rangers, I will explicate some of the contingencies through which public work gets done, and make a practice-led contribution to scholarly conversations on street-level bureaucracy, public behaviour,

and the production of public space as a situated accomplishment. In Chapter 2, then, I will review select literature across three main sections: 'Encounters', 'Public space and the city', and 'Working in public view'. The first section of the Literature Review on 'Encounters' sets up the position being taken herein with regards to (and against) the use of prevailing sociological concepts, and serves as a point of departure from the conceptually-heavy formal analysis that dominates contemporary sociology. It does so by establishing an interdisciplinary dialogue around the concept of 'Encounters' as it traverses, *inter alia*, interactionist sociology, policy-oriented public administration studies, and theoretical human geography. It concludes in favour of the utility of ethnomethodological sensibilities in considering the participants' orientation in order to investigate encounters *in situ*. In other words, since 'encountering' is a recognisably central work practice that the Park Rangers 'do' as part of their everyday work, we can examine what encounters look like *to the co-participants of the encounters themselves* within this perspicuous setting, and what happens when people encounter one another in public space, especially when it is constitutive of public work. Encounters are inherently collaborative engagements, and leaning on the concept of the 'co-production' of public administration services (Whitaker, 1980), the argument is set up for the forthcoming ethnographic data to demonstrate a radically reconsidered practice of mundane, orderly co-production.

Chapter 3 is the Methodology chapter. This will argue in favour of ethnographic observation as primarily comprising unremarkable embodied practices and sensibilities. It therefore champions lay methods and discusses how the analytical handling of fieldnotes as *prima facie* accounts can offset the interpretative issues arising in traditional ethnographic analysis; the fieldnotes are treated as part of the

field themselves, rather than a relic of it. I challenge the traditional reasoning that justifies the elevation of the ethnographer's observations and provides it authoritative status by mere virtue of first-person presence. By promoting an approach that challenges the hierarchies of formal method, an attempt is made to stay true to the phenomenological underpinnings of the research and to treat the ethnographer as a member-in-the-field. After all, *everyone* is an enquirer into their own cultural settings (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982), and looking at participants' orientations can go some way to alleviate the problems of relying on the analyst's interpretation. The simple argument is that if interpretation is inevitable, then we should look at the practices of interpretation that are employed in everyday reasoning by the participants themselves. As such, the proposed synthesis of 'granular' ethnographic fieldwork and the consideration of people's own categorisation practices in the analysis of the fieldnotes lends itself to an attempt to make the approach more robust and offer a practical commensurability for formal sociology that encompasses selective ethnomethodological sensibilities.

The two substantive chapters that follow the Methodology chapter are organised in terms of how the data has been arranged: Chapter 4 will focus on the particulars of moments when the Park Rangers are approached by members of the public, while Chapter 5 will flip this around and will draw on instances where the Park Rangers approach people in park space. The argument in Chapter 4 considers what it looks like to be a public worker, specifically around the Rangers' production as 'approachables' and their routine orientation to 'the public'. It will demonstrate how such glosses as 'professionalism', 'strategy', and 'system' are recognisable features

of their mundane work activities, and how this is a practical and organisational requirement of public work.

To begin the substantive analyses, Chapter 4, will trace the Park Rangers' local 'trouble' of being approached by members of the public, and demonstrate what public work looks like. The key point of this chapter is that enquiries are normatively handled and show how park users are ordinarily available as legitimate participatory stakeholders. Equally, the Rangers exhibit a routine, no-time-out orientation to 'the public'; this is navigated through their methods for displaying 'professionalism', 'strategy', and 'system'. This will begin to make the case for the co-production of public services along the lines of mundane interactive co-participation.

Chapter 5 will build on the argument and consider more centrally the spatial implications of the Park Rangers' practice. By looking at how the Rangers do such things as approach strangers, look for heroin needles and condoms, and lock up at the end of the day, we can see how order is displayed in invocations of and orientations to normal park occupants, normal park schedules, normal park activities, and normal park objects. It will show how park space is ordinarily collaboratively produced by co-present incumbents as an assembled activity, which in turn demonstrates its haecceities (or its 'just thisness') as a managed space, and very specifically a public park, as opposed to simply an undefined plot of land that is made up of trees and grass and people.

Chapter 6 is a semi-standalone chapter which looks specifically at the changing contingencies of park space during the COVID-19 pandemic. I describe it as 'semi-

standalone' because it builds on the two previous chapters and carries the argument further, but ultimately sits apart inasmuch as it exclusively describes park encounters during the pandemic and establishes a secondary argument drawing on Harvey Sacks' (1984: 22) manifesto statement that there is "order at all points". As this thesis deals with local order as a by-product throughout, it so continues in this chapter with a greater emphasis on the phenomenon of order in so-called 'unprecedented' times. The 'new normal' times of COVID-19 are demonstrated to be more 'normal' than 'new'; the park reality is relatively stably produced in terms of the omnirelevant 'public worker'–'member of the public' categorisation device during the pandemic just as it always was beforehand. However, the pandemic also provides the analytical opportunity to analyse how 'context' is produced and displayed in mundane action and interaction. An observable phenomenon herein is the collaborative production of COVID-19 as an ubiquitous 'shaper' of practice; even when it is not articulated directly, the global logics of COVID-19 are seeable in the local. Considering that the viral particles are invisible to the naked eye, COVID-19 is very visible even in the most mundane encounters in the parks. With the pervasiveness of the new legislation, public space is more so navigated in terms of the legality of practice, and this sheds light on the multi-layered organisation of park space as a local site in which global context can be recognised.

Finally, the argument takes a step out in Chapter 7 to discuss the applied lessons of this ethnographic study of the Park Rangers for the ongoing conversation around street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980). It addresses the issue of the vernacular assumptions of a central concept in public administration studies literature, namely 'citizens'. 'Citizenship' is demonstrably a politically charged category as not everyone is eligible to be deemed a 'citizen', yet it is often used in the public administration

literature to mean anything from 'service user' to 'member of the public' (in other words, anyone who is not a public administrator, official, or bureaucrat). What more, discussion of street-level bureaucracy oddly misses the perspective or orientation of the 'service user' or 'citizen', or caricatures them through expectations constructed in theoretical frameworks of potential participation. By focusing on interaction, this chapter will finish off the discussion of public service 'co-production' by showing that 'citizenship' itself is a collaborative, situated accomplishment. It will further describe the centrality of 'discretion' in street-level bureaucracy, and show how this is publicly available as an interactional practice, before concluding in Chapter 8.

So, to begin: a review of some of the literature on encounters, urban public space, and work. This literature review is not designed to be comprehensive, but instead pieces together and serves as an appraisal of pertinent existing scholarship, setting up the space for my contribution to the conversation.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Encounter(s)

Situating concepts

“I think that at present, if sociological concepts are to be treated with affection, each must be traced back to where it best applies, followed from there wherever it seems to lead, and pressed to disclose the rest of its family. Better, perhaps, different coats to clothe the children well than a single splendid tent in which they all shiver” (Goffman, 1961a: 11).

Face-to-face encounters are an integral part, and constitutive of Park Rangers' everyday work. As will be shown throughout this thesis, Park Rangers do public 'encounters' with members of the public all the time. Importantly, they manage to organise and participate in encounters competently without recourse to any academic definition of encounter. In what follows in this first section of this literature review, I will explore existing work on face-to-face, public interaction, and established conceptualisations of encounters. However, I will also use this opportunity to set out my argument for approaching such concepts (and sociological concepts more generally) with caution. The position taken herein is deeply critical of 'grand theory' of the type so abstracted and generalised that it becomes a study wholly of itself, devoid of the organised realities of observable social phenomena (Mills, 1959). To lean on the above quotation from the introduction to Goffman's 'Asylums' (1961a), my argument similarly follows that sociological conceptualisation should only be done

sparingly and with great care not to lose grasp of the phenomena, if at all. Similar to Paul Atkinson's stance in 'granular analysis' (2017), I am not proposing a total rejection of useful, 'light touch' conceptualisation to aid descriptive work, but certainly I am not in the business of reifying academic conceptual categories as they threaten to supplant and *become* the phenomena. In essence, I take seriously the participants' – and indeed all members' – capacity to competently organise social reality in mundane, orderly ways *without* intervention from sociologists. People do not do 'geographies of encounter', nor even 'Goffmanian encounters' in the everyday run of their lives, but they do often encounter people and things. Moreover, the Park Rangers participate in encounters, and do 'encountering' as a work-related method; indeed it is during these face-to-face encounters that their work roles are realised categorially. Paying attention to *how* they do encountering, what they and other park users orient to in encounters, and how they account for and collaboratively produce its ordinariness – particularly in public – is important in uncovering the character of public work and public space.

The Park Rangers work alongside (and in direct contact with) public park users, and engagement with these individuals is integral to their daily work practices of maintenance and management. This engagement is observably routinely *and emergently* organised into interactional units that might be described as encounters. This social organisational imperative leads me to draw similarities with, and influence from (albeit with notable reservations), Erving Goffman's concept of 'encounters' in his work on face-to-face interactions in public space (Goffman, 1961b; 1963; 1967; 1969; 1971). In what follows, then, I have opted to work through the main thrust of the argument in relation to the Goffmanian literature on encounters, evaluating its use as a parallel framework whose constituent sensibilities can help see the order in and of

encounters as units of social organisation, while critiquing it by borrowing arguments from some ethnomethodological and interactionist scholars. Following this I will discuss some applied ethnomethodological studies of public encounters, which will be returned to later on in this chapter, in sections on public space and work. Because the current section provides an exemplar case for my broader position on conceptualisation in the thesis, I will further include discussion of some of the leading work on encounters in other disciplines, namely human geography and public administration studies. Both of these subsections will be organised as discussions of selective literature within their respective disciplines, geared primarily to the character of their academic conceptualisation practices.

The argument to be made is that, while the use of theoretical concepts has different ends in both scholarly contexts (e.g. sociology and human geography) and in practice-oriented contexts (e.g. public administration studies), a similar criticism can be considered inasmuch as theoretical applications can become tautological devices in the production of knowledge that builds a feedback loop that excludes observed phenomena. Thus, the section concludes by arguing for the de-reification of the academic concept of 'encounters', preferring to look to the actual details of situated membership practices to see how it is that encounters constitute foundational, practical, organisational methods for their participants. In sum, it acknowledges that public, face-to-face encounters – as they are occasioned and accomplished by members in the field – are 'naturally occurring' interactional assemblages for the Park Rangers and other park users, fundamental to their quotidian enquiries into the local production of the cultural knowledge in and of the parks, mediated and negotiated by the public availability of their accountability to the setting. In establishing the

organisational pervasiveness of local interaction orders, the section naturally segues into discussions of other concepts as they apply within the framework of local social organisation.

Goffmanian encounters

To begin, the Goffmanian conceptualisation treats encounters as units of social organisation in which ‘focused’ face-to-face interaction is sustained as mutual attention (Goffman, 1961b: 7). Goffman’s light(ish)-touch, arguably a-theoretical, approach to conceptualising encounters is drawn from empirical exemplars. Rather than becoming overly preoccupied with defining encounter semantically (although, as I will explain, he does make claims that can be interpreted as falling into this trap), he comes to use the term as an organisational one situated within his broad scholarship on face-to-face interaction. This is just another example of his broader tendency to treat the concepts he uses and coins as descriptive of (and not straying too abstractly from) practical, observable, “commonsensically available” phenomena which are “findable without recourse to specialised methods”, rather than to advance theory (Wieder, 1999: 168). George Psathas (1996) made some (possibly gratuitous) attempts to argue to the contrary: that Goffman was a theorist *malgré lui* (i.e. despite not considering himself one). However, he concludes that “his [Goffman’s] conceptual clarifications were made to achieve an immediate purpose, whether it be to achieve a contrast with other concepts, modify an earlier formulation, differentiate between observations of apparently similar phenomena, etc.” (Psathas, 1996: 391). In this respect I would be mindful of, and agree with, Goffman’s own intentions for his work, and make use of his observations independently of other scholars who may wish to read him theoretically.

My reference to Goffman's work herein follows – tentatively – his practice of practical, purposive, a-theoretical conceptualisation, albeit with an awareness of the criticisms levelled against him, and thus not sharing his enthusiasm and confidence in continually inventing, ignoring, and reinventing concepts (Sharrock, 1976). Therefore, while I have referred in short-hand to 'Goffmanian encounters', it should be clarified that this concept is not Goffman's to claim, nor am I claiming that I am 'applying' or 'finding' Goffman's concepts in my data. When discussing my data and findings, I will on occasion formulate statements along the lines of 'What can be seen here may look something like Goffman's concept of...' This is arguably not a theoretical application of these concepts, but rather a comparative nod to existing interaction literature which identifies similar organisational contingencies. I take this care because it must be noted that 'there is order in the plenum' – social organisation is always available as ongoing accomplishments – and therefore, fundamentally, society will exist and 'function' with or without intervention from sociologists and their concepts (Garfinkel, 1988). In its most painfully abstract, the concept of 'Encounter' (in the academic-singular formulation) reads an attempt to pedestalise and decontextualise a concept to make it applicable in different situations. Of course, the process of 'making' a concept applicable to a multitude of situations can render it analytically irrelevant. A critical discussion of this kind of academic formulation of 'encounter' as applicable grand theory will follow in a section on 'geographies of encounter'. For now, on the other hand, what we are dealing with are 'encounters' (in the plural). These should be recognisable and experienceable phenomena to all members without the need for a *priori* knowledge. That is why Goffman's work on the formal characteristics of encounters as an organisational framework is of more conceptual value to this thesis than other grand theories of encounter.

So, Goffman writes of and about encounters in the majority of his published work, but his conceptual focus is most explicit in his foundational essay collection 'Encounters' (1961b). Despite titling the book 'Encounters', as mentioned above, he does not task himself with the goal of defining (what I have called) the 'academic-singular' Encounter theoretically. Instead, in the preface of the book he sets up the importance of making the distinction between encounters as 'focused gatherings' and small social groups, and he does so by looking at the relevance of certain order properties on which each might be contingent. The reason for this initial distinction was to set it apart from the study of small groups (see contemporaries and fellow social psychologists Robert Bales, 1950; 1953, and Muzafer Sherif, 1956) as a study of situated activity. For encounters, such organisational properties (that is, properties of the encounter itself) include the possibility for embarrassment or maintaining dignity, and navigating (accepting and relinquishing) the interactional role of speaking, as well as sustaining appropriate relational conduct insofar as physical spatial positioning is concerned. Of most central concern is "the participants' maintenance of continuous engrossment in the official focus of activity" (1961b: 11). Goffman's analytic concern is with the relational properties of these shared moments of sustained mutual attention; the relations themselves as organised and seeable in and through actions publicly 'done', rather than as private or individual characteristics that participants might hold.

Goffman takes seriously the treatment of an encounter (as in a focused gathering) as a unit of social organisation, with its structure realised through the "sanctioned orderliness" demonstrated in the social obligations and expectations of participation (Goffman, 1961b: 19). Interestingly he briefly considers the methodological possibility

of seeing this orderliness in the moment when it breaks down, and attributes this orientation to his contemporary, Harold Garfinkel, in a footnote. Nevertheless, in true Goffman fashion, he drops the idea within the same paragraph and opts for a rule-governed approach through which he coins the term 'rules of irrelevance'. He is adamant that the order of the encounter, and the "definition of the situation" is made available in what is "attended and disattended" (p. 19). Similarly, Randall Collins (2004: 48) noted in his attempt to synthesise Durkheimian 'rituals' and Goffmanian 'interaction rituals' that said interaction rituals consist of four 'ingredients': bodily co-presence, a barrier to outsiders, a mutual focus of attention, and shared mood. For him, Goffman's interaction ritual "is a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality" (Collins, 2004: 7). Collins' synthesis serves to demonstrate how situated action can display social structure "viewed up close as a chain of interactional situations" (2004: xiii).

Goffman himself does not shy away from the structural gravity of the situation that he is calling an encounter either; as such he criticises Georg Simmel's idea of 'pure sociability' as being a superficial concept which alleges that roles may be performed in encounters without interference from personal attributes such as wealth, social position, fame, and so on. His criticism is straightforward: interaction is not merely tactical or inconsequentially whimsical, and certainly the idea of 'sociability' betrays insincerity in that it implies that social interactions of this sort are "sharply cut off from the entanglements of serious life" (p. 21). Such attributes are observably brought to – and made available in – encounters, and perhaps more seriously, their backgrounding or foregrounding is dependent on the relational properties of the situation as it plays out.

Beyond Goffman: A locally produced interaction order

It is this discussion of sociality and participants' expected attributes which brings Goffman to introduce the problem of officials and their expected conduct in their routine work encounters. Borrowing from Parsons' reworking of Weberian bureaucracy he constructs the interactional mechanisms of professionals' expected attributes of 'universalism' and 'affective neutrality' as they pertain to 'courteous service' (Goffman, 1961b: 22–23). Here, offering an alternative to Simmel's 'pure sociability', he notably draws social structure together with the individual, not as competing entities, but rather as "joint products" in what he would later call the 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1983) or, as Anne Rawls fine-tuned (1987: 138) an "interaction order *sui generis*". Paul Atkinson (2017: 46) shares this interpretation of the encounter (or as he calls it, 'the situation') as a social phenomenon "that is *not* reduced to its participant actors" but whose analysis is focused on the relations between them; their competence being demonstrated in their constitutive organisation of and around the conventions of that situation. Relevant here, however, is Rawls' criticism of Goffman's privileging of the institution of 'the self' (and its dependence on dramaturgy) over 'talk' as a poor ontological start point for an interaction order. She instead points to the work of Garfinkel and Sacks as more insightful in gleaning how meaning is achieved in a locally produced, constitutive order "at the level of talk and mundane action" (1987: 137). This observation and rectification of the misplaced framing of Goffman's interaction order is significant to analyses which take meaning as locally constituted and produced in interaction, as opposed to something that occurs in some kind of mysterious assemblage of collective moments and individual selves. Rawls' position is still, however, closer to Goffman's than Simmel's 'pure sociability'; 'the self' is not suspended in interactional encounters, but nor does

personal identity provide their structural base. Instead, a person's social characteristics are not thought of as being 'owned' by individuals, but rather meanings and identities can *only* be realised in and of the fact of their public availability in interaction.

For Goffman (1961b: 25), the 'rules of irrelevance' are imperative to the organisation of an encounter, as he notes: "Irrelevant visible events will be disattended; irrelevant private concerns will be kept out of mind. An effortless unawareness will be involved, and if this is not possible then an active turning-away or suppression will occur." He goes as far as suggesting that these orderly 'rules' of an encounter's mutual activity erect a boundary – still mediated by the focus of attention – with the 'outside world', or the peripheries of that focus. He uses the comparative analogy of a 'screen' as opposed to a solid wall to illustrate the selective and transformational properties of the boundary. It is not the case that everything outside of the mutual focus of attention is disregarded or disattended, but rather that the internal order of the encounter reciprocally shapes and is shaped by external environmental agents, which *may* be included by virtue of the relational properties. In this way properties beyond the focused gathering are "*selectively* handled within the encounter" (Goffman, 1961b: 33, my emphasis). If considered in terms of visual and moral orders, what is interesting about this selectivity, and the public non-engagement with co-present people and activities, by means of "civil inattention" (Goffman, 1963: 84) or the like, should not be explained away by apparently central concerns about defensively saving face or shielding oneself from stigmatising threats. Instead, analytic interest might involve, as Stephen Hester and Dave Francis provoke, how "civil inattention" is oriented to and

played out as an accomplishment in itself, and that it is not simply the case that people “are not doing anything when they disattend one another in public places” (2003: 46).

The rules in question, then, may not be as straightforward as Goffman would have it. It is not so much that unwritten *cultural* rules govern behaviour and shape an interaction order whose parameters ‘cultural dopes’ operate within (Garfinkel, 1967: 68). Instead, as culture is an “apparatus for generating *recognisable* actions” (Sacks, 1995: 226) the rules are observable productions – rules of *application* – that form part of the machinery for *recognising* local categorial order (Hester and Eglin, 1997). In sum: these rules do not *govern* orderly actions, they reflexively recognise ‘autochthonous order properties’ of a setting (Garfinkel, 2002) and people organise their conduct relationally in terms of the locally assembled visible social order of public space (Lee and Watson, 1993; Watson, 2005; Carlin, 2017; Laurier, et al. 2020). As such, the interaction order – and by extension an encounter – is a by-product of ordinary practical action, rather than something policed by moral rules of engagement. Furthermore, such rules of engagement in public space – for example the ‘rules of irrelevance’ – are not organised in statically arranged practices. The lines along which temporary territorial claims are made in and through public encounters are not fixed or binary, and are organised within and between broader mobilities and temporalities pertaining to everyday practices (Smith and Hall, 2018). There are no clear-cut rules for Ranging encounters; they happen as part of Rangers’ routine practice, a *mobile* practice, and one that hinges on intersecting the rhythms and movements of others. A locally emergent interaction order rests on more than mere rules of personal conduct.

De-reifying the Goffmanian encounter: A members' phenomenon

Goffman referred to some everyday, common-sense uses of the term 'encounter' in footnotes in his books 'Encounters' and 'Behaviour in Public Places'. These include "face-to-face meetings with another that were unexpected or in which trouble occurred" (Goffman, 1961b: 18; 1963: 89). He specifically excludes these meanings from his conceptualisation. Nevertheless these situations and these types of encounter are of such fundamental importance to the daily work of the Park Rangers, it would be reckless of me to discount them in the same way. Of course, Goffman's reason for doing this is primarily because, for him, encounters are central to everyday social organisation and he wants to establish that they are more than just accidental or unexpected meetings, and moreover that they need not necessarily be spatiotemporal sites of 'trouble'. It should go without saying, however, that a concept's meaning should not preclude the provisions on which it would be used by members themselves. If an 'encounter', according to Goffman, is not actually what is popularly understood as an 'encounter' (and more so dismisses the common-sense features of its popular use), then it is perhaps not an appropriate term to use to describe the properties of a concept.

Nevertheless, as Larry Wieder points out, Goffman's 'encounter' is one of a number of "overlapping sets of *social interactional* concepts" (1999: 165, his emphasis) employed in related schemes of analysis which share phenomenon-locating features (these schemes include ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, microanalysis, and the ethnography of speaking). Stretching a bit further back philosophically, Lyman and Scott (1989: 17) contend in their endeavours in absurdist sociology that Goffman "adopted the specific unit of investigation derived from Machiavelli's conception of

social life – the episode.” Their argument is that Machiavelli’s concept of ‘man-in-episodes’ takes into account the interplay of the individual and social structure and chance, much like Goffman’s oft-quoted refrain regarding “moments and their men” (1967: 3). Notably, however, Lyman and Scott also use the common-sense terms ‘occasions’, ‘events’, ‘encounters’, ‘engagements’ and ‘situations’ practically interchangeably as names for a perceived unit of social organisation. Returning to Wieder: he suggests that the analytic unit of a ‘conversation’ in conversation analysis is a ‘subtype’ or ‘species’ of focused gathering or encounter (1999: 168). The term ‘conversation’ is admittedly a common-sense expression, albeit with its own assumptions (primarily that participants will be engaged in the act of speaking lexically). It is my position that, as a definition of a *unit of social organisation of face-to-face interaction*, Goffman’s ‘focused gatherings’ or ‘focused interactions’ (which he uses synonymously with ‘encounters’) is most appropriate in capturing those intended organisational attributes. ‘Events’, ‘episodes’ and ‘moments’ are also organisational terms I use and have discussed at reasonable length in the methodology chapter, although these are not specific to the internal organisational characteristics of face-to-face interactions. An ‘encounter’, notably, (like a ‘conversation’), is a common-sense ‘subtype’ of a focused interaction, and is a cultural object in its own right, of crucial and quite specific communicative value to members themselves. Because the participants of these interactions are engaging quite specifically in *public* places, and this is of procedural relevance to those interactions, the common-sense meaning of an encounter as being unplanned and potentially between individuals otherwise unknown to each other, is surely relevant and appropriate. ‘Encounter’ is a term that indexically glosses a number of mundane practices (e.g. ‘seeking out’, ‘coming across’,

‘interrupting’, and so on) required to arrive at that particular formation of the focused public interaction.

The irony of engaging lexicologically with Goffman’s concept of ‘encounters’ with such sincerity when he himself often did not respect the labels he places on his concepts enough to use them consistently between his works, is noted. In fact, Goffman began referring interchangeably to ‘encounters’ as ‘face engagements’ in his next book, *Behaviour in Public Places* (1963: 89). Wes Sharrock identified this as a broad flaw of Goffman’s in a review of ‘Frame Analysis’, in which he rhetorically asks: “If conceptual articulation is to be such a significant element in each study I can only ask why Goffman erects and abandons schemes with such astonishing regularity and seeming indifference?” (Sharrock, 1976: 333). For Sharrock, a stalwart of the ethnomethodological tradition, this is part of a more general criticism of Goffman’s analogous and relatively concept-heavy approach to the study of interaction, stating that he (by comparison to Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks) “provided little guidance on the issue of how the sociologist’s concepts relate to the phenomenon that they intend to conceptualise, namely the witnessable situations and occurrences of the world of daily life” (Sharrock, 1999: 121–122). Rod Watson (1992: 5) similarly warned that Goffman’s work in this respect hinges on practices of redescription which consequently set out to establish what he calls a “look-again technique”. The danger of such an analytical technique is that local visual order and its endogenously produced constituent practices of seeing are replaced by his own order in what becomes “an *instructed* seeing”. As Eric Laurier and Chris Philo (2006a) further clarify, the potential consequences of this for local order is that all situations become sites of impression management, and all members and practitioners’ situated jobs become

self-managerial in this way. Park Rangers may do the work of impression management as a by-product of their actual routine practical work, but the risk is that a lens which focuses on Goffmanian concepts might see that as the phenomena, and the routine practical work of rangers as a frivolous detail.

The ethnomethodologists' criticisms are worth taking seriously, although it should be noted that for scholars such as Sharrock and Watson, they are couched in a broader argument about ethnomethodology's and sociology's incommensurability. If considered independently of this cold war, and not as captious grounds for a disciplinary argument, Goffman's conceptualisation practices, while perhaps occasionally superfluous (particularly when it comes to establishing typologies and general rules), are not as abstracted and removed from 'the things themselves' as a lot of other more traditional theoretical applications may be. Sharrock comes from a place which may ask 'Are Goffman's conceptualisations really necessary for studying everyday phenomena?' (to which the rhetorical answer is quite emphatically 'no'); but, on the other hand, a moderate position might instead question whether Goffman's conceptualisations hinder or detract from a study of everyday phenomena. The answer to this question is, of course, that it depends on how these conceptualisations are treated. As I have stated throughout this section, the strength of Goffman's coinages is that they are supported by empirical exemplars and the practices which they describe are by and large recognisable. A crucial point to maintain, which is consistent with Laurier and Philo's cautious approach, is that these sociological concepts are not the observable practices themselves, and what is being observed ethnographically is not the application of sociological concepts. Nevertheless, to say that some of the recognisable features of everyday activities are similarly recognisable in the writings

of a particular scholar, remains valid. That similar observations can be made across examples of routine interaction is surely a celebration of finding the universal in the particular.

Ethnomethodology: Situated, embodied, multimodal public encounters

Following their use to critique the Goffmanian approach, it would be amiss not to (at least briefly) discuss ethnomethodological and conversation analytic (EMCA) studies of public encounters in their own right in this section. The issue, organisationally, with discussing EMCA encounters in a standalone subsection is their pervasion of multiple practical applications; orderly face-to-face communication (which EMCA deals with regularly) is very often organised and produced in and through settings that might be describable as 'encounters'. EMCA's prevalence in studies of 'encounters' is, of course, testament to its natural analytical affordances in its orientation to the detail of interpersonal interaction and its treatment of 'facts' as collaborative accomplishments (Garfinkel, 1967; Pollner, 1974). But it is for this reason that this subsection has to be very selective. To avoid repetition, this subsection will only discuss some studies which refer centrally to embodied, multimodal practices in public encounters. Other EMCA studies which may be relevant here are, naturally, centrally pertinent to more specific conceptual discussions in other sections (by virtue of their attention to relevant particulars and their simultaneous general applicability) and will therefore be discussed elsewhere. For example, Eric Laurier's (2013; with Philo, 2006a, 2006b) and Lorenza Mondada's (2009; with De Stefani, 2018) work features prominently in discussions of public encounters with strangers in the section on public space, while Emily Hofstetter (2016) and Birte Asmuss (2007) are germane to the subsection on public administration. Harvey Sacks (1972b) and Egon Bittner's (1967) respective

works on the visual practices and orders of police work are discussed in a section on public work.

Of most central relevance to the current discussion, and with specific attention to multimodal activity, is Lorenza Mondada's (2009; and with De Stefani, 2018) work on the social organisation of public encounters between strangers and already-acquainted individuals. They focus their analyses on 'pre-beginnings' and 'openings' as emergent organisational configurations on the consequent trajectory of the spatial arrangements of brief encounters. Taking Goffmanian 'comings together' as a start point, they respecify the analytic concerns to show the practical orderliness of public encounters. For example, in an instance where a participant begins their engagement with a stranger with "Sorry madam—" Mondada (2009: 1981) notes that a Goffmanian analysis may go straight to an assumption that prefacing engagement with an apology serves to 'save face', however it misses what a Sacksian analysis shows (the practical, situated achievement): that such an opening is an 'attention-getting device' that reflexively produces the encounter as a normal course of action in terms of its public context. Mondada's emphasis on multimodality in interaction continues in a paper with Mathias Broth (Broth and Mondada, 2013) detailing the coordinated, concerted practices of physically moving apart in *achieving* the 'closing' of an encounter, rather than merely *responding* to it. They observe that walking away often begins before the turn-completion of the conversation, projecting sequence closing as a recognisable activity for all participants. The emergent multimodal displays highlight the delicate visual order of public encounters, showing the local production of this order not to be rule-based (as Goffman might have it) but rather negotiated as an ongoing sequence of category-relevant activity between co-participants of that interaction. Recognising

the emergent multimodality of encounters, and exploring how people actually – in practice – move between focused and unfocused interaction, challenges this notion of rule-governed behaviour, but does not suggest that ‘encounters’ are lawless or socially anarchic. Rather, ‘rules’ of engagement are produced, invoked, oriented to, and accomplished *in situ* by people together as a *constitutive feature of the interaction*. People know what it is to encounter each other, they are competent enough to recognise this and to negotiate when, why, where, and how it is appropriate to engage and to then disengage; apposite conduct is ongoingly accomplished in, of, and through interaction.

Geographies of encounter

‘Encountering’ has become something of a ‘buzz-verb’ in human geography. It is often used in place of ‘discovering’ and denoting a type of enquiry which – by appropriating the language and affective intensities of ‘exciting’ corporeal connection – is characterised by submitting one’s bodily self to raw exposure to a phenomenon in order to experience it through some kind of visceral, sensorial purity. A literature search will show hundreds of results titled ‘Encountering place’ and ‘Encountering difference’ and ‘Encountering the city’ and ‘Encountering materiality’ and ‘Encountering post-colonialism’ and ‘Encountering–’ any such geographical concept or classical scholar or theorist; little of this literature comprises scholarly work which involves analysing practices of encountering. Its use as a buzzword and titular mainstay has possibly diluted its potency and facilitated some directions for ‘encounter’ within the discipline – namely a theory of encounter and encounter as (formal) method – that fall short of its potential as a phenomenologically experienceable, organisable, orderly occurrence. Before I consider these two

interrelated directions in more detail, I will briefly direct discussion to some more expedient and interesting cases of geographical research in encounters.

These cases typically take – to varying degrees – a phenomenological stance (Anderson, 2014); a stance which has formed the basis of some incisive studies of *situated* corporeal encounters within the ‘mobilities’ paradigm (Wilson, 2011; Bissell, 2014, 2016, 2020), some of which have stayed sharp to the ‘things themselves’ in describing the occasioned practices of encountering (other people, devices, technologies, and so on) as mundane members’ method (Laurier and Philo, 2006b; Laurier, 2013; Muñoz, 2020). These latterly mentioned phenomenological and ethnomethodological studies are some of the best showcased examples of encounters as situated spatial practices, and are a reflection of the potential strength of geography in its attention to the detailed interplay of people and/in space. I will draw on some of them in a coming section on public space. Before this, urban geographers such as Ash Amin (2002), Doreen Massey (2005), and Nigel Thrift (2005) had recognised public encounters as being mundane sites of civility and democracy in the city, although the actual detail of the encounters which they deem so central to the urban fabric is, unfortunately, missing.

A divergence from actual lived detail can be traced to scholars who follow the aforementioned urban theorists’ lofty style of dealing in conceptual generalisms. Helen Wilson is one key contemporary scholar who has focused more recently on writing a theory of encounter in human geography (or its disciplinary brand name ‘geographies of encounter’). Wilson’s scholarship on encounter was initially grounded in empirical data, drawing on ethnographic description of actual public encounters (between bus

passengers on a bus in the Midlands) to write of such conceptual things as “encounters with difference” and ‘intercultural’ encounter (Wilson, 2011: 641). Like David Bissell’s work, this early ethnographic work is situated in actual encounters, although it quite heavily applies Thrift’s (2004) concept of ‘affect’. Both scholars tend to fall into the trap of sometimes treating empirical data as sites for the theoretical concepts they are using. In Wilson’s more recent works (2016, 2017a, 2017b), she jettisons the data in favour of theorising about ‘encounter’ in the academic-singular. In her conceptualisation, encounter is “far from a general term for meeting” but rather “a conceptually charged construct that is worthy of sustained and critical attention” (Wilson, 2017a: 451). This is largely consistent with my previous discussion of the common-sense meaning of ‘encounters’, and of course it is a perfectly agreeable suggestion to give encounters sustained and critical attention in their own right (as this thesis will hopefully show). Where I deviate from this manifesto statement is in the suggestion that conceptualising it is a necessary step to avoid it becoming “an empty referent, which undermines the critical and analytical force of work that engages it as a key site of scholarly interest” (Wilson, 2017a: 452).

As argued throughout this section, academic interest in public encounters need not require it be bracketed out and constructed as an abstract academic concept. Instead, what is being proposed is to treat face-to-face encounters as quotidian ‘comings together’ – encounters of and as practice – contingent on routine, orderly interactional accomplishments. A main conceptual point of Wilson’s (2017b) – and the point I most strongly dispute – is that ‘organised encounter’ is a paradox because the conceptualisation of encounter being put forward is “fundamentally unpredictable” due to its inherent ‘unknowability’ (p. 616). This intrinsic design feature seems to be

definitive of 'encounter' while simultaneously writing it off as a concept so arcane it is not particularly analytically useful. It is perhaps a symptom of its reliance on 'affect' to do the heavy lifting in place of observation that affords the theory its status within its discipline despite it falling short of the observable fact that encounters are knowable and constituted by the participants *in situ*. At risk of misinterpretation, the issue here is not that the heightened 'affective intensities' (Bissell, 2008) that often characterise encounters are not observable or recognisable, but rather that pedestalling them as 'unknowable' simultaneously caricatures participants' situated cultural knowledge and discursively maintains encounters as enigmatic academic concepts. This latter point serves as a gloss that may, perhaps inadvertently, discourage analysis of the locally produced detail of these encounters which treats members' situated organisational methods of knowing and dealing with encounters seriously.

For Wilson, then, the affective uncertainty and risk of encounters is what defines them as such, going on to borrow Paul Carter's (2013: 10) terminology of the "dark side" (which he used to discuss the 'Annunciation' as an encounter between the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary) to illustrate the geographically unplanned character of 'encounter' as distinct from a 'meeting'. Such a common-sense distinction is quite acceptable and might not actually require divine intervention to agree with it, but the broader problem is that a theory based on these core properties does not appear to have much palpable analytic application. More so, Wilson's interpretation of 'organised encounter' as paradox relies on social structure as an essential component of social organisation, which – as has been argued – is not necessarily the case. The orderliness of encounters can be recovered through describing the situated methods that their participants use to accomplish them as such. Participants will recognisably

'do' encountering, and handle encounter situations in an orderly way, without recourse to external taxonomic system. Wilson advises: "To organise is to give structure, to form, to order, and to engineer. It is a process by which we systemise and choreograph." (2017b: 612). My proposition is that while, yes, interactional encounters can have high stakes for participants, and can indeed be characterised by perceived uncertainty and risk (particularly between unacquainted people in public), we can still observe social order in their constituent features (Ablitt, 2020). Social organisation – as a routine accomplishment – is not necessarily predicated on system or structure, and need not be engineered or planned. The orderliness of encounters as they are made available to their constituent participants 'each next first time' does not require choreography, nor indeed does any form of meeting or conversation for that matter (because there is order at all points).

The fallacy of 'encounter' as formal research method

A further – related – problem of the building of 'encounter' as a broadly-applicable framework is its naïve translation into formal research method. Its relation is in the unexplicated reliance on 'affect', albeit this time as a research disposition. Nedra Reynolds (2004) refers to 'encounter' as a methodological attribute of and from the framework of 'streetwork' borrowed from Jacquelin Burgess and Peter Jackson (1992). 'Streetwork' would appear to be an urban ethnographic method designed for a specific student research project in UCL in the nineties, but which Reynolds has interpreted as being of methodological value independent of ethnography. She claims: "The word *encounter* implies unplanned, unstructured, fleeting, short-lived; distinctly *not* ethnographic, there is no effort to become an insider or an expert" (Reynolds, 2004: 115, original emphasis). While this point perhaps misrepresents what ethnography is

and can do, it is born of the UCL faculty members' original idea for their student researchers to effectively create the conditions whereby they can have "genuine encounters with people-in-place" (Burgess and Jackson, 1992: 151). Robin Smith and Tom Hall (2013; 2016) offer one of the most direct critiques of academic methodologists who seek to reinvent mobile methods in a 'contrived' way without acknowledging that everyday practitioners already do such methods, and do them well. If researchers like Burgess and Jackson want "genuine encounters with people-in-place" – rather than simply hoping for perceptive self-manipulation by recourse to tired academic dichotomies of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives – they might instead wish to seek ethnographic guidance from homeless outreach workers who already 'do' patrolling and encountering as part of their everyday round, such methods are "capable of capturing things and people on the move" (Smith and Hall, 2016: 503).

The recognisable trope of 'encounter' as 'unplanned', 'unstructured', 'fleeting', and so on, is the driving force behind its formal methodological application which ironically claims to afford the researcher a reflexive positionality without acknowledging their inevitably purposive position as researcher-in-the-field. Such a position is similar to *flânerie* in its advocacy of whimsical happenstance, and passive 'encountering' is what an academic *flâneur* might do (Borchard, 2003; Kramer and Short 2011; Rizk and Birioukov, 2017). This is perhaps more so the case in geographical studies in which the space or place itself is often the conceptual object of study and consequently what is being 'encountered'. As we have learnt from Smith and Hall's ethnographic studies of homeless outreach workers, and from this ethnographic study of park rangers, 'encountering' as a practice and method is anything but whimsical. If practitioners whose job involves 'encountering' do not treat it as wayward *flânerie*, then researchers

who, at the very least, take the naturalistic social organisation of the setting seriously, should reconsider this contrived methodological reasoning. Further, the naivety of encounter as a formal research method comes from its reliance on the researcher's own internal or cognitive affective disposition. It throws its weight behind misplaced acclamation for a measure of embodiment that places undue ontological authority on the researcher. As such, subsequent analyses may be in danger of missing out on intersubjective phenomena, in favour of tired descriptions of hyperbolic affective reflections on the researcher's own arbitrary feelings about the phenomena. Celebrating this also arguably sits in contradiction to the unique adequacy requirement of methods (see Garfinkel, 2002; Smith, 2020; and Chapter 3 of this thesis). Indeed, this aggrandising of the researcher and their thoughts on the 'affective atmosphere' is a misrepresentation of, and too far removed from, the phenomenological groundings of describing the publicly available resources and methods that *members themselves* use to enquire into the cultural setting.

Public administration encounters

A brief foray into public administration literature reveals some pointed conceptualisations which demonstrate policy-oriented concern regarding issues of practice in face-to-face engagement between practitioners and members of the public. Broadly speaking, this body of literature strives to devise typological models of best practice, and values theoretical interventions pertaining to novel ways of understanding the relationship between a service-provider category and a sometimes-homogenising and undifferentiated category of a citizenry (Forester, 2009). The citizenry is issued with varying levels of participatory agency in this research field, although this agency is typically considered within a given model of governmentality,

which operates on already-established, assumed categorial boundaries of the role of 'citizen'. Cooper and Gulick (1984) refer to 'legal' and 'ethical' citizenship as concepts; their existence being a case in point for why 'citizenship' as an *a priori* construct is a problematic term, as it is loaded with assumptions of legal and ethical obligations of a certain type. The term 'citizenship', then, invokes a baseline assumption of legally-backed citizen's rights and privileges, and expectations of ethical and cooperative citizenship behaviour. This in turn is couched in macro-level explanations made via recourse to the notion of cosmological system. The issue with this is that it is founded on – and takes for granted – categorial assumptions of the sort which may be contested or negotiated *in situ*. It might be argued that the institutionalisation of such a central concept as 'citizen' serves to apply certain general psychological traits to, and build a 'neutral' typology of, 'the general public' as rational actors, and how members of this category are expected to function within the structures of public administration and governance.

Of course, there may be cases in which members *do* demonstrate citizenship in ways similar to which these typologies describe, but it is equally unhelpful to designate such obligations from a place of perceived neutrality. This will be further discussed below in relation to the public encounter literature and at greater length in Chapter 7, but in sum, the broad issue I have identified with this body of literature is that the assumptions that underpin much of it involve bureaucratic structures and their operation by individuals with clear-cut roles, obligations, and goal-orientations (Finer, 1931; King and Stivers, 1998; Yang, 2005; Stout and Love, 2017). The focus of this subsection, then, will be an exploration of this interpretation of public encounter and some of the concepts it is contingent on. An immediately identifiable feature of public

administration research is its broad drive to tautologically sustain itself by dedicating itself to informing practice in terms of the reified categorial assumptions of an academic discipline geared narrowly to the furtherance of governmental bureaucracy, or “advancing excellence in public service” (the latter being the slogan of the American Society for Public Administration, a major organisation which hosts several of the top public administration journals including ‘Public Administration Review’). This is starkly clear when it comes to ‘public encounters’.

Coined in this specialist field by Charles Goodsell (1981), ‘*public* encounter’ has less to do with public spatiality or visibility as it does the publicness of the organisational body that the practitioner or service-provider is representing. He describes the public encounter as “the interaction of citizen and government official as they communicate to transact matters of mutual interest” (Goodsell, 1981: 3). As such, a ‘public encounter’ (in Goodsell’s terms) is specifically between private citizens and public officials (expressly executive or administrative personnel), and it is the public accountability of the official that defines these encounters as ‘public’. In grandiose terminology, he sets out to position such an encounter as the physical manifestation of the “private individual standing alone before the sovereign state” (p. 4). To colour these mundane interactions with such bold symbolism may be appealing, but it risks reducing the relational configuration to a mimetic forum in which representational proxies execute their transactional functions (perhaps with some resistance or contestation) within the remit of a presupposed model of governmentality. Such an assumption that individual actors are representatives of broader abstract categories in public administration encounters misplaces their sovereignty by placing gratuitous emphasis on their obligations to represent the citizenry (or their individual citizenship),

or the sovereign state respectively. Like the theories of encounter in human geography, it equally overlooks the micro-contingencies of the interaction as it plays out, preferring to place (circumscribed) value in the individuals as representatives than in the 'things themselves': the actual, artful practices of managing and accomplishing order as it is made available in situated talk and action. That being said, my position herein is, similarly, not to immediately discount the interpretation, but rather refrain to from conjuring up representational categories, instead leaving it to the members themselves to orient to role practices in their own terms and their own categories. Of course it may be the case that Goodsell's introductory characterisation holds weight in certain circumstances and situations, but this would be a trouble to be addressed and handled by the members themselves, and such similarities ought to be demonstrable as a categorial accomplishment rather than through a culturalist modality or as a functional consequence.

In opposition to the 'citizens', we have the administrators themselves, or as Michael Lipsky (2010) might call them 'street-level bureaucrats'. Lipsky can be credited with taking a positive step towards addressing the social construction of 'the client', albeit *by* the street-level bureaucrat on the basis of the requirements of their job. He makes some general observations regarding the relational configuration of the administrator and the client, suggesting that the bureaucrat treats a client "only as bundles of bureaucratically relevant attributes rather than whole persons ... deal[ing] with symptoms, qualifications, and capacities, but not with feelings or superficially tangential facts" (p. 76), and that "street-level bureaucrats experience client problems as calls for categories of action" (p. 60). While these points are made as criticisms of bad practice arising from under-resourcing, they arguably miss the true character of

membership categorisation as more than just 'folk taxonomies' (Watson, 2015: 27), especially in a one-sided employment of job-oriented classifications. Categories are organised and publicly available in everyday activity, and not simply – as Lipsky suggests – imagined classificatory components of the 'client' or 'citizen' conjured up by a public official. Perhaps more immediately observable is the inaccuracy of the idea that 'feelings' or 'superficially tangential facts' are disregarded by street-level bureaucrats who apparently deal exclusively and systematically with modular issues as somehow distinct from the people who have and raise them. Even those street-level workers who are critically overworked and who are forced to pick up the slack in an under-resourced organisational structure do not operate in this disinterested way. Lipsky almost addresses this by referring to their practice as being mediated by the discretion they are afforded by their practical autonomy from organisational authority, which can be used "to intervene on behalf of clients as well as to discriminate among them" (p. 23). However, this discretion is framed as a symptom of the necessary rationing resources, and still delineated with recourse to classificatory scales of problems (see p.106 for his discussion of medical triaging). The Park Rangers, on the other hand, exercise discretion in numerous subtle ways (for example, not extinguishing barbecues deemed safe and controlled despite their illegality in park space), and specifically refer to their 'Ranger's discretion' for standing down from potentially dangerous or confrontational encounters; decisions often observably made independently of the goal-oriented classification practices relevant to their job and its limited resources.

To continue on the categorial assumptions characteristic of public administration studies, Josephine Gatti Schafer (2019: 1) uses a telling turn of phrase – that is "agents

of governance” – to describe public administrators. At risk of reading too much into what is an introductory depiction by a single author, it discloses a broader institutional understanding of the agency of these practitioners as being limited by – and to – their administrative roles. Agents of governance might be understood to operate – representationally – a very specific form of organisation and decision-making tautologically defined by the very bureaucratic structures they claim agency within. Take research on methods for ‘fruitful public encounters’ by Stout and Love (2017) as a symptomatic example of the tautological, theoretical, and structurally-bound thinking that defines policy and practice-oriented literature in the discipline. Their research on public encounters as practice, and specifically how to do such a practice well, is curiously absent of empirical descriptions of actual public encounters. Instead, it trades in ‘ideal-types’ within a typological model as it considers “the types of encounters likely to be produced by the four primary approaches to governance” and “the likely results of these encounters in terms of how each approach (a) handles conflict, (b) gathers input (facts and values), (c) comes to agreement on goals and methods, and (d) engenders expected behaviour” (Stout and Love, 2017: 133). Most fundamentally, my research seeks at the very least to showcase instances of actual public encounters, demonstrating the “micro-level relational processes of ‘face-to-face contact between public professionals and citizens’” (Stout and Love, 2017: 130). Heeding Koen Bartels’ (2013: 479) call to study public encounter in its own terms by examining the “relational, situated performances through which public professionals and citizens communicate in daily practice” (a call that Stout and Love insist they also heeded, although there is little evidence of that in their work) I would hope that my own intervention may go some way to help break the cycle of practice being informed by theoretical models built on (theoretical) ideal-type scenarios.

Co-production of public services

After discussing the frameworks through which public administration studies have sought to construct each participatory 'side' of their public encounters in turn, I move onto a related concept for some form of synthesis: 'coproduction'. Scholars of interaction might be familiar with the idea that interaction orders are coproduced by participants *in situ*. Nevertheless, the concept has a rather more specific application in public administration literature which predictably involves the coproduction of public services, typically positioning citizens and communities as stakeholders and policy makers in the delivery of these services, for example through volunteer structures (Boyle and Harris, 2009). Gordon Whitaker (1980) defines it much more broadly as involving how services can be shaped by citizens simply through requests for assistance (including 'alerting city officials to problems') and the joint consideration of problems and the 'reciprocal modification of expectations'. Coproduction is understood broadly as "the active involvement of the general public and, especially, those who are to be the direct beneficiaries of the service" (Whitaker, 1980: 242). While this lenient application is contested within public administration studies, a field which appreciates directly useful concepts that can be operationalised in practice (see Kiser and Percy 1980; Brudney and England, 1983), this type of involvement (alerting Park Rangers to problems or requesting assistance) is routinely observable from park users in my study.

The crux of the data in this thesis effectively involves public service encounters between Park Rangers and park users through which requests and inputs are made that fit Whitaker's liberal definition of 'coproduction'. Drawing it together with the

interactionist interpretation, an important point can be made about coproduction of lived reality and the visual order in interaction (Goodwin, 2000), and can help inform a point about members' agency, which is often missed in the traditional literature in this field (Whitaker, 1980; Goodsell, 1981; Lipsky, 2010 being examples of such). The main issue with 'coproduction' as it is formulated in the literature is – like the street-level bureaucracy literature – it is one-sided in its approach, being solely interested in what the enrolment of citizens in public service provision means to that service. Plainly, people are not 'cultural dopes' (Garfinkel, 1967) and the structures of the state do not simply act upon the individual unidirectionally. The Rangers' treatment as public administrators or street-level bureaucrats is equally coproduced in and by the contingencies of the encounter, in which members of the public who come across, seek out, approach, or are approached by the Rangers are participants in the strongest sense. In questioning or engaging the Rangers, or vice-versa, park users are interactionally enrolled in the local trouble at hand. It may not be as straightforward as Whitaker's (1980) idea of coproduced service, but certainly the Park Rangers' interactional engagement with members of the public in park space is a major part of how they go about doing their everyday job, and indeed what that job might entail on any given day. In this way, my study serves to show, *inter alia*, how the concept of 'public service coproduction' is interactionally coproduced in situated, embodied Rangering practices.

To conclude this subsection, I turn to Laura Hand (2019; also with Catlaw, 2019) who has recently published some encouraging public administration work which does indeed take Koen Bartels' advice to study the situated communication of public encounters. She makes the case for ethnomethodologically-influenced studies of

public administration encounters which treat these encounters as collaboratively produced and negotiated; focusing primarily on talk and “how the realities of the situation are enacted in the moment” (Hand, 2019: 8). Her study does not comprise a purely ethnomethodological approach but, like my own, pays close attention to the interplay of categorial and sequential modalities through which the local accomplishment of the encounter is recognisable. Similarly Birte Asmuss (2007) and Emily Hofstetter (2016, with Stokoe, 2015) have taken conversation analytic approaches to public administration encounters, with the former looking at how requests in an employment office are formatted, and how these are negotiated as interactional resources for managing expectations. The latter, similarly, shows how politicians sequentially navigate helping their constituents by cycling through differently formulated offers of assistance which do the interactional job of assessing whether their offers are appropriate in the situation. All of this work is still geared towards informing public administration practice, and indeed it is possibly better positioned to do so by showcasing encounter situations procedurally and relationally produced through the microcontingencies of that very practice. Without relying on frameworks or taxonomies and all the tautological bureaucracy they are bound up in, Hand demonstrates the careful negotiations involved in actually-occurring public encounters between administrators and clients, and can pinpoint the relevancies and practical skills at play, their situated acceptance or resistance, and the interactional subtleties that theoretical frameworks inevitably miss.

Conclusion: Encounters as practical Ranging method

This extended section on encounters has sought to identify and evaluate numerous directions and applications for ‘encounter’ conceptually across academic disciplines.

In evaluating the varying literature systematically I have concurrently clarified my position on conceptualisation. This has been necessary as a literature review will invariably deal in academic concepts and theories, and it would be cumbersome and no doubt repetitive to critique each scholarly work with the same arguments regarding not supplanting the reportable detail of actually-occurring phenomena with established sociological theories. To summarise my position on encounters, it is fairly clear that face-to-face encounters are of central organisational importance to the Park Rangers in their quotidian enquiries, and they are consequently of huge significance to the study. Across the reviewed literature – from applied to theoretical – the fundamental understanding of what public encounters are remains quite similar. The discrepancies are in the different perspectives, semantic positions, and central relevancies, but each (whether explicated or assumed) arrives at an understanding that, at the very least, face-to-face encounters are recognisable everyday phenomena. The Goffman literature is helpful in situating them as units of social organisation, an observation that is so ordinary and familiar that it is easy to miss analytically. Taking into account Watson's (1992) criticisms of the Goffmanian approach, the ethnomethodologically-oriented studies in sociology, human geography and public administration studies demonstrate, however, that paying attention to procedural accomplishments in and of everyday life can uncover *how* encounters are occasioned phenomena, and how this in turn can facilitate analysts' arrival at similar conclusions without having to rely on sociological concepts or indeed ways of seeing. This is characteristic of the Husserlian argument to 'go back to the things themselves' and makes the case for taking the data first. Moreover, it shows, quite simply, that encountering is a routine practical method within the set of practices comprising 'Rangering'. It is a *collaborative* practice in which

public service coproduction (Whitaker, 1980) is observably co-produced interactionally.

Public space and the city

The City: The universal in the particular

Public space and public behaviour are well-studied topics in the social sciences. As a concept, public space is variously framed: philosophically, as a site of democratic fora constructed hand-in-hand with the popular operations of civic society and the birth of an aggregated 'public' of private citizens (Habermas, 1962); geographically and materially as contested sites of legal and cultural tensions threatened by neoliberal agendas of privatisation and proprietorship (Lofland, 1998; Blomley, 2004; Low, 2006); and sociologically as a site with its own social organisation and behavioural expectations (Goffman, 1963; 1971), spaces where people and their practices are *visible* (Marx, 2001), more so where the delicate social order on which this visibility is contingent can be breached by simply 'doing nothing' or standing still (Stanley, et al. 2020), and, quite curiously, where some types of public individuals going about their routine practices can find themselves *hidden* (Hakim Hasan, in Duneier, 1999; Hall, 2017). For numerous reasons, much of the work – from conceptual to empirical – is born of and involves urban city space. My study is no different; the city parks that constitute the physical setting of my ethnographic observations are, of course, city spaces whose organisational properties cannot be separated from their embeddedness in – and constitution of – the urban fabric. The setting herein is 'the city', but it is also just one city: Cardiff. It is more accurate, however, to refer to 'the city' in a general sense, rather than Cardiff as a culturally unique setting. This is

because descriptions of the mundane particulars in this one city – with all their ‘haecceities’ (Garfinkel, 1996: 10) – can be generalisable inasmuch as their accountable features are recognisable to anyone, even if they have never been to Cardiff or have no specific geographical or cultural knowledge of that particular city. As James Joyce told Arthur Power:

“For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal” (Ellmann, 1982: 505).

Whether set in Cardiff or Dublin or any other city, an interactional study concerned with the microcontingencies of face-to-face interaction should not require assumptions about external cultural context for any organisational purpose. This is not to say that the unique cultural peculiarities of Cardiffian or South Wales society do not exist or matter; rather, in a study that values the ontology of emergent order as a hyperlocal accomplishment, these cultural peculiarities will be ‘available’ and accountable in the data if they are made procedurally relevant in the ordinary activities that comprise naturally occurring interactional moments. This is discussed at greater length in the methodology chapter, however it is a point worth stressing. ‘Context’ will also be considered as a local accomplishment and consequently an in-built feature of the situation in Chapter 6. What I want to make clear here is that data will not be analysed through a culturalist lens. Culture is not a structural programme, nor a formal explanatory device. As Sacks (1995: 226) had it, “A culture is an apparatus for generating *recognisable* actions” through which the procedures for both generating and detecting said recognisable actions are the same. Culture is, then, *organised* through radically local practices by members themselves. But, as Garfinkel (1996: 6)

noted, this position is "...not an indifference to structure. This is a concern with structure as an achieved phenomenon of order." So, if national or regional 'cultures' (as these concepts are popularly understood) are relevant, they will be relevant for the members themselves, and will be recognisable as orientations to cultural categories of this kind in the emergent moments of ordinary activities (Coulter, 1979, 1982).

An important point here, however, is that rejecting cultural explanations of the city setting does not necessarily leave a void that needs replacing by other formal categories. This is in reference to my above statement that the setting of the study is 'the city' rather than Cardiff as a culturally unique city. 'Setting' is an occasioned phenomenon; sometimes it is procedurally relevant that this setting is Cardiff, or that it is a city, or that it is an urban park, or a specific park, or a precise location in a park, or that it is public space, or that it is expectedly private space, and so on. Therefore, if we are to consider interaction as emergent from hyperlocal order, the broader urban context should – equally – not be categorially assumed in a formal analytic way. The following section will grapple with the formal categorial assumptions of 'the urban', particularly as it is popularly contrasted with 'the rural'. It concludes with a call to consider how these categories are produced in situated interaction.

Critiquing 'the urban' as a formal category

The 'urban fabric' often takes on its own imaginaries; as a term it is useful in imagining the interwoven character of cities as assembled in and through the makings of its constituents. The 'urban-ness' of space is nonargumentatively assumed when referring to spaces that seamlessly fit this imaginary (shopping centres, high streets, plazas, tower blocks, gritty inner-city skateparks, and so on) but is somewhat

challenged when it comes to park spaces. Rather than debate whether parks fit in with the urban imaginary or form part of the urban fabric, I will critique the tendency in formal analysis to construct 'the urban' as an organisational category without recourse to ordinary lived activities. Such formal analyses tend to ossify the symbolic boundaries of the urban in conjunction with formal concepts, or as a means to some conceptual end. Thomas Corcoran and colleagues (2019) typify this position as they set out a number of dichotomous (conceptual) 'tensions' of 'place' in urban ethnography (including 'in/out', 'order/disorder' and 'public/private') which, they claim, are necessary concepts to attend to in order to combat imprecision. Their treatment of 'place' as a 'social actor' reifies this geographical concept as a stimulating force for social life, turning on the Bourdieusian reciprocal relationship between habitus and habitat, suggesting that people and place are indeed extricable in urban ethnography. While this conceptual reciprocity (and consequent foregrounding of setting) is encouraging, designing a framework along these lines misses the emergent orders of urban public space as contingently produced in everyday interaction. Instead, a position which remains sensitive to the *occasional* character of the situation (and the delicate configuration of people, practice and place it comprises) may consider place and space as local accomplishments. I will elaborate on this position after summarising the corresponding formal analytical position, in which the aforementioned researchers are not alone. It is a common routine for sociologists, geographers and urbanists alike to construct urban public space as symbolically dichotomous; its discordances being realised and delineated along imagined boundaries.

Shrouded in legalism, spatial boundaries define the sharp point – the precise line – at which people's rights to the space change. The pervasiveness of concepts of

belonging, proprietorship, and right of admission give rise to further questions of relations between individuals and urban space, or rather, between individuals *about* space (Blomley, 2016). Boundary, in the spatial sense, is a relational effect inasmuch as its existence serves to realise the differences between characteristically distinct, separate spaces. The persistent ontology of urban boundaries is reliant on contrast, perhaps in rhythm, as dominant spatiotemporalities provide a governing experiential grounding to an urban 'enclave' (Stavrides, 2010; 2013). Similarly, Robert Park (1915: 608) described the city as "a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate." In his interpretation, the urban fabric is organised as a series of moral milieux between which an individual is able to pass so long as they assimilate to its varying conditions and values. These enclaves or milieu or little worlds can likewise be defined by means of their stimulation of certain affects in everyday life: happiness, calmness, tranquillity rising or subsiding at the event of 'crossing' the boundary between park space and the built environment (see Thrift, 2008). Similarly, the biosocial, neuropsychological implications of everyday urban life have been considered at the juncture of the rural and the urban imaginations (Fitzgerald, et al. 2016a; 2016b). Georg Simmel made the distinction between the intensified emotional and psychological conditions built from the "swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli" of the metropolis, as contrasted with the "slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence" (1903: 11–12). Like Simmel, Louis Wirth (1938) of the Chicago School shifted attention to the individual, defining 'urbanism' as the *conditions* of living in a city. He looked to the material-spatial technologies of 'the city' and considered their embeddedness in an 'urban personality' and an 'urban way of life' which are shaped by urban features such as population density and heterogeneity. Manuel Castells

(1977: 15) goes a step further to argue that 'the urban' is a cultural ideology which normalises the social values that consider this heterogeneity and social densification (and all of its potential exploits) to be a 'natural' phenomenon. Without discounting any of the above, perhaps, put simply and plainly: the city is "the place, above all, of living with others" (Laurier and Philo, 2006a: 193).

Some scholars have chosen to conceptualise urban parks as characteristically 'natural' (Burgess, et al. 1988; Chiesura, 2004; Desfor and Keil, 2004; Byrne and Wolch, 2009; Gabriel, 2011; Loughran, 2016) or even quasi-rural spaces within an urban context (Krenichyn, 2006). My intention is not so much to establish a position on the urban-rural divide, nor to engage with categories of 'urban' and 'natural' in any formal analytical way. That being said, these ontological positions are sometimes occasioned by members themselves. For example, in an ethnographic extract in Chapter 5 a Ranger takes a dogwalker averting his attention away from him on a narrow path in a secluded area as an incongruity, and consequently, a cue to inquire further into what he is up to. If we were to take Simmel's (1903: 27) "blasé attitude" (an urban "psychic phenomenon" stemming from sensory overstimulation due to the "quantitative intensification" of the city) into account, we may consider this to be a specifically urban rendering "civil inattention" (to borrow from Goffman, 1963) in the sense that disattending strangers in relatively close proximity and "experie[n]c[ing them] as insubstantial" may comprise normal appearances *in an urban setting*. However, for the Park Ranger here, being notably disattended was an indicator of trouble. I do not wish to get caught up in explanatory moves, but the questions of social organisation that arise from this members' trouble have implications for 'the urban' as a formal analytic category. The observable phenomenon of the routine obligation to greet a

stranger who crosses one's path in close proximity in more secluded or quiet areas in urban park space is not shared on the high street, in a supermarket aisle, on narrow city pavements, and so on. Such obligations for fleeting but focused interaction of this sort between strangers are perhaps typically reserved for hill walks and countryside rambles. Without implying that urban parks are rural settings (they are not), it can certainly be said that the contingencies of the normal appearances of urban park space – as they are negotiated and accomplished in moments of mundane face-to-face interaction – challenge the organisational structures of the formal analytic category of 'the urban'. If categories of 'urban' and 'rural' are of interest – and I do not necessarily propose they should be – then they should be handled as contingent on members' own competent actions in and pertaining to the space (Smith, 2017a). People use parks without needing to consider the semantics of whether the most appropriate organisational 'rules' are urban or rural ones. It, therefore, may be a better option to consider people's mundane actions as constitutive of the *haecceity* or 'just thisness' of the setting (Garfinkel, 1996: 10).

The position that this points to is one that acknowledges the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), noting that the city, the park (and any other space) is not merely a 'bucket' or container of objects and events, but a social phenomenon "*generated* by the motion of bodies" (Laurier, 2005: 102) and one that is "actively accomplished" and "reflexively configured" in and for particular moments of interaction (McIlvenny, 2009: 1881–1882). Going beyond Lefebvrian spatial politics, the ethnographic descriptions herein pay close attention to the *occasioned* character of events, considering practice and space as mutually categorially constitutive in and through the relational configuration of category, context, and activity (Hester and Francis, 2003). Indeed,

one concern of this thesis is to show members' orientations to and formulations of *context* as a phenomenon. I discuss membership categorisation devices (MCDs) at greater length in the methods chapter (Chapter 3), while Chapter 6 is dedicated to encounters in the park during the COVID-19 pandemic, and which treats the pandemic as a contextual device in the configuration of the space and action. For now, I will tackle another pertinent issue in public space: interactions between unacquainted people.

Relational configurations of and with 'strangers'

In the previous section, I touched upon – in passing – the concept of 'strangers'. Some scholars have attempted to 'know' the stranger as an embodied characteristic, by protagonising the generic character of 'the stranger'. Albert Camus' (1946) stranger was synonymously translated from the French as 'outsider'; the character being a shunned interloper in society, whose 'outsiderness' was produced relationally through a series of mundane, trivial encounters in which the protagonist (the stranger) was perceived (and victimised) by his counterparts as being insincere, emotionally distant, insensitive, and generally not in-keeping with cultural norms around death, mourning and sentimentality. Simmel (1908) spatialised and mobilised the concept of the stranger (who is also an outsider) as someone who does not belong, and – owing to their unestablished position straddling indifference and involvement – is able to operate an 'objective' involvement in a situation. Likewise, Alfred Schutz's (1944) stranger is an inquirer who must do the work of making sense of a group's 'system of relevance' and all the unspoken assumptions that its members take for granted as insiders. The difference here is that Schutz treats the stranger in terms of their relational orientation *within* a group, as opposed to simply being an outsider from a far

and distant place. It should be noted, however, that all of these conceptualisations consider strangers as alien individuals of difference and incongruity; a marginal figure in terms of the assumed collective. What is perhaps missed by essays on the character of 'the stranger', is the mundane normalcy of 'strangers' and 'stranger-ness', not as a personality trait or held characteristic, but as a routine relational practice. The stranger is not 'that' person who is inherently strange, out of place, or abnormal; indeed it can be noted that most people in a city are perhaps 'strangers' in some regularly organised relational formulation. In a city the assumed collective is not homogenous and thus not necessarily organised in a way that facilitates the construction of 'the stranger' in these literary terms. The cosmopolitan "society of strangers" challenges the dichotomous host/visitor organisation apparent in these conceptualisations of 'the stranger', noting the paradoxical inclusivity and democratisation of organised society where being strangers to one another is the norm (Ossewaarde, 2007). Even Simmel's own 'blasé attitude' and Wirth's 'urban way of life' are effects, by and large, of the assumption of regular, mundane dealings between unacquainted people.

Shelving the *character* of the stranger portrayed literature and urban theory, what I am really interested in here is the *relational organisation* of strangers. Eric Laurier and Chris Philo (2006a: 193) pointed out that in the city "little is said between the unacquainted, even though they are involved in making queues together, holding doors for one another and sharing seats." They note the ordinariness of subtle gestures between the unacquainted in a café, doing the visual work of welcoming or 'snubbing' new arrivals. Charlotte Bates (2018: 992) echoes how sharing public space can produce baseline conviviality in which people "come together in their mutual affinity for the place itself". She recounts Paul Gilroy's (2004: 3) description of

mundane cosmopolitan encounters: “the strangeness of strangers goes out of focus and other dimensions of a basic sameness can be acknowledged and made significant.” This latter point seems to be a central categorial dilemma that gets addressed in and through mundane civic culture-in-action (Housley, 2021).

Staying with the above considerations about shared public space, there is certainly something about shared city space that produces an occasion for orderly – often non-lexical – relations between unacquainted people. Jane Jacobs (1961: 72) pointed to the streets as the urban setting that comprises “built-in equipment allowing strangers to dwell in peace together on civilised but essentially dignified and reserved terms.” I will withhold judgment as to whether cities or streets or urban parks are *designed* for (relatively) convivial relations between ‘strangers’ (see Shaftoe, 2008; Tonkiss, 2013; Bates, 2018), but certainly ‘stranger’ is a categorially interesting term assumed to be at the crux of city life. The term is all too often loaded with notions of difference and discordance, and resonates somewhat with the baseline misanthropy that Nigel Thrift (2005) would insist characterises urban relations. Moreover, it is not a particularly useful category – in practical terms – when dealing with individuals who are differently accountable to the setting, such as the Park Rangers. If taking Harvey Sacks’ (1995: 246) rules of application for referential satisfactoriness, ‘stranger’ would rarely be a helpful membership category to describe Park Rangers in park space. It would be highly peculiar for a park user to recount their exchange with a Park Ranger in an urban park as ‘an encounter with a stranger’; the Ranger is visually and accountably paired with the park space to the degree that they could not simply be a ‘stranger’ to a park user, even if they had never met before. The reportable relational relevance, when Park Rangers are participants in interaction in park space, is that they are – in

some way or another – a practitioner of discernible professional responsibility in that space.

Taking a step back from the specific categorisation troubles of Park Rangers in park space (something I will return to shortly), lets stay with the idea of ‘strangers’ as a relational production. Stefan Hirschauer (2005) wrote of accomplishing ‘being a stranger’ in an elevator as ordinary social practice. Taking as central Goffman’s concept of ‘civil inattention’, he sets out to show how ‘strangeness’ is *maintained* interactionally, relating ‘civil inattention’ to “a chronic problem of co-presence in public settings: the problem of staying unknown to each other” (Hirschauer, 2005: 41). Of course, the vehicle of the elevator cart is given significant import in the analysis as an enhancer of general interactional problems of public encounters, but his work largely notes how unacquainted people do the ordinary, routine, collaborative – and *public* – interactional work of maintaining personal boundaries, and thus maintaining their positions as strangers to one another. As mentioned above, Eric Laurier and Chris Philo (2006a) found that subtle but meaningful gestures such as ‘cold shoulders’ were made publicly available in ordinary café interactions. Hirschauer (2005) similarly noted the unmistakably spatialised practices of bodily navigation that comprise the work of maintaining ‘strangeness’ in an elevator, from avoiding contact, to more subtle moments in which participants “stop the automatism through which co-present bodies start interactions” (p. 58). That is, they disrupt the compulsion to communicate by suspending those embodied moments in which unfocused encounters become focused ones (eye contact, glances, greetings). In doing so, Hirschauer argues, they ‘undo’ their presence, thus maintaining their nonacquaintance in the elevator space. A difference in Laurier and Philo’s (2006a) analysis is that they are rather more

optimistic about the potential for conviviality between strangers. They show how handing napkins to strangers on nearby tables comprise quasi-helpful gestures in response to minor crises (namely, a toddler spilling his drink), which they (borrowing from Sacks) conceptualise as ‘potentially integrative events’. It is the seeable limitations of such a gesture of goodwill (short of genuine practical solutions such as getting a mop and bucket) that work to maintain the delicate position of *unacquainted* conviviality, displaying the appropriate level of responsibility in a relationship between strangers. In these examples, we can see how unacquainted persons interact, and how the relevancy of being *and staying* strangers is built into ordinary actions.

Place-relevant reference categories: More than just strangers

Returning to a discussion of Park Rangers, an important intervention in the debate comes from Goffman (1971: 7) in a footnote in ‘Relations in Public’. He attributes an observation of the trouble of the categorisation of strangers to Sacks: that the term “strangers” is reserved for “fellow user of a public place” and “not merely any unacquainted other – for example, ordinarily not a policeman or a shop clerk.” Relational configurations in park space in which the Rangers are involved, then, are potentially shaped by their public accountability to that space. In this way – if we return to the example of the dogwalker at the end of the previous section – a reader may plausibly consider that the issue is not that the dogwalker failed to acknowledge a *stranger*, but perhaps that he failed to acknowledge a *uniformed official*. Certainly, while observations do suggest that park users do routinely disattend the Rangers in more well-populated areas (unless, of course, the Ranger explicitly and verbally calls their attention), the occasioned trouble cannot be considered without

acknowledgement of the relevant category relations through which the situation is made ordinarily accountable.

Perhaps, then, my previous claim that 'strangers' are routinely interactionally dealt with in the city should be amended. While strangers do routine work to maintain their nonacquaintance throughout interactions, and the category of 'stranger' can be brought to the fore in moments of overfamiliarity (when 'civil inattention' is breached, or say, in the kind of situation that anti-abduction 'Stranger Danger' material warns children about), it is typically the case that individuals in the city engage with each other in terms of their situated roles; as Park Rangers and park users, as cashiers and customers, as fellow shoppers in a supermarket, as patrons in a bar, as fellow residents, workers, or users of a building in a lift, and so on. Lena Jayyusi (1984: 141) puts it clearly:

“Now, although going out into the market-place, for example, we may spend hours among 'strangers', they are nevertheless only *strangers biographically*. *Culturally*, the persons we encounter *are not strangers* – we know them well, we know what to expect from them, what they will expect from us, we know some of the features of their lives, we can provide stories about them and the scenes we encounter them within are self-evident through *this* knowledge. But this knowledge is category-organised: child, woman, married man, bus-driver, saleslady, policeman, butcher, shoe-repair man, old woman, mother, businessman, husband, etc.”

Park users can – legitimately – be joggers, dogwalkers, picnickers, commuters. Rangers may engage individuals they may deem illegitimate park users, for example, drug users, doggers, rough sleepers, or other people who may be thought to be

engaging in dangerous, inappropriate or illegal practices. Due to their own situated categorial position and its bounded ways of seeing, a relational pairing co-constituted by a Park Ranger can never accomplish another user of park space as merely a 'stranger'.

So, while the 'stranger' category *can* be invoked as momentary productions in public space, it is rarely an occasioned practical category. Paying attention to Sacksian rules of application, spatialised, situated, practical categories tend to be foregrounded in urban parks. As Lorenza Mondada (2009: 1984) put it: "In public space, 'strangers' are not anonymous people, but persons seen as belonging to a category visibly displayed and often bound to an activity." That is, people are rarely *just* reportably strangers in park space because they are already seeably involved in embodied category-bound activities, and these typically do not involve 'doing' being a stranger *in the first instance*. It would be difficult to imagine how one might ever possibly make available that they are first and foremost a 'stranger' – in unfocused copresence – in the same way that they are able to show straight away that they are a cyclist or a jogger or a dogwalker or a parent of a child. What I mean to say, is that there are whole hosts of categorisation devices employed in and through ordinary activities that routinely supersede orientations to the category of 'stranger'; the Simmelian *cultural* stranger is not someone we knowingly encounter in everyday city life, simply because that characterisation supposes an immediate and inherent visibility of meso-level networks of inclusion and exclusion. This just does not happen in the first instance, because even in public encounters with the 'types' of people who may fit the bill of the Simmelian stranger, other referential terms presuppose them in interaction (e.g. 'homeless person', 'beggar', 'charity worker', 'street preacher').

Even when unacquainted people encounter each other in public parks, or indeed any public space, in direct, focused talk, the relational category of 'stranger' is only sustained as an arguably secondarily relevant organisational device in that focused situation by way of the situated design of the conversation as being of limited scope and longevity. As Goffman (1981: 62–64) suggests, unacquainted people tend to limit their engagement with one another with certain speech acts such as 'commissives' that require only a factual response and commit the respondent to a clearly delineated course of action. For example, a stranger may reasonably ask another person for the time, or for directions, and that respondent's ordinary response will accomplish the local production of that orderly, convivial encounter by virtue of a simple factual response. Elwys De Stefani and Lorenza Mondada (2018) further note the multimodal character of stranger relations in their analysis of approaches and conversational openers in public space. They observe how peoples' embodied mobile trajectories and orientations converge to produce a common interactional space for a brief encounter between strangers. Notable is how the trajectory of this participation framework hinges on the negotiation of 'epistemic authority' (De Stefani and Mondada, 2018: 262). As stated, approaching and sustaining an encounter with an unacquainted party in public space is facilitated by a presupposition that it will be short-lived and involve an appropriate commissive request such as those mentioned above. In such a framework, the longevity of the encounter can rest on relevant knowledge qualifications; an approached person can 'deselect' themselves by expressing a lesser epistemic position (not having a watch, not being local, not knowing the area, etc.), which equates to not knowing and therefore not being an appropriate candidate to answer the request. It can be argued that this serves as a method for maintaining

reciprocal 'stranger-ness' while demonstrating the delicate organisational contingencies of a stranger encounter. Unacquainted people thus resolve to remain 'strangers' inasmuch as they do not become personally known to one another throughout or after the encounter.

This being said, 'stranger' remains only a secondary organisational device because – as stated – fellow users of park space are not categorially foregrounded as 'strangers' (see Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002 on 'multi-layered' categories). By mere virtue of being in park space, their observable categorial relevancies and orientations relate to that space, and moreover, their spatial practices. But for Park Rangers in particular, even the aforementioned situated, momentary accomplishment of 'strangers' is not viable. 'Park user' is the 'go to' professional, operational, baseline category, and sometimes 'member of the public' is used interchangeably. The latter being a distinctive relation which invokes a navigation of 'rights' with their general accountability to a broader collective category. In turn, 'member of the public' achieves the distinguishing accountability of the Ranger to the space in a more specified, professional way. Parallels might be drawn in the use of 'civilian' in military environments. The Ranger is not a 'member of the public' in park space, much like a soldier is not a civilian in a barracks or on a battlefield. This relational configuration is routinely assumed in encounters between Rangers and park users, forming a relatively stable organisational interactional feature through which expectations, obligations and responsibilities emerge. Interestingly, however, as is shown most bluntly in Chapter 6 (the COVID-19 chapter), this very categorisation is challenged in conflicts which invoke authority: in an instance in which a man challenges the Rangers' authority, he

calls them 'members of the public' in a way that implies that their powers are no greater than his own in that space and in that situation.

Fundamentally for the Ranger, issues arise when some incongruity (in behaviour or other noticeable features) challenges the normal appearances of 'the park' and 'park user' pairing. The Rangers' quotidian job involves seeing occasioned categorial 'troubles'; seen through the illegitimacy of some formulation of people, practice, and place. What is pertinent, here, then, is not simply the revelation that 'stranger' is not a valid practical category in most situated applications, but rather how situated and emergent spatialised categories produce as normal a local social order through which Park Rangers' are permitted to engage people who they do not know personally in focused interaction, without ever becoming 'strangers'. It is not my intention, however, to fall back on the simple assumption that Park Rangers are differently accountable in park space. I will, instead, showcase the emergent contingencies on which this accountability is produced as a situated accomplishment.

Conclusion: Mundane relational troubles and public categories-in-action

To briefly conclude this section, the city has been discussed as a setting in which unacquainted people come into contact with one another, but a key point being made is that *unacquainted* people are not *unknown* people. Indeed, as Jayyusi (1984) argues, we share categorially-organised cultural knowledge about people, and have expectations of them and their behaviours, as part of 'normal appearances' in and of public space. With regard to the Park Rangers, engaging with people that they do not have previous or personal relationships or experiences with is part of their daily round. It is treated as ordinary, and therefore the relational configuration of public operative—

member of the public is an omnirelevant organisational device for all of the face-to-face interactions in this thesis. An omnirelevant device is one that is “composed of collections of categories that are always potentially applicable, and that, when invoked, have priority in terms of organising action within – and only in – situated interaction” (Fitzgerald, et al., 2009: 48). In terms of the occasioned categorial relationships that constitute their quotidian practice, “category, context and activity stand in a relational configuration to each other” comprising a “mutually elaborated whole” (Hester and Francis, 2003: 41). The interactional data herein will show how ‘context’ is oriented to and made procedurally relevant in the ordinary collaborative activities of Rangering. The logics of the city can be realised through interaction. Therefore, the argument in this thesis will go some way to show how members accountably ‘do’ being in public, and consequently how public space is accomplished as a relevant categorial resource for interaction as an ordinary course of action between Rangers and park users.

Working in public view

Making work visible

A broad-brush criticism of sociological studies of work is that they often minimise the actual phenomena of the work itself in favour of constructing it as a vehicle for sociological phenomena such as class-based and gender-based ‘habitus’ (see Skeggs, 1997; Desmond, 2006, 2008; Atkinson, 2013; Simpson, et al. 2014; Simpson, et al. 2016); or concepts such as ‘alienation’ and ‘emotional labour’ (Marx, 1993; Blauner, 1964; Hodson, 1996; Hochschild, 2012); or processes of rationalisation and applied coinages such as ‘McDonaldisation’ (Weber, 1978; Ritzer, 1998). That they ‘minimise’ the work is not to suggest that they are not worthwhile sociological studies;

but that – as previously mentioned – sociology and its formal concepts tend to predominate analyses, losing the lived phenomena in the process. While this is an established sociological practice, it is not my intended practice. Indeed, most of the existing literature on park rangers and wardens obscures their actual practice by discussing it as a proxy for other phenomena, or by writing about what their practice *ought* to be or do (c.f. Lewis, 1989; Wong and Higgins, 2010; Poppe, 2012; Howard, 2013; Usui, et al. 2014; Mendoza, 2016; Day, 2020). On the other hand, a claim (and affordance) of ethnographic research is to make everyday practices visible, and indeed a non-exhaustive list of ethnographies of work that do that without constructing said practices as mere vehicles for formal sociology includes: Egon Bittner's (1967) 'The Police on Skid-Row', Lucy Suchman's (1987) 'Plans and Situated Actions', Paul Atkinson's (1995) 'Medical Talk and Medical Work', Julian Orr's (1996) 'Talking About Machines', Robin Nagle's (2013) 'Picking Up', and Tom Hall's (2017) 'Footwork'. The ethnographic work of Michael Pendleton (1998) is perhaps the only study of park wardens that resonates with my own; it is an interactionist study based in Canada that uses observations of park wardens approaching people to empirically explain the criminological/policing concept of 'soft enforcement'. As such there are some overlaps with my own findings in the way that Pendleton's wardens position themselves as "the campers' friend" and forego their "cop image" (p. 553). However, he continues to design a typological model of responses along two axis (low to high 'symbolic expression' and low to high 'intervention') which establish four observed categories of enforcement approaches: 'encouraging', 'bluffing', 'avoiding', and 'bargaining' (p. 567). In this way his formal analysis ascends to a level that I am not comfortable in employing in my own; while all of these approaches can be observed in this thesis, it

is not so much defining types of approach that I am interested in, but rather what emergent features of a situation occasion certain methods of enforcement.

To return to 'Making work visible'; the title of this subsection is borrowed from the title of an edited collection by Margaret Szymanski and Jack Whalen (2011). This collection comprises a number of ethnomethodologically-informed ethnographic studies of work practice, providing a convincing programme of a-theoretical observations and analyses of actually occurring practices as they are produced and organised *in situ*. Among them is a study of mundane interactions between customers and staff at a printing shop, which showcases via transcript where misconceptions occur and how complaints are negotiated (Vinkhuyzen, 2011). In another chapter, Jacki O'Neill and colleagues (2011) observe remote troubleshooters 'embodying solutions' by physically miming a course of action while on a phone-call with, and offering help to, office workers whose printer/copiers had malfunctioned. These studies, inspired by Garfinkel's (1986) pioneering edited collection 'Ethnomethodological Studies of Work' seek to showcase work practices – and thus make them visible – in an ethnographic sense, while a couple of the chapters serve as contributions to the affordances of ethnography to 'see' (see Sharrock and Button, 2011; Tolmie, 2011). My own interest in the 'visibility' of the work of the Park Rangers is particular to its public context and consequent availability. It is not merely, then, my ethnographic endeavours that are making the job of Rangering 'visible'. Rather, the Rangers' practice is already very much routinely visible to members of the public, as evidenced by their regular interventions and engagement. A contribution of my study is to recover the collaborative organisation of *public* work between practitioners and other constituent users of the space.

Now, much of the literature discussing ‘public work’ refers to the erosion of public sector work and public service (Carter, et al. 2013; Stecy-Hildebrandt, et al. 2018; Kirkpatrick and Hoque, 2006; Lewis, et al. 2016; Cohen, et al. 2018; Smith, 2012). These are pertinent issues, of course, which some – if not all – of the Park Rangers feel the sharp end of. In an era characterised by severe budget cuts and austerity measures hitting the public sector, the Park Rangers, as Council workers, are particularly precarious. In fact, some of the Rangers are employed on even more precarious ‘agency’ contracts and have faced cuts to their hours, or even job losses – through no fault of their own – during my time with them. In light of this existential threat to individual members of the team, and also to the future of the team itself, a heightened awareness of their public *visibility* has pervaded their everyday work. It is this public *visibility* that I am interested in, more than the public ‘ownership’ and funding of the work, although these are undeniably linked. The Park Rangers are publicly funded, publicly accountable, publicly available, publicly visible workers who work in public space, and arguably provide a service *for* ‘the public’ at large.

Public visibility and the occasioned ‘invisibility’ of unremarkable practice

Studying workers in public ethnographically brings up certain dilemmas of visibility that we can take as a start point. Peter Bearman (2005), in his research on Doormen, noted that the design of his ethnographic study was geared towards the ‘visible’ doormen who worked in contexts that gave them access to the public. According to Bearman, this would potentially bias his findings because these doormen who do public work are more likely to be uniformed and unionised, and not representative of the experiences of those whose job involves the ‘dirty’ work of operating elevators and taking out the

rubbish, and so on. While I am not concerned with ‘biases’ resulting from non-representative samples in the same way (see the Methodology chapter, and Crabtree, et al., 2013), this observation raises an important point about public visibility. His concern that his ethnographic observations may miss some doormen “because they do not all look like doormen” (Bearman, 2005: 263) is telling of the mundane availability of public workers as *workers* in the visual order.

In juxtaposition, in her ethnography of sanitation workers in New York City, Robin Nagle (2013: 30) wrote of their relative invisibility as their uniforms functioned as effective “cloaking devices”. Nagle focuses on this invisibility in public, and how these workers and their work go largely unseen or unacknowledged when it is *successful*. Success, here, means an ability to carry out their routine round without issue or disruption, which being uniformed helped afford them. Exceptions to this invisibility occurred in instances when their own work interfered with other people’s rhythms; when their trucks blocked roads or when members of the public disagreed with the objects they decided were refuse. What Nagle is arguing, then, is not that uniformed public workers are literally invisible in public space, but rather that routine work punctuates the rhythms of the city and becomes backgrounded as normal street appearances. The exceptions she writes of, which include some instances of quite serious altercations between the sanitation workers and members of the public, demonstrate that they are not truly unseen, but that they are able to be ‘wilfully’ disattended much of the time, as long as they remain a congruous part of the urban fabric. Passers-by and members of the community do still occasionally acknowledge the workers and offer their thanks or engage in brief small talk. In this way the option

to disattend public workers is certainly occasioned by their routine work, but equally they are available to be engaged in ways that other users of public space are not.

To zone in on and explore this form of 'wilful invisibility' a little further (before discussing public accountability in the next subsection), we may look to Peter Tolmie's (2011) ethnographic work which considers how things – in the context of working from home – can be said to become 'invisible' *in use*. He noted an instance when a member entirely ignored an alarm clock sounding, continuing her work unfazed, and how she consequently displayed an orientation to the alarm as an entirely unremarkable event. To the ethnographer, however, the alarm was reportable, and sequentially, the alarm was a device that initiated a morning routine for the member's children. In this way, despite the member's unremarkable treatment of the event of the alarm sounding, it was still noteworthy to the ethnographer *and* of central practical significance for others in the field. The course of action was available to the ethnographer as 'ignoring' for this very reason; the alarm's differently-organised recognisability depends on membership and ordinary competence in that setting. Perhaps then, 'wilful invisibility' is in some way an accomplishment of complex collaborative practices that occasion a scene as 'unremarkable'. Like Nagle's sanitation workers, Park Rangers can equally be treated as unremarkable 'objects' in an ordinary park scene by virtue of their categorially relevant and mundanely successful work. It is, of course, notable that 'successfulness' here is orderly and, itself, unremarkable: picking up litter, patrolling, driving a van through the park, loading plant debris onto the van, and so on. None of this is remarkable or due applause, and in this way the everyday achievements of Rangering are unacknowledgeable.

Nevertheless, the recognisability of these same actions can be occasioned as remarkable or acknowledgeable by members with differently organised categorial competences. For example, in the way that young children may be intrigued by otherwise mundane work practices; or when members of the public who may be environmentalists or trained tradespeople or adjacently 'expert' in the observed practices enquire about them; or when they encounter a patrolling Ranger in a secluded spot; or, similar to Nagle's observations, when park users' own activities are interrupted by the Rangers' work practices, such as when their van blocks a path or when they shut the gates at closing time and require joggers or dogwalkers to reroute. This is why invisibility *in use* is important: while it cannot be said that park users 'use' Rangers as objects themselves, the Rangers can become invisible to members in park space, inasmuch as their competencies in the routinely accountable features of the space allow them to disattend the Rangers as composite features themselves. That an ethnographer, or indeed any competent member, can recognise such concepts as 'civil inattention' or 'wilful invisibility' or 'ignoring' demonstrates their public availability and, moreover, the public availability and acknowledgeability of the objects or people that are being ignored or 'made invisible' in the first place. In this way, 'invisibility' – like 'strangers' – is a relational concept achieved collaboratively *in situ*, contextualised by the occasion of working in public view.

Work-oriented practices of seeing

Two substantive chapters of this thesis engage with instances when the Park Rangers (typically while out on patrol) identify issues which require their involvement. The identification of issues, be they to do with people or with the materiality of the park, is a practical accomplishment that draws together categories of people, practice, and

place. This practice, at its most fundamental, is that of *seeing*; not simply in terms of physiological and neurological processes of receiving and interpreting light stimuli through the eyes, but seeing as a *social* practice, a *relational* practice, and an *embodied, situated* practice that is locally organised through mundane competencies and as a constituent part of an endogenous visual order (Goodwin and Harness Goodwin, 1996). These have already been touched upon in the previous subsections which deal with the contingencies on which the Rangers and their work are made 'visible' or 'invisible' in public. In a similar way, the visual order of the park setting is arranged through the Rangers' own accountable work practices, as people and objects are produced as relevant in certain configurations. Like Mike Lynch's (1991: 74) scientific laboratory, the park is "an ecology of local spaces integrated within disciplinary practices". The 'topical contextures' of the park – for the Park Rangers – are organised in and through local knowledge productions of their Rangering practice. A clear example of this is the organisation of their patrols around their construction of 'hot spots' of antisocial behaviour. The practical disciplinary knowledge of the routine trouble of antisocial behaviour being a phenomenon which accomplishes the routinised occasion for the patrol in that specific spatial formulation. In terms of work-based relational configurations of objects, another example is the seeing of litter, and its production of a clear obligation for a course of action from the Ranger. Rangers are required, by virtue of their accountability to the space – turning on distinct complexes of equipment (carrying litter pickers) and practices (expectations of maintenance responsibilities) – to pick up litter and not ignore it (Ablitt and Smith, 2019). Litter may be 'invisible' to others who do not share the same obligation to park maintenance, or rather it may be seen through different relational configurations which moreover produce the litter as something that they do not need to act on.

Related to practices of 'seeing', patrols are routine methods for *searching* and *finding*. Analysis of the pedestrian mobilities involved in this practice is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is well documented in Tom Hall and Robin Smith's work on homeless outreach workers (Smith and Hall, 2013, 2016; Hall and Smith, 2013, 2014, 2017). The knowledge practices involved in Rangers' patrols implicate some configurations of objects and people as local 'troubles' relevant to and *seeable through* their work competencies and orientations. The rub, however, is twofold: firstly, 'troubles' are not real-worldly objects or people, and therefore their seeability hinges on a machinery which categorially generates them as such; secondly, *finding* 'troubles' as part of the practical quotidian work of patrolling precludes 'seeing' as it often involves looking for something that is as yet 'unseen'. This requires a competence in the 'normal appearances' of the park. Melinda Baccus (1986: 5) argued for the 'visibility criterion' of referencing 'unseen' objects via analytic devices as being based on their potential locatability, in other words "objects have to 'reside' in the world where one could go looking to find them." Sacks (1972b) pointed to the 'incongruity procedure' employed by police officers to scout out categories of people deemed out of place and therefore of potential deviant or criminal status. Both the orientation to knowledge of potential locatable objects and the competence in seeing 'incongruity' can be taken as evidence of specific expertise, recognisable as 'professional vision' (Goodwin, 1994). The Rangers' work-oriented practices of seeing do the work of constituting the very profession of Rangering. As Chuck Goodwin (1994: 615) put it:

"The relevant unit for the analysis of the intersubjectivity at issue here is thus not these individuals as isolated entities but ... a profession, a community of competent practitioners, most of whom have never met each other but

nonetheless expect each other to be able to see and categorise the world in ways that are relevant to the work, tools, and artefacts that constitute their profession.”

Conclusion: Uniforms, professionalism, and public engagability

As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the mundane public work of the Park Rangers is regularly produced as practically visible and acknowledgeable, and occasioned as something which a competent park user can engage with or provide their input on. To conclude this section on working in public view, it should be noted that work-oriented visual orders manage and make visible the norms of engagement between Park Rangers and members of the public. These are constituted and occasioned in complex category relationships which are negotiated by participants in interaction. Taking Lorenza Mondada's (2009) work on pedestrians approaching other pedestrians to ask for directions, we can see how these interactions between somewhat symmetrical parties are categorically organised. She notes the collaborative categorial work that goes into deciding the appropriateness of potential future co-participants of focused interaction, stating that people “organise their categorial availability and accountability by adopting specific postures or engaging in specific conducts” (Mondada, 2009: 1985). In one particular excerpt in the Mondada paper, ‘pre-beginning’ remarks accounting for a couple’s appearance categorised them as possibly not local (and therefore not suitable candidates to ask directions from) using their unorthodox clothing as an inference-rich resource. A uniform is similarly inference-rich, but arguably indicates asymmetry in the first instance, and consequently affords more straightforward mutual intelligibility in its practical objectivity of its wearer being a responsible presence in a space. The uniform is a

constituent feature of a professional topical contexture, building visible category relationships in terms of a situated work-role. They, then, have procedural relevance for the collaborative trajectories of interactions in park space.

An issue, observed by Sacks (1972b: 293) is that 'professionalism' (in police officers, at least) is seen in the way that they deal with people in "impersonal, code-governed" relations. This may be achieved, ideally, through seeing and dealing exclusively with categories. The problem here is that, practically speaking, we do not encounter categories as standalone entities; they are seeable in candidate activities and people. 'Code-governed' relations, then, are not always successful, when people do not accept or allow themselves to be positioned as candidates of the proposed categories being invoked in that interaction. In instances in which Rangers are engaging with people in terms of their categorial availability as rulebreakers or deviants on the basis of contested features of this categorisation, the interaction is navigated in ways which reveal an essential, situated distinction between 'people' themselves and 'categories' of people. This thesis will show how categories are organised and made available in the Rangers' public work encounters, and how, in some ways the delicate negotiation of these categorisations play out by invoking the categorial 'troubles' as relevant for intervention and cooperative courses of action, but not necessarily pertaining *personally* to the individual or party currently being engaged. In exploring this, I hope to advance the understanding of what the mundane vernaculars of street-level bureaucracy actually look like and what situated practical social work they do in keeping the city ticking over.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline my methodological reasoning for this research project. The project is primarily an ethnographic exploration of everyday phenomena in the mundane, routine, *public* work of a team of Urban Park Rangers. It is very much a contribution embedded in the 'Cardiff School' tradition of interactionist 'everyday ethnography' (Atkinson and Housley, 2003; Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008), and takes particular methodological direction and inspiration from Paul Atkinson's (2017) 'granular ethnography'. The field materials – fieldnotes comprising observations from about two and a half years of episodic, participatory work – are practically and linguistically oriented, and focus largely on (and written as) interactional moments and encounters that occur during the Rangers' shift work between two large urban public parks. A focus of the exploration is the social organisation of this work, and, critically, how its local production is constitutive of orderly reality; how phenomena of order can be showcased in and as the mundane, vulgar "work of the streets" (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992: 203).

I will begin by outlining some of the assumptions on which the study is built, and then follow up with a comment on the phenomenological inspiration for the study. The rest of the chapter involves justifications for using ethnographic research methods and design, describing how these are implemented in this study specifically. It also makes an attempt to show what a working commensurability between said ethnographic

methods and ethnomethodologically-inspired analyses might look like. My argument traces the ways in which ethnographic methods, assumptions and traditions can be respecified, or form part of a respecification, which can faithfully recover and report on phenomena of order. It goes on to make the case for using the full set of human capacities and affordances in the field, and treating consequent fieldnotes, faithfully captured *prima facie*, as occasioned phenomena to be analysed carefully, respecting membership categories. Finally, discussion ends with practical ethical considerations.

Ethnographic fieldwork is fundamentally recognised herein as comprising everyday embodied “members’ methods” (observing, listening, talking, learning, mimicking, counting, reading, storytelling, writing, etc., see Garfinkel, 2002: 72) and therefore appreciates the ethnographer’s position as member-in-the-field. This position does not imply that an ethnographer’s position is like that of all other participants, but rather that ethnographic method displays recognisable features that are not idiosyncratic or uniquely ‘academic’ in their application or practice, and as such an ethnographer’s position in the field is contingent on some of the same rules for orderly conduct in public spaces that may be part of the phenomena being analysed. This underlying assumption is the foundation for the argument for this ethnomethodologically-inspired/informed ethnography (Silverman, 1985; Dingwall, 1981; Crabtree, et al. 2000), in which selective ethnomethodological principles – the centrality of members’ own practices, concepts, categories, and methods in particular – are applied to analysis of research materials resulting from ethnographic fieldwork.

As stated, this research project is broadly an ethnographic exploration, from fieldwork, through analyses, and in representation and writing. It is an ethnographic exploration,

precisely and exclusively, of urban park space and the practitioners who work to manage and maintain it. But, regardless of geographical setting – although setting is not to be (and cannot be) disregarded – it is a study of *public* work first and foremost. Focusing closely on the particulars of the Urban Park Rangers' quotidian work is a way to showcase the situated contingencies of working in public view. As such, I accompanied the Rangers on shift for approximately two and a half years as an overt participant observer in setups similar to Margarethe Kusenbach's (2003: 464) phenomenological 'walk alongs' – spending time patrolling with them, partaking in routine manual labour, and joining them on breaks – all while taking down *in situ* scratchnotes on my smartphone when I had the chance (Sanjek, 1990; Gorman, 2017).

If I were to pinpoint the *initial* assumptions that underpin this research (and make up the preliminary reasoning for this kind of exploration), they would be, *inter alia*, that: 1) the social world is not static, and people rarely are; 2) observation of public encounters in public space can provide for discrete interactional cases which can showcase the live production and organisation of the social as it pertains to those cases; and 3) therefore that social order is observable and recognisable in the micro, in the particular, and specifically in the mundane practices that are necessary for producing and reproducing what we know as the public urban fabric. Mundane practices and natural language produce local social order as a by-product, as there is "order at all points" (Sacks, 1984: 22). This is a central assumption that I maintain throughout this thesis.

A phenomenological grounding for an embodied, non-cognitivist approach

Phenomenological underpinnings affirm this research as an exploration of mundane phenomena, holding true a core principle of experience and perception as the inescapably corporeal way in which human actors (a label which includes ethnographic researchers) can know and make sense of the social world. Fundamentally, the *mobile* lived body is the zero-point in which perception is centred around and from which the life-world is constructed. This rings true for ethnographers whose primary method of knowing is characterised by experiencing and perceiving phenomena *in situ*. The body is a “spatio-temporal ‘thing’ around which is arranged a surrounding of things that reaches outwards without limits”, but whose relational limits are ultimately set, arranged, and categorised in and through distinction between direct and indirect perception (Husserl, 2006: 3). Bodies are objects-in-the-world, but equally cannot be treated as separate to ourselves; our bodies are sensory and expressive vehicles inherent to us, and in that sense are reciprocal sites of communication between social actors. They are, to quote Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1976: 5), the “visible form of our intentions” and as such the argument being made is for a non-cognitivist approach whereby meaning and intention and ‘rationality’ can be treated as visually and publicly available phenomena in and through embodied action. Harold Garfinkel has been attributed with the anti-Cartesian declaration that “there is nothing in the head but brains” (Watson and Coulter, 2008: 9) and so putting aside mind/body dualism, a radically phenomenological, non-cognitivist approach to ethnography would accept only those *visible* forms of intentions as knowable. Ethnography’s corporeal ideal of ‘being there’ helps uphold those core phenomenological principles.

To attend further to the non-cognitivist recommendations of this ethnographic approach, Ken Liberman (2007) proposed that Edmund Husserl himself (whose phenomenology is largely concerned with the mind) had been on a trajectory to realise the importance of locally situated activity, but had fallen short of developing such a research programme (Jenkins, 2009). Further, we should consider a point raised by Jack Katz and Tom Csordas (2003) in their intervention in phenomenological ethnographies across sociology and anthropology. They found, traversing both disciplines, a point of departure from philosophical phenomenology which is equally applicable to my own study: the “superior ontological status” of “collaboratively warranted facts” (p. 281). It is imperative that sociology does not get tied up in interpretative assumptions of people’s intentions. My ethnographic endeavour is careful to steer clear of this for the most part, and instead to ontologically value the shared mechanisms through which “collaboratively warranted facts” are produced. Nevertheless, a specific affordance of ethnographic description is its capacity to convey an authoritative *human* perspective, and despite being far from autoethnographic, the written accounts that are the subject of the analyses herein are indeed my own (non-argumentative) observations – heavy with descriptions of embodied, moment-by-moment sensemaking – as afforded by my being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962).

My fieldnotes are, of course, accounts like any other. They are formed in good faith from observations, and as such inevitably involve some lay interpretation (inasmuch as everyone might deal in interpretive enterprise as part of their everyday methods for producing knowledge). However, they are written in such a way that acknowledges the unfolding reality of events, and are reflexively analysed, *prima facie*, in terms of

their situated role in collaboratively warranting facts without privilege. As an example: a vignette in Chapter 5 describes a situation where someone I believed to be an ordinary dogwalker turned out to be involved in a scene of potential sexual deviance. Rather than writing from a privileged perspective in hindsight, the ethnographic description set out to capture the emergent character of the unfolding situation as I, a non-Ranger who was co-present in the field, understood it. Included in the account was a description of the disagreement with the Ranger who saw the dogwalker as someone worth 'checking up on'. To write this uncertainty and emergent sensemaking into the account is not to cast doubt over its authority, but instead to recover and retain some of the social relations that exhibit the messy, embodied, negotiated order that a human researcher has the capacity to navigate and describe in a way that a recording device might lose. To borrow from Stephen Hester and David Francis (2003: 45): "the observer is a constituent feature of visually available mundane order". It is therefore phenomenologically coherent to write myself into the accounts, especially if and when my presence becomes procedurally relevant. The activity of 'thinking', too, is a relational concept that is regularly accomplished by means of situated analyses, and so the construct that we might call 'the mind' is indeed social and can be publicly accounted for (Coulter, 1979).

So, collaborative thinking, reasoning, sensemaking, and so on, can all be treated as visually available, public, practical activities that are "happening in every meaningful moment" (Rawls, 2008: 724). Understanding 'the other' is a central dilemma for ethnographers and social researchers in general; but one that Alfred Schutz (1962: 11) (borrowing from Husserl, (1970)) acknowledges is already done (by members) all the time via a "natural attitude of common sense thinking in daily life". Understanding

other people is an ordinary trouble for members that is regularly dealt with in ordinary ways:

“...we may just take for granted that man [sic] can understand his fellow-man and his actions and that he can communicate with others because he assumes they understand his actions; also, that this mutual understanding has certain limits *but is sufficient for many practical purposes*” (Schutz, 1962: 16, my emphasis).

Hiroshi Nasu (2006: 387) paraphrases the above to remind us that the issue “is not about how the other is understood, but about how it is possible for me to take for granted that I can and do understand the other.” This, then, is the foundation for my analytical reorientation to study the social order that gets accomplished with recourse to, and as a by-product of, everyday interaction; it also goes some way to make the point that an ethnographer, as a member-in-the-field, is equally capable of drawing on those same quotidian lay-methods to make sense of and participate in unfolding social reality. To further reiterate, we can trace Katz and Csordas’ (2003: 278) claim for phenomenological anthropological ethnography, that getting at the other-experience is “characterised by an emphasis on embodiment as the common ground for recognition of the other’s humanity and the immediacy of the intersubjectivity”. This observation appreciates ethnography’s humanistic affordance; something that will be discussed from a complementary angle in the next section on member’s methods. So, coupled with a treatment of phenomena as occasioned accomplishments, ethnographic observation and description play a valuable role in laying down a humanistic, embodied approach for recovering the interactional machinery that members use to construct collaboratively warranted facts.

As a final point, perhaps the most important phenomenological imperative of this study is to take seriously the Husserlian call to go “back to the things themselves” (Husserl, in Smith, et al. 2009: 1). That is, to treat the hyperlocal, observable, radically-emergent particulars of practical action as the phenomena to be explored, rather than using empirics as a means to gain insight into broad, abstract theoretical concepts and imaginaries (or vice-versa); a commitment to examine phenomena in their own terms. To reiterate what has already been said: the “things themselves” are the visually available, reportable and locally describable courses of action – the methods – through which local order is produced. Ethnographic methods can commensurably attend to these radically local phenomena – the “things themselves” – by employing an immersive and involved investigative programme that can confidently recover their emergent orderliness as accomplished by members with no time out. At the crux of the argument is that human researchers, as members of society, possess and display the axiomatic, embodied, ‘ethno-methods’ (Silverman, 1998: 101) to co-produce locally-organised social reality, and that a process of reflexive description should be the grounds for recovering and analysing naturally-occurring interaction as *sui generis* phenomena. Ethnographic researchers cannot (and should not) be treated as distinct from or separate to the field of study, especially not when the strengths of their methodological position is inextricably tied to this embodied immersion; experiencing and accounting for the radically local order in and of the ‘plenum’ (Garfinkel, 1991).

Ethnography: A member’s method?

“Everyone is a participant observer, acquiring knowledge about the social world in the course of participating in it. And, in our view, such participant knowledge

on the part of people in a setting is an important resource for the ethnographer”
(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 98).

As mentioned, this study is primarily ethnographic. In this section, I discuss what this means in terms of the discrete example of the research study in question, and why an ethnographic approach was taken. Taking the above quote from Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson as a reminder that participation and observation are methods used by everyone in the course of their everyday lives, the ethnographic method used in this study is inspired by a want to stay true to the phenomenological groundings of everyday experience and the production of knowledge as a no-time-out accomplishment. Atkinson (2014: 35) refers to ethnography’s potential to “exploit (in the best sense) one’s full range of human capacities in order to make sense of a given social world”; and it is for this reason and “the commensurability between lay and professional ‘method’” that other Cardiff School scholars say “makes ethnography the most human of approaches to studying the social” (Smith, et al. 2020: 195).

Formally speaking, the label ‘ethnography’ encompasses a number of approaches, methodologies and practices born of multiple parallel disciplinary and institutional developments throughout the 20th Century (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). British anthropological ethnographies traditionally sought to understand far and distant cultures by means of immersion in local practices, while in the US, the Chicago School brought observational techniques to sociological studies of marginal groups in urban industrial society (Brewer, 2000). Its nonlinear history and trajectory makes it difficult to define in singularity, but ethnographic practices certainly have accountable features that allow for them to be reportable as specifically ‘ethnographic’. The ethnographer,

for the most part, intends to immerse themselves in or get close to a 'culture', group, or workplace in order to better understand it. They study people's actions and accounts in their everyday contexts – "in the field" – and use participatory or observational methods in order to do this (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3).

The *raison d'être* of a long-term ethnographic involvement with the Park Rangers was to make sense of the otherwise unfamiliar (to me) practice of Rangering *as it is made sense of by the Rangers themselves*. In traditional ethnographic reasoning, participatory ethnographic involvement can set about to make strange practices familiar by facilitating a researcher's experiential learning by 'immersion' (Wacquant, 2004). That is, by 'getting close to' the practice and experiencing it as closely as it may be experienced by practitioners in society (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011: 43). As Erving Goffman deliberated, ethnographic description of social practice and phenomena requires appropriate involvement in this immersive sense, by "subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon [them]" (Goffman, 1989: 125).

By studying things in their naturalistic settings, the ethnographer attempts to – over time – build a nuanced understanding from the field that does not rely on decontextualised interview accounts or surveys. Data is typically collected as descriptive accounts – the ethnographer's own – of what they think, witness, perceive, experience, and so on. Although these are ultimately the ethnographer's own accounts, they are informed by the so-called 'insider' accounts and actions of the subjects, and as such the litmus test for the adequacy of ethnographic description has traditionally been to represent "the native's point of view" (Geertz, 1974). From a

standpoint that takes seriously the participants' orientation, there is little requirement for external verification or assessments of validity of insider accounts because such "common-sense knowledge *is constitutive of social reality*" and therefore we should look to the emergent, autochthonous modes of orderly production of that social reality inherent within it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 97, my emphasis).

That is not to say that the content of accounts should be accepted at face value, but rather the activity of accounting can be treated as an organised activity itself worthy of sociological study. My study explores quite centrally the practical contingencies of accounting for work practice in public; accounts matter, but (and because) accounts are collaboratively accomplished. In this way inspiration is taken from Harold Garfinkel's (1967: vii) ethnomethodological respecification of Emile Durkheim's aphorism that "the objective reality of social facts is sociology's fundamental principle":

"the objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted, is, for members doing sociology, a fundamental phenomenon."

Rather than creating formal methodological frameworks and putting further distance between the researcher and the researched, an ethnographer is well positioned to report on, from a uniquely embodied and immersive standpoint, the mundane accomplishments of social facts. The appeal of participant observation is its everyday use by everyday social actors as a routine member's method, and its consequent potential treatment of the researcher as member-in-the-field. By this, I do not mean that everyone partakes in formal ethnographic exploration, but rather that the

accountably ordinary features of ethnographic method and participation comprise mundane sensemaking competences and exploratory practices that we all already routinely do. After all, everyday members – or to use specifically ethnographic language, ‘natives’ – “can be treated as enquirers into their cultural settings ... Fieldwork activities can then be treated as a set of occasioned practices whereby the investigator and his [sic] informants make sense of activities” (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982: 210). Taking the assumption, then, that knowledge is produced in the course of participating in the social world, and that such knowledge is constitutive of emergent reality in and of interaction, a specifically mundane treatment of ethnographic method as quotidian participation seeks to shelve the formal structures of academic endeavour and submit to the experience of learning, understanding, experiencing, and sensemaking as members already do in the course of their everyday life. An ethnographer (like all members) can rely confidently on the shared, interpretative, interactional, navigational affordances of the Schutzian ‘natural attitude’ to provide a *good enough* common, linguistic, human familiarity in order to get by in participation.

It is important to note that, according to Paul Atkinson (2014: 34–35), ‘participation’ – in a specifically ethnographic sense – “does not depend on the adoption of that way of life” and that “to equate ethnographic participation with such role-adoption is, at root, to trivialise it”. This trivialisation is brought to the fore in the common treatment of ‘participant observation’ methods as an oxymoronic misnomer which may be represented on an ‘immersive’ scale which positions ethnographic studies as either more ‘participatory’ or more ‘observational’. If we are to accept fieldwork activities as a set of occasioned practices, both the normative definitions of ‘participation’ and ‘observation’ become unhelpful. Following Atkinson, it is largely a fallacy, particularly

in ethnographies of everyday life, to suggest that practical participation equates to somehow *becoming* a member category-bound to the everyday work that is being researched. Of course, this notion would hinge on a rigid and fixed categorial definition of who such a member is and also relies on a superficial and performative conceptualisation of action as role-adoption. Furthermore it provides undue attention at the individual level. Individuals are not the concern here; interactional accomplishments are.

To offer an example: much of my own fieldwork involved the practical action of walking with the Park Rangers while they were out on patrol. They were patrolling; I was walking. That they were recognisably patrolling was accomplishable by virtue of their specific category-boundness to the space in terms of their work role requirements. Patrolling is accountable as a Rangers' work practice. Despite the participatory practical action of walking-along with Rangers who were on patrol being practically indistinguishable to a potential observer, my walking-along did not mean that I was 'Rangering' or that I was now a Ranger. Crucially, from my fundamentally, mundanely participatory, position engaged in the embodied action of walking-along (but without actually adopting the role of Park Ranger), the Rangers' pedestrian practice is still made available to me as being a patrol.

Harold Garfinkel's strong conceptualisation of the 'unique adequacy requirement of methods' (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992) disagrees with the above inasmuch as his belief was in the requirement for specialised training in a trade "in order to study from the inside how their practitioners created their particular version of a social 'order'" (ten Have, 2005: 48). While this may demonstrate a particular notion of ideal practice, Paul

ten Have (2005) points to specific advantages of ethnographic practice as alternatives to this hard-line approach. He uses Wieder's (1974) 'Telling the Convict Code' as an example of a study whereby the ethnographic researcher strategically positions themselves as 'the stranger' or 'the novice' (see Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979), suspending their 'natural attitude' and necessitating instruction and explication by everyday members in that setting to instead see/account for social reality through *their* 'natural attitude'. Another arguably linked strategy is to simply ethnographically observe situated, naturally-occurring activities and discuss them with the practitioners "in order to study the competences involved in the routine performance of these activities" (p. 37). In different ways and at different times, I have deployed these two strategies in the course of fieldwork.

As Garfinkel (2002: 175) argues, "a phenomenon of order is only available in the lived in-courseness of its local production and natural accountability." This is the imperative, and it is arguably one that an ethnographer can get at without becoming a practitioner themselves. To follow Gerald de Montigny's interpretation of unique adequacy, ethnographic immersion and long-term repetition – the building of an adequate ethnographic knowledge – means in some ways the ethnographer can "rely on their own intimate knowledge as members to unfold the artful accomplishment of local practice and local orders (de Montigny, 2014: 352). Equally, however, Lena Jayyusi (1991: 241) understands that the analyst's job at the point of description is to "uncover fully members' own practices and relevances ... rather than substituting one's own". In this way, I am not writing about my experiences of 'doing being a Ranger' (something I cannot truthfully claim to have done), but rather I am using my own vulgar competences as a member learning from and being informed by the Rangers as they

instruct on, demonstrate, and display the orderliness of their daily round. Ethnographic description can do what it traditionally does – set the scene and provide a rich, immersive account of ‘being there’ – while also being focused on emergent social interaction as an ongoing accomplishment. In analysing ethnographic accounts *prima facie* they can be considered ‘good enough’ descriptions of emergent local order that reflexively account for the situated lay-understandings gleaned from being constitutively present. These different affordances, while having different analytical objectives, can be commensurate in building a study that can uncover members’ relevancies while acknowledging the phenomenological strengths of ethnographic participation.

It is proposed herein, then, that ethnographic methods, by virtue of their situated character and global recognisability as comprising familiar, routine, mundane features and lay-methods that everyone can do – and importantly, everyone *already does* – can provide the vehicle to appropriately and legitimately report on social facts as ongoing, ordinary accomplishments of daily activities as they are known to everyday members of society. Equally, my long-term physical co-presence with the Park Rangers on shift; my practice of recording observations as field notes; and the treatment of said field notes as interpretative representations of naturally-occurring phenomena are all accountably ethnographic features from which a radically local study of everyday social order can be built. Ethnographic participation and ‘immersion’, then, should not be conflated with ‘becoming’ a Ranger or doing Ranging (see Desmond, 2006). Even sharing in the practical labour of ‘doing’ some of the routine practices that comprise the orderly phenomenon of Ranging may not necessarily be required to “locate and examine the concerted vulgar uniquely adequate competencies

of order production” (Garfinkel, 2002: 176). Phenomenological ontology cannot lay claim to knowing what it is to be a member; only to see *how* things are done. In what follows, the discussion will make the case systematically for such aspects of ethnographic methods being ideal for, and commensurate with such a study of the phenomena of order.

Finding the phenomena

Ideally, by following Husserl in going “back to the things themselves” the ethnographer would allow social phenomena to emerge empirically from observation. Indeed, the observed objects being described should not be understood as things that may be *something like* sociological phenomena, or empirical symbols pertaining to or validating some abstract sociological concept, but rather the naturally-occurring objects of these observations *are* the sociological phenomena. That is what is being proposed here. Whatever “foreshadowed problems” (Malinowski, 1922: 9) informed by prior theoretical studies must be acknowledged, but should not be directive of the study. Garfinkel (2002: 171) warned on not deciding “in advance what the phenomenon consists of on the basis of prior formal analytic studies” and this advice is heeded. Thankfully, ethnography is well armed to deal with such intrusions of deductive reasoning and theory testing, owing to its actively exploratory character and long-term immersive design.

The ethnographic process provided scope to challenge and funnel these ideas and allow others to be brought to the fore in the field. In this way the formal analytic character of sociological thinking, through which trained sociologists are arguably conditioned, is something that may be reflexively ‘unlearned’. The original prospective

sociological phenomena – broad dichotomous ideas about nature and urbanity, mobility and immobility, maintenance and decay – from which I built initial research leads, were sometimes backgrounded by observational data. Long-term fieldwork with the Park Rangers replaced the theories and dichotomies with the ordinary accomplishments of the quotidian practices that formed their daily round. The study thus draws on the practical issues the Rangers faced by demonstrating their orientation to categories as a cultural resource in the course of dealing with those issues. The phenomena for sociological analysis are the radically local methods, orientations, devices, and cultural resources occasioned in interaction, and they are only knowable and observable *in vivo*, in the field. As Harvey Sacks (1995: 664) argued:

“...starting a consideration and developing points on it does not require a hypothesis. It just involves sitting down at some point and making a bunch of observations, and seeing where they’ll go. The things in the world that are going to count theoretically ... will not necessarily come with labels on them.”

As such, phenomena are observable in the field, not theoretical study. Shelving theoretical study is not easy for formally-trained sociologists, however, and the previous confession regarding my own preconceived ideas is confirmation of the impossibility of ethnographic ‘*tabula rasa*’. An ethnographer can be open-minded, and the affordances of ethnographic research design can serve to challenge preconceived ideas, but purely inductive reasoning in research is unattainable. Atkinson (2017: 3) insists that ethnographic analysis must be ‘abductive’; he issues an unapologetic justification for informing fieldwork with generic but “useful and productive ideas”. This

can be read as contrary (albeit not dissimilar in reasoning) to my own championing of members' methods.

A formally-sociologically-informed member perhaps cannot help 'thinking like a sociologist', nor would they want to if they are convinced of the potential of the formal sociological programme. While I am not in the business of making the case for formal sociology, Atkinson's argument holds weight, especially when social analysis and theorising are not exclusively the domain of formal sociology. As previously mentioned, ideas and thinking are also, obviously, things that people do in the course of their lives. Indeed, it should be mentioned, too, that Atkinson is not here championing theory as "some grandiose, impenetrable rhetoric that derives from elsewhere (often Paris)" (p.2) and is instead arguing similarly for the generic thinking that we use to make sense of order and structure and interaction, and so forth. In this way, even ethnomethodologically-oriented methodological reasoning cannot suspend formal thinking: we still require a coherent, working understanding about what 'members' and 'categories' and 'settings' and 'practical action' are, for example. Even though membership categorisation analysis (discussed below) is a members' method, its necessarily formalised design as a description of members' own situated methods, is itself a professional sociological method. Such tautological discussion is perhaps ultimately unhelpful, but it hopefully goes some way to make the case for a working commensurability between sociology and ethnomethodologically-inspired analyses.

To return the discussion to preconceived ideas and fieldwork, Garfinkel thought it necessary to "*stop* formulating the questions and problems they will be concerned with before entering the research site" as they can "*only formulate* questions as good as

their theories” which will itself hinder the discovery of members’ “actual conditions of work” (Rawls, 2008: 725). This is why ethnomethodologically-oriented studies focus on members’ own methods for rendering the setting mutually intelligible, as opposed to imputing theory onto the observations. Harvey Sacks had a practical solution for dealing with the inevitability of academic curiosity short of fully suspending it. Potentially-relevant theoretical concepts cognised by the sociologist pre-fieldwork, such as those ‘broad dichotomous ideas’ I mentioned above with regard to my own work can be ratified by its relevance to members in the field. Sacks’ gloss for finding perspicuous settings acknowledges this and provides an answer to the sociological analyst. The gloss seeks not to hypothesis-test but rather to reconfigure such sociological concerns as practical concerns by finding members for whom such concepts are categorially organised and realised in and through their everyday action. In Sacks’ own practice as an analyst, he resorted to the following logic in order to answer his theoretical concern about categories of objects he referred to as ‘possessables’ and ‘possessitives’:

“I want to *find* a work group, somewhere perhaps in Los Angeles, who, as *their day’s work*, and because they know it as their day’s work, will be able to teach me what *I* could be talking about as *they* know it as the day’s work.” (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992: 185, their emphasis; Garfinkel, 2002: 181–182).

This gloss equally provides a logic for the ethnographer’s issue of finding the field. In order to find the phenomena, which may indeed be actionable and observable in the field, we must first find a discrete setting in which that phenomenon may be actioned or oriented to, by members, as naturally-occurring and locally-organised accomplishments in the course of a quotidian round. The Park Rangers are that work group who, as their day’s work, and because they know it as their day’s work, were

able to teach me what I could be talking about as they know it as their day's work. To reiterate, however, the attempt is not to topicalise or thematise the phenomena as experienced by the Rangers as 'meaningful', but rather to respecify and examine them as orderly, locally-produced locally-accountable and locally-describable phenomena.

Respecifying topics and resources

Qualitative social science research, at its most fundamental, involves inquiry into phenomena in a more or less systematic way. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2018: 43) bravely attempt to summarise it in the introduction to their SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

Generally speaking, Denzin and Lincoln's summary is essentially correct inasmuch as their admittedly broad-brush description of basic interpretivist logic should be recognisable to most qualitative social researchers. That being said, in this study it is proposed that interpretation be cautiously approached and not inexorably justified. The

locus of interpretation herein is not so much analytical as it is in an interest in members' radically emergent interpretative procedures and how they might be observable as unfolding in everyday encounters. As such I am not interested in 'interpreting' what Rangers do and why they do it, but rather describing their own publicly available interpretative methods. Epistemologically speaking, interpretivism is not a label I would accept or place on this study, but certainly interpretation features centrally as an ongoing membership activity. As previously mentioned, the ethnographer can and does tap into and share in the joint interpretive enterprise as a constituent feature of a setting, but an attempt is made to suspend formal analytical interpretation and distinguish it from the *in vivo* lay-interpretations available in the participants' orientations (which includes, in situated configuration, the ethnographer as member).

A further disagreement is specifically with the idea that our research practices are understood to "transform the world" in a way that makes it identifiable through interpretive representations or 'topics' of inquiry. While this may exemplify methodological reflexivity, it is ontologically disingenuous to suggest that transforming the world into representations may be part of a necessary *academic* practice to make sense of phenomena. With full respect for interpretive sociology, the practice of transforming the world into representations is perhaps something already being done by every conscious social actor in the run of their everyday lives. Indeed we can appreciate the reminder that "everyone is a participant observer, acquiring knowledge about the social world in the course of participating in it" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 98).

Zimmerman and Pollner (1973: 81) nicely illustrate this point in the following example of the divergence and similarities between professional and lay sociologists:

“While the sociologist and the policeman may entertain very different theories of how a person comes to be a juvenile delinquent, and while each may appeal to disparate criteria and evidence for support of their respective versions, they have no trouble in agreeing that there are persons recognisable as juvenile delinquents and that there are structured ways in which these persons come to be juvenile delinquents. It is in this agreement – agreement as to the fundamental and ordered existence of phenomenon independent of its having been addressed by *some* method of inquiry – that professional and lay sociologists are mutually oriented to a common factual domain.”

They argue that this common orientation further “indicates sociology’s profound embeddedness in and dependence upon the world of everyday life” (p. 81) and therefore recommend suspending conventional sociological constructions of sociologically-relevant topics in which members’ own practical investigations into the social world and its emergent reality may be used as resources to learn more about those predetermined topics, and instead look at members’ practical investigations as topics for enquiry. Rather than using members’ practices as resourceful tools for sociology to learn about predetermined sociological topics, to borrow from Robert Dingwall (1981: 134), “the ethnomethodological ethnographer starts from the question of how the participants in some event find its character and sustain it, or fail to, as a joint activity”. The topic, then, is the ordinary, artful method that members themselves use to accomplish the ‘just-thisness’ (or as Garfinkel, 1991 calls it, ‘haeccity’) of the lived social order.

As such, in the context of this study, the Park Rangers are “treated as enquirers into their own cultural setting” (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982: 120) and their own practical handling of everyday troubles are studied as constitutively co-accomplishing social order. This is the *topic* of study, and not simply a resource to learn about what those troubles are. It should be noted that this is not a novel position in ethnographic method; Paul Atkinson (2017: 41) provides in his manifesto for ‘granular ethnography’ a position for ethnographic analysis as “not aimed simply at demonstrating *that* realities are socially produced, but ... on *how* that is accomplished.” It is proposed, then, that members’ knowledge is treated as “an explicit topic for analysis” instead of “an implicit resource” (ten Have, 2007: 1). Garfinkel and Sacks (1986: 161–162) realised and specified this reorientation in their call to look to the “situated particulars of speech” and to subsequently treat “glossing practices” as a topic in its own right, rather than just a resource for conceptual topics. That being said, however: the conceptual topics of traditional, formal sociological analysis (e.g. gender, race, class, etc.) may still indeed be deployed as procedurally-relevant orderly resources for these members in their no-time-out sense-making in the course of everyday life.

Furthermore, to return to Denzin and Lincoln: that we “interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” is another red herring that in many cases raises more analytical problems than it solves. This imputes the fallacy that meaning is the driving force behind phenomena, to the point where interpretive sociology can fall into reifying meaning, risking equating ‘finding the phenomena’ to ‘finding the meaning’. In the following section, ‘meaning’ – as a sociological concept – is placed under the microscope and the continued argument for the proposed analytical respecification is

made in particular reference to the exclusive treatment of ‘meaning’ as a publicly available, collaboratively produced, members’ phenomenon.

Studying meaningful action and the participant’s orientation

Max Weber’s (1978) conceptualisation of “meaningful action” – that is, the idea that the focus of interpretive sociology is on subjective meaning in and of human behaviour – is a useful departure point for respecification across two points. Firstly, and most importantly, the concept of meaningful action assumes that human behaviour and action is rational, externally coherent, and representational. Meaningful action suggests behaviour of a specifically rational actor who can and does account for the *a priori* meaning of their actions. People invariably do not do ‘meaningful action’ in the run of their everyday lives; but they *do* produce lived order as a by-product of everyday practical action, and *how* that is done should be the subject of analysis. ‘Meaning’ is something that a formal analyst may give to lived action, or something that may be applied by social actors to their own actions post-hoc. Such application would be the implementation of a non-indigenous taxonomy; the imputation of meaning where it may not be found in real-time. Imposing an interpretative framework of meaning as opposed to analysing the local production of meaning by members may result in a “misrepresentation of that action and the order it is producing, via an extant meaning it has for social theory instead; and thus ‘ironicising’ members’ actions” (Jenkins, 2018: 40).

Of course, it is equally not to say that social actors may not have prior intentions or goal-orientations for the direction of their actions, but the idea that there is a conceptual thing called ‘meaningful action’ that, in the course of their everyday lives, people will

employ selectively and consciously in terms of their 'natural attitude' is a fallacy. As Merleau-Ponty (1962: 180) claimed: "The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his [sic] speech is his thought". Therefore, these potential intentions, should they exist as cognitive constructs, cannot be known phenomenologically or experientially, and it is not the business or ontological remit of this study to make assumptions as to the intentions of actions should they not be made explicit and be accomplished as procedurally-relevant in members' visually and publicly available categorisation practices. It would be an artificial distinction that is made between 'meaningful action' and meaningless/sociologically irrelevant behaviour, and it would have implications on the value and treatment of such actions in analyses. Such treatment of members as 'cultural dopes' ("the man-in-the-sociologist's-society" who acts in compliance with pre-established cultural rules (Garfinkel, 1967: 68)) does them an injustice but also rigidly and arguably erroneously treats "cultures as whole frameworks of meaning which lie behind and are expressed in activities" (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982: 120). Although Weber does warn against drawing a "sharp dividing line ... between meaningful action and ... 'purely reactive' behaviour" (1978: 7) an analysis held true to the participant's orientation would seek instead to "discover how intelligible patterns of behaviour *are actually being constructed and recognised on the spot*" (Rawls, 2002: 30).

So, the respecification being put forward in this thesis is a non-cognitivist approach in which the analyst must refrain from imposing theoretical, non-taxonomic notions of 'meaning' on the emergent data. Garfinkel (1996: 8) reminds us that "enacted local practices are not texts which symbolise 'meanings' or events. ... They are studied in their unmediated details not as signed enterprises." As an aside: in an

ethnomethodologically-informed study the ethnographer faces an issue of incommensurability here, as fieldnotes are traditionally understood as textual, semiotic representations of events, but this will be discussed in a later section. For now, in dealing non-cognitively with the sociological interest in ‘meaning’, we might consider ‘meaning’ to be a member’s phenomenon that *may be* witnessably recognisable as contingent on interaction at the local level. As Crabtree et al. (2000: 670–671) put it: “social practice *qua* practice in real time cannot be discovered through such rational practices of the imagination”. Therefore, recovering the phenomenon of local order does not require the pursuit of such cognitive constructs that are invariably not constitutive of “the things themselves”.

‘Meaning’ should not form the basis of analysis, nor should it be treated as distinct *unless* it is recognisable as an occasioned resource that is procedurally relevant in data that can display its methodical, emergent production (see Liberman, 2009). Emphasis, then, (*if* ‘meaning’ was to be occasioned and operationalised by members in the field) may be on “the ways in which meaning is produced, recognised, and transformed during an interaction” as opposed to *what* those interpretations are and whether they are indeed meaningful (Dennis, 2011: 351). Meaning and interpretive procedures may be ‘seeable’ through activity-relevant categories and their related activities. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, the discovery of needles and condoms is treated, by the Rangers, as inference-rich material for a whole realm of interrelated categorial productions of people, activity, and space, which serve as practical issues for their work. These needles and condoms are made available as work objects requiring immediate remedial action as they become health and safety concerns. They also form a constitutive part of a local assemblage which produces the

place which they were discovered as an antisocial behaviour 'hotspot' which now requires further monitoring. The 'meaning' of the needles and condoms is thus relationally configured and organised in terms of the practical vicissitudes their discovery created for the Park Rangers' work activities and schedule.

The rules through which meaning is organised are produced as common-sense constructions inexorably tied to "*the variety of objects, events, and occasions relative to which they are invoked*" (Bittner, 1965: 248). The potential relevance, then, for 'meaning' in sociological analyses should be only as an accountable phenomenon for members themselves; doing 'meaningful' action is an accountable practice, and it does not need to be imputed by analysts. Meaning cannot be conjured up as a maxim to prop up sociological frameworks, but may be knowable through and contingent on the categories incumbent in, and as they play out, for members in interaction. Interpretive sociology may excessively commit to 'meaning' as phenomena, but the proposed ethnomethodological respecification intends to move away from this: the phenomena in question here are member's methods for doing, organising, and recognising social order, and whether or not meaning plays a part in it, it must be available and observable to, and accomplished by, members.

This leads to the second part of the problematisation of meaning, which is related to the first but involves a direct intervention in interpretivist sociology's tendency to construct distinctly sociologically meaningful knowledge, i.e. academic, professional 'sociological issues' that are topicalised and presented as part of a broader disciplinary corpus. Formal sociological analysis is in danger of constructing frameworks of sociologically meaningful knowledge (theories) based on "hypotheticalised,

proposedly typicalised versions of the world” (Sacks, 1984: 25). The consequence of this practice, Sacks says, is that these shared imaginations rely on what can be accepted as reasonable by professional sociologists. My concern is that theorising and abstracting and hypotheticalising within the bounds of formal frameworks can create a feedback loop in which the phenomenological ‘things themselves’ are lost to the established theoretical structures of sociological hegemon. This is the issue of treating observations in terms of what is sociologically meaningful. And so, dealing only in empirical data – observational accounts of actual occurrences (rather than hypotheticals) – is one way to begin to tackle this. By returning to Sacks’ own methodological recommendation to “use close looking at the world [in order to] find things that we could not, by imagination, assert were there” (Sacks, 1984: 25) sociology may position itself as an informative science with grounding in the descriptive detail of actual occurrences. While it should be noted that he favoured transcripts, ethnographic materials afford similar ‘close looking’ and can also display emergent local order, as can participant observation lend itself to a multimodal, embodied closeness that other forms of field work or exploration may struggle to retain.

Participants’ orientations: Talk versus voice

There is more to be said on how an ethnographic research design may shape what is ‘meaningful’, and that will be further explored shortly. However, having introduced the ‘participant’s orientation’ in the previous section, this will now be clarified and situated in broader ethnographic debates. At this point it is important to distinguish between a participant’s orientation and a participant’s perspective. Anthropological ethnographies have historically expressed the relevance of learning from and

representing native perspectives on matters (Geertz, 1974; 1977), Chicago School ethnographies were equally designed and conducted to 'give voice' to otherwise ignored populations (Katz and Csordas, 2003: 280). In practical terms this involved representing participants' *voices* as the leading authority in the field, championing their own perspectives. In this respect, *voice* is political; most people have a voice (in the way of a physical mode of communicating vocally), but not all voices are heard or valued, and herein lies the reason for redistributive, targeted-sample activist research. On the face of it this would sound like good ethical practice as well as a defence of the ethnological contribution of informed experiential knowledge free from the networks of power of professional, academic, and discipline-specific knowledge structures. In certain contexts, challenging these hierarchies in such a direct way is innovative and necessary. It is still a common trope in movements to decolonise academia to value the word – the *voice* – of participants and use this to form the basis of a new researcher-participant relationship that allows participants to lead in sympathetic, collaborative representation. This form of activist research is, of course, an admirable and often useful practice when dealing in offsetting the traditional hierarchical relationships in research involving marginalised communities or sensitive subjects.

Nevertheless, an issue with representing and reifying *voices* is that, in some way and in some circumstances, this may constitute an active omission of the interactional contexts whose neglect could construct an artificial representation of the subject. By this I mean that intervening in and rearranging the situated order (through which certain perspectives gain prominence over others) by means of decontextualizing and choosing whose voice and whose accounts to privilege could potentially construct a representation that loses its illustrative affordances in showing up the implicit and

situated power dynamic. This is where implementation of ethnographic research methods and analyses that specifically orient to participants' own orientations can work to keep these interactional power dynamics whole. The politics of Rangering is not so sensitive as to require an external intervention and amplification by a researcher. The political character of my own study is in the description of the things themselves, as they are produced there and then, and subsequent analyses that "let the materials fall as they may" (Sacks, 1995: 11). While I am interested in 'shifting the lens' onto this group and their routine activities and practices, the Rangers are not voiceless or suppressed and do not depend on my intervention. This is not said to delegitimise Rangers' routine experiences (which are steeped in a different kind of interactional politics and the broader political pressures of cuts to local government funding), but it is not comparative to the racialised politics conveyed in the observations in, say, Elliot Liebow's 'Tally's Corner' (1967) or Elijah Anderson's 'Code of the Street' (1999). Rangers are not *voiceless* – and the Rangers would equally see this as an exaggeration if described as such – but their everyday experiences, despite being public, are invisible in a different kind of way. Taking at face value Rangers' own description of the work they do would be largely unhelpful. It would make redundant the need for ethnographic observations in the first place, and indeed allow insights to be influenced and filtered by 'professional spokespeople' and 'public relations agents' (Katz and Csordas, 2003: 280). This is, of course, not to say that Rangers do not require or deserve representation, but rather that in order to do justice to the daily trudge of Rangering, there are more appropriate methods of representation.

An answer to this is to propose a multimodal approach of inquiry that considers interaction in its own right, taking interactional practices and accomplishments as the

members' methods through which local order is produced, as the topic of inquiry. In this way, the *content* of informants' accounts is less important than their *methods* for producing and accomplishing those accounts. The ethnomethodologically-informed ethnographer thus treats the informants as inquirers, too; an attitude that vacates the need for external judgment or evaluation. This means that there is little concern for them to fall into the trap of holding unsympathetic, suspicious, or unduly critical opinions of potential informants, as might be said of Jerolmack and Khan's (2014) conceptualisation of the 'attitudinal fallacy'. The attitudinal fallacy, broadly, is the idea that there is a difference between what people say and what they actually do, and therefore taking self-reported narratives at face value is not good academic practice. They argue that ethnography may be best situated to get around this issue as it can "analyse how unconscious cognitive and behavioural dispositions may shape behaviour" (Jerolmack and Khan, 2014: 19). A point of contention here, if remaining true to the 'things themselves', is the impossibility of 'knowing' the inner cognitive workings of social actors, and the assumption of the very existence of an 'unconscious' realm (and whether this construction is at all useful for sociological analyses). Jerolmack and Khan's treatment of 'talk' is perhaps conflated with 'voice' inasmuch as it critiques verbal accounts as a weaker form of data than direct observation of action, without considering that the methods of accounting available in 'talk' may be worthwhile phenomena for analysis of social order. I agree in principle with scepticism of the reification of participants' *voice* (as discussed above) as data, but do not extend this cynicism to 'talk' as the everyday mode of communication and organisation of categories by and between members. One of the truisms that drives their argument, "Actions speak louder than words" (p. 2) does not recognise that talk *is* action and that

studying talk can be a good way of studying social order, as such conversational organisation is constitutive of local order.

This means that, although 'quote-driven' (as specifically distinct from 'context-driven') ethnographies are perhaps a fallacy in themselves (in the sense that decontextualised quote-driven data can arguably no longer be considered ethnographically situated), there *is* analytical value to talk-in-interaction inasmuch as empirical, naturally occurring talk can demonstrate how social action is organised and made sense of (see Sacks, 1995; Psathas, 1995). In treating talk as an observably mundane member's method of social organisation, analytic meaning is contingent on the ways in which categories are used in interaction, rather than inherent in the information shared. In this way, analysis can move beyond the trivial judgment as to whether participants' voices should be accepted as legitimate or trustworthy or not. It should not be the requirement of the researcher to assess the intrinsic validity or truthfulness of information conveyed by participants. By respecifying the focus of enquiry onto *how* things can be known and observed, the methods being employed herein are not so much formal analytic methods, but those informed by ethno-methods regularly employed by everyday members. This includes naturally occurring talk, and accounts, and other such modes of communication. The information communicated in interaction is not the subject of enquiry; instead, the ways in which social organisation is demonstrated through the interaction is. So, while there is no inherent analytic concern with inaccuracies in the content of what participants may say, a potential lie would become procedurally relevant if such accounts were to be collaboratively accomplished as a lie, by members, in interaction. In other words, analytic interest in such a case, for example, would be on how untruth is presented as a method in interaction, and what categorial

resources are drawn on by co-participants in order to deal with or challenge recognisably deceitful communication.

Membership categorisation: Category work-in-action

Much has been said above about the analytical respecification towards members' own practices as constitutive of visually observable order. I have so far attended to this respecification in terms of how it may be commensurate as an affordance of the design features of ethnographic fieldwork. In this section I wish to continue the argument about the analytical import of talk, and begin to properly introduce how local order can be recovered through analysis of participant's orientations to categories incumbent in talk-in-interaction.

Membership categorisation originates in the work of Harvey Sacks and his "concern with how everyday members of ordinary society, as competent members of a linguistic community, use categorisation in everyday life" (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015: 3). Categories (descriptive references to people, objects, places, etc.) are used by members "in such a way as to form co-membership with other categories in an organisational and situational relevant 'device'" (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015: 8). As such, Sacks was not just concerned with the mere fact of people using categories, but more so to show that "there [are] *procedures* that Members have for selecting categories" (Sacks, 1995: 41–42, my emphasis). He proposed building "an apparatus which will provide for how it is that any activities, which members do in such a way as to be recognisable as such to members, are done, and done recognisably" (Sacks, 1974: 218). Membership categorisation is, then, a series of practices through which members organise their activities and render them visible *in situ*. Furthermore, the

sociological importance of studying category use or category work-in-action is that these practices are demonstrable of the ongoing, routine, collaboratively organised assemblage of observable categorial order (Smith, 2022).

My analyses herein are focused largely on recovering the category work-in-action that constitutes mundane public park interactions. Indeed, one of my analytic aims is to show how 'context' can be constituted as a by-product of mundane hyper-local category work in everyday activities. To do so, I follow the seminal work of Harvey Sacks as well as the ethnomethodologically oriented approach of membership categorisation analysis (MCA) as coined and developed by Stephen Hester and Peter Eglin (1997), and further advanced by Hester's fellow contemporaries of the Bangor School of Ethnomethodology, including William Housley and Richard Fitzgerald (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2009; Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015; Housley, 2021a; Housley, 2021b). Membership categorisation analysis (MCA) builds on the foundations set by Harvey Sacks' aforementioned work on membership categorisation practices and devices, and was first developed by Hester and Eglin to discuss the category practices that comprise 'culture-in-action' as an ordinary, 'common-sense' accomplishment (Hester and Eglin, 1997; Housley, 2021b). They proposed the study of these practices as *accomplishments*, arguing for a firmly ethnomethodological treatment of Sacks' original ideas in which attention is directed to the "locally used, invoked and organised 'presumed common-sense knowledge of social structures' which members are oriented to in the conduct of their everyday affairs" (Hester and Eglin, 1997: 3).

Hester and Eglin's MCA, developed to critically engage with practices of 'culture-in-action', takes seriously the idea that 'culture' does not (pre-)exist as a 'machinery' or resource. In other words, 'culture' is not an appropriate explanation for an action; rather, the orderliness of cultural resources is constituted in their use, and therefore culture can only exist in action (Hester and Eglin, 1997: 20). In terms of the current study, this approach provides for a useful re-orientation to practical action as radically generative of park space. It is not simply the case that members 'do' park activities because they are in a park. Instead, the things that people do in parks is constitutive of the park itself. This works beyond the 'obvious' park activities like picnicking, dog-walking, jogging, and so on. The relational configurations of mundane interactions between Park Rangers and park users constitute, in part, the park 'gestalt' through which the social/visual/moral/textual/interactional orders of the park can be commonsensically and unproblematically realised. An example of this is in common-sense, taken-for-granted treatment of Rangers as public custodians: figures who can be approached and questioned by members of the public, and the same relational configuration, or categorisation device, which displays a park user as a legitimate auditor of Rangers' maintenance practices in the first instance. The intelligibility of these categories as 'naturally' organisable into collections and relational assemblages in turn renders the collection itself intelligible and instructive for the visual order of the park as a managed public space (Francis and Hester, 2017).

To return to the seminal work, Sacks' famous explication of the textual recognisability of common-sense collections and relations of categories is a two-sentence story told by a child:

"The baby cried. The mommy picked it up" (Sacks, 1995: 236).

In this short story it is unproblematically heard that the mother of the baby picked said baby up *because* it cried. This can be understood despite there being no context or elaboration. There is little confusion as to whose mother picked up which baby, or whether the person picking the baby up just happened to be a mother (to someone else), or what the intentions of such an action were (and what the ‘picking up’ was a response to). Sacks (1995: 237) explains:

“We hear that it’s the mommy of the baby because she’s the one who ought to pick it up, and if she’s the one who ought to pick it up and it was picked up by somebody who could be her, then it’s her.”

The reason we hear this unproblematically is because the aforementioned organisational apparatus can be built between the categories of ‘baby’ and ‘mommy’: a ‘standardised relational pair’ (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015: 8). This machinery for the ‘seeing’ of visually available order provides a recognisable category device – in this case ‘family relations’ – and category-bound activities (babies are known to cry; mommies are known to pick crying babies up) that allow for such a story or scene to be understood, *in the first instance*, as mundanely ‘normal’. The first instance formulation of the scene is routinely congruent because the category relevancies between the incumbents and their actions are mutually intelligible.

For this to be the case, nonargumentative rules of application inform and organise members’ perceptions of what happened. The “economy rule” as a “reference satisfactoriness rule” stipulates that the categorisation of ‘baby’ and ‘mommy’ is enough to satisfy the situated criteria for practical reasoning (Sacks, 1995: 246). No extra information about the baby or the mommy is required for the practical purposes of the story. Next, the “consistency rule” – a “relevance” rule – proposes that the

categorisation of a first person can instruct the categorisation of further people by reference to the collection or device that it is part of. 'Baby' may be nonargumentatively paired with 'mommy' or 'daddy' or other familial categories. Incongruence may occur if the consistency rule is flouted, for example: 'The baby cried. The astronaut picked it up.' Of course the baby's mother could very well be an astronaut by profession, but her categorisation as such would be quite unnecessary for the practical purposes of the story (the economy rule) and would also flag up questions regarding its relevance, as 'astronaut' does not fit consistently in a device with 'baby' (pp. 246–247). Further, the "hearer's maxim"⁴ clarifies that the consistency of two categories can clear up ambiguities by being "combinably referential"; the devices are "duplicatively organised" (p. 247). In other words, the reference to 'mommy' and 'baby' in this story does not just account for the two people being from the same family, but also that the reference to 'baby' in this context infers age or stage of life, and further configurations suggest dependence.

Sacks' concept of membership categorisation devices is of course a useful one to begin to recover orders of action and demonstrate the relational configurations built into activities. Nevertheless, the textual affordances of the seminal concepts are somewhat rigid and static; navigating the availability of common-sense structures with recourse to maxims and rules of application risks decontextualising the procedure and building an analytical model on *a priori* structures. This could be a problem for analyses that seek to recover the radically emergent character of the public park context. Hester and Eglin (1997: 26) warn against 'filling in' contextual details around categories,

⁴ The hearer's maxim is: "If two or more categories are used to categorise two or more Members to some population, and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection, hear them that way" (Sacks, 1995: 247).

arguing that categorisations and their contexts cannot be viewed separately from each other: they are mutually elaborative. Of course it may be argued that ethnographic description is in the business of 'filling in' those contextual details, however as will be discussed in the next section and beyond, the *prima facie* treatment of fieldnote data can maintain their usefulness as 'good enough' records of category work-in-action. For now, however, as Robin Smith (2022) argues: Hester and Eglin's 'radically local' re-orientation to categorisation practices reconsiders the 'tool-like' idea of rules of application, and looks at them with an ethnomethodological sensibility that sees members 'improvise', produce, and recognise said cultural rules 'each next first time'. "Membership categorisation devices are *assembled objects*" and furthermore, they are assembled *in situ* (Hester and Eglin, 1997: 20). In maintaining this analytic orientation to radically local practices, MCA provides the scope to be able to develop analyses of categories-in-context that remain suitable to the emergent production of the assembled reality of the park.

Advances in MCA have seen some attempt to incorporate sequentiality into categorisation analyses. Rod Watson (1997: 69) discussed the "intricate and inextricable interweaving" between categorial and sequential orders in what he originally called 'turn-generated categories', and has more recently called 'turn-produced, turn-distributed categories' (Watson, 2015: 33). Watson (1997: 54) noted:

"Interlocutors' sensible production and monitoring of an utterance and of a series of utterances is both categorial and sequential. Interlocutors' conjoint orientation to categorial relevances informs their orientation to the 'structure' of utterance and series which in turn inform the categorial relevances."

In this way Watson argued that paying attention to the affordances and significances of both sequential and categorial orders is not only relevant to analyses, but also something that informs the moment-by-moment activities of co-engaged members. This is the case inasmuch as the recipient design of conversational features are categorially sensitive, and category relevancies can become available by way of their emergence and production in series of ongoing talk. Lorenza Mondada (2021) explored similar notions of categorial and sequential synthesis more recently in cases of people walking together. She noted how the activity of walking together is a sequential interactional phenomenon that is categorially accountable, such as when members organise themselves into practically oriented 'leader-follower' configurations.

To situate the tenets of MCA in the context of the Park Rangers study, similarities can first be drawn to Egon Bittner's (1967) classic study of 'The Police on Skid-Row'. Although not directly referred to, Bittner describes (through ethnographic practices) the operationalisation of certain categorisation devices contingent on (and informing) the organisational practices of street-level policing in the Skid Row neighbourhood. The patrolmen's categorisation of people and place under the device of normalised criminality reciprocally renders the neighbourhood and people category-bound to Skid Row as not 'normal', therefore requiring ad hoc decision-making practices in order to appropriately keep the peace in place of normal policing strategies. The local knowledge bound up in and made relevant through the mutual category work between patrolmen and residents alike has far-reaching implications for everyday police work and what may be considered enforceable crimes. Similarly, then, the Park Rangers study describes and analyses the local organisation of membership categories as they

are made operationally relevant in talk-in-interaction. Analysis of this kind seeks to build the apparatuses and the modes of engagement through which categorial relevancies are invoked and local order is contingent on. A lot can be said of the parks and their situated interlocutors by looking into members' categorisation practices in the course of naturally occurring conversation and communication, as discussed (for example) with reference to 'strangers' in Chapter 2. Incongruities in the visual order are made available through analysis of categorisation practices, which can tell us, for example, about the negotiated and contested character of occasioned public space (see Ablitt, 2020).

My interest is in how categories and category devices are predicated, invoked and negotiated in the Rangers' quotidian maintenance activities and public interactions, and how their ordinary handling can locally assemble and configure the routine features of public park space 'each next first time'. It is incumbent on the Rangers, as their daily management work, to check that all is well in the park, and to note and act upon incongruities. In doing so, they organise people, activities, and space through categorial means and descriptions. Moreover as constituent features of the visual order of the park themselves, the Rangers and their activities do not sit outside of membership categorisation. Indeed, the 'live apparatus' of MCA (Housley, 2021a: 65) is equally applicable to their spatialised, category-bound activities, and is the mechanism through which members of the public's lay 'audits' of their practice can be accomplished. For example, such emergent categorisations that produce trees and other greenery as protected objects are seen to be formulated categorially-sequentially as a result of some park maintenance activity which involves their removal (see Chapter 4). The Rangering activity of 'coppicing' trees invokes the sequential

production of an array of categorisations that organise the trajectory of public interaction between park users and Rangers in which the standardised relational pairs of 'approacher–approached' fall into 'accuser–accused', 'questioner–answerer', or 'auditor of good practice–demonstrator of specific practical knowledge'. In this way it is noted that public interactions are category-rich engagements by way of their affordance of spatial invocations. Therefore MCA is argued to be a suitable approach for analysing the locally emergent and co-productive character of those encounters.

In what follows, I return to a discussion of ethnographic description as a method through which interactional detail of orderly categorisation practices can be retained.

Ethnographic accounts as occasioned phenomena

In this section the argument is made for ethnographic accounts and descriptions, via fieldnotes, as a powerful representational device that can showcase interactional detail and thus retain the phenomena of order in a way that reflexively represents the investigator as a constituent feature of visually-available mundane order. It is proposed that, despite the trend in EMCA related studies to prefer first-order materials such as recordings and transcripts, ethnographic descriptions can be considered 'good enough' formulations of naturally-occurring phenomena for the practical purposes of analysing visually available order. Further, ethnographic description can be beneficial for such analyses by making available the textured, multimodal demonstrations of situated, temporally accomplished interaction and its embodied actions in terms of an "occasioned corpus" (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1973: 94). Ethnography can recover the situated categorial reasoning that reciprocally and constitutively involves, invokes, and produces the material features of space and place. The uniquely 'here and now'

organisation in and of a setting can be conveyed in ethnographic description in a way that appreciates its contextual assembly of people and place and practice. In a similar way, the ethnographic accounts themselves will be treated as occasioned phenomena resulting from and depicting the situated 'here and nowness' of the fieldwork, which in turn is also occasioned. In treating the fieldwork methods and their subsequent materials in this way, their non-generalisability is maintained and a dividing line can be drawn between the interpretive aspects of fieldwork and the construction of the accounts, and the demonstrative *prima facie* analyses of the good faith descriptions of naturally-occurring phenomena.

Moreover, this *prima facie* handling of the accounts seeks to challenge some of the persisting neocolonial constructs embedded in ethnographic practice. These are, *inter alia*, dichotomies of host and visitor, of cultural inquirer and cultural subject, of academic and lay-voices. All of these are bound up in the concept of the ethnographic field as a particular spatiotemporal setting that can be entered and left. In common ethnographic parlance, fieldnotes are formulated as being representations of field experience that transform an event "which exists only in its moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscription and can be re-consulted" (Geertz, 1973: 19). This might suggest that fieldnotes create a new fixed, representational realm *outside* of the field; which in turn demarcates 'the field' as a separate empirical realm. I argue that this is unhelpful, as it treats fieldnotes as ontologically distinct from the setting in which the observations were made by mere virtue of their inscription. In all its ceremony, the granting of authority to the resultant materials inherently in the process of turning field experiences into written fieldnotes is glossed with little attention to the social organisation of the practical accomplishments of observing and writing

and reading and editing and formatting and analysing and so on. Equally, reifying fieldnotes as extraneous to the analytical phenomena they describe provides for the simultaneously clumsy construction of the ethnographic field as a black-boxed, empirical playground where social reality exists, which researchers can enter (as outsiders), draw from, harvest data from, glean insights from, and then leave, to inscribe and analyse and present and publish in another, distinct academic realm.

Instead, we might consider ethnographic materials not to be consultative inscriptions per se, but rather demonstrative descriptions of naturally-occurring phenomena, and moreover, the orderly products of ethnographic involvement. Fieldnotes are an occasioned accomplishment of fieldwork observations (indeed, without these materials, the practical activity of observational ethnographic fieldwork could not be accomplished as such). The ethnographic descriptions themselves are constitutive of the occasioned corpus of the field. This is ratified in Don Zimmerman's explanation of Larry Wieder's reconfiguration of his ethnographic materials in the extended preface to 'Telling the Convict Code'. He describes the *prima facie* treatment of one's own ethnographic descriptions "as events *within* that setting rather than simply as reports on that setting" (in Wieder, 1974: 16). Importantly, fieldnotes are all we have to showcase observations, and as such *are* the residual objects of those field experiences. When all fieldwork is done and two and a half years worth of involvement with the Park Rangers comes to an end, the materials are all that are left, and are thus the practical aggregate from which analysis can be accomplished. Returning to Hester and Francis (2003: 45): "visually available phenomena are not independent of the observer and his or her practical relevancies but rather their very availability is constituted by those relevancies."

For Sacks, too, ‘natural observational studies’ should treat observability as a phenomenon in its own right, and therefore ‘seeing sociologically’ involves “attempts to come to terms with *the sense* witnessed scenes and witnessed activities have *for members in the way they routinely do*” (Mair and Sharrock, 2021: 28, my emphasis). The ethnographic descriptions *are* part of the phenomena, and all the orderliness of the Park Rangers’ daily round – for the practical purposes of analysis – are built into the descriptions contained in these observational materials. Analysis must attend reflexively to the ethnographic descriptions (as shaped by members’ natural language use) as a constituent feature of the occasioned corpus of the observed setting, in order to demonstrate not just that something was witnessed, but that the thing was observable and recognisable as that thing by people who were present and routinely in the know about that thing.

Accomplishing ethnographic accounts in vignette format

A feature of ethnography is its invitation to tell a story from – and sometimes of – experience that will be accepted by the reader as a legitimate account that they can interpret through signs and referential adjacencies; that they can (to use a lazy cognitivist gloss) imagine and visualise in ‘mind’s eye’. Although Paul Atkinson’s (2017) defence of ‘granular ethnography’ warns against telling stories, in this respect he means uncritical tales with little analytical purpose or value and challenges the ethnographer to analyse stories as accounts and narratives. I agree with this manifesto statement, but consider an accountable feature of ethnographic description to be storytelling in some form or another. Of course, adhering to the tenets of granular, practically and linguistically-oriented ethnography, the focus is on observable practice

and therefore there is little need to embellish the description with peripheral affective details. However, written into ethnographic accounts is direct inference to 'being there', invoking inherent authority by virtue of copresence (Geertz, 1988; Watson, 1999). Now, the process of telling a story is not (and cannot be) a value-neutral endeavour. As Atkinson (1990: 70) put it: "the ethnographer constructs versions of social reality, and persuades his or her reader of the authenticity, plausibility and significance of representations of social scenes or settings." Persuasion is an active and accountable interactional device that can be recognised in accounts and stories directed at potentially critical recipients or readership. Ethnographers' storytelling, much like other members' storytelling, involves providing enough contextual detail and description so that their account of an experience is rendered understandable and plausible to the reader for the practical purposes of the occasioned event of reading it as an ethnographic contribution. A reader must accept an ethnographic account as a representation of the researcher's direct observations, but for this to happen it must be designed to be convincing to those recipients for those practical purposes. As a caveat: although there is "no such creature as the 'generic reader' within ethnomethodology's frame of reference" (Sharrock and Button, 1991: 149) it is still the case that members of society recognise and produce accounts as ordinary phenomena.

Ethnography inevitably involves curation at every point of the research process, some of which has been covered earlier in this chapter (for example, Sacks' gloss for finding perspicuous settings). It goes further, of course, as even the most astute and perceptive ethnographer cannot hold a democratic gaze – a 'god's eye view' – of the setting they are researching. Further to what has already been said regarding the

ethnographer's body as a phenomenological zero-point, perception is socially organised. No account or narrative is all-encompassing, and even then recorded descriptions inevitably, sometimes accidentally, miss details. Sometimes these are not accidental: in my case, I paid particular 'granular' attention to the Rangers' mobile practices and overlooked their social networks and relationships to each other. Some Rangers were more receptive to my 'being there' or even more active in their daily tasks, and therefore their actions feature more than those who possibly spent more than their fair share of time in the break room. Indeed, for the purposes of the study of public interaction, 'the field' of data was that which could be captured in public spaces, out on patrol, and moments in the office or on breaks were more or less ignored. When engaging with the public, there were times when I was too preoccupied with 'getting down' a detailed, linguistically-driven, sequential account of the encounter that I lost some of the detail of the doings and movements of perceptively peripheral characters, or those moments before and after the encounter. In valuing embodied action I (actively) neglected other details such as members' biographical characteristics. Curation continues through to the presentation and documentation of materials as there are invariably too many interactional 'events' and moments observed over two and a half years of fieldwork to compose them in a sequential order that pertains to a situated chronology that would be recognisable to the participants. That being said, this kind of idealistic representation – one that would perhaps see a day-by-day, moment-by-moment account from the field – is not only impossible given the constraints of textual representation in a thesis document, but also arguably unnecessary if the benchmark is for the observations in the data-driven study to be recognisable to participants.

It may be, as above, that the composite ethnographic data set will be full of 'noteworthy' observations (Emerson, et al. 1995: 44). This noteworthiness is an explicitly subjective judgment by the researcher, but moreover the character of a noteworthy ethnographic observation is to be accomplished by the reader. As such the ethnographer is required to represent their observations in such a way that acknowledges and inscribes its believability *and* its academic relevance. Ethnographic accounts must therefore possess temporal and referential features that make their content 'storyable' in a specifically academic, ethnographic way (Sacks, 1986). Furthermore, as Garfinkel and Sacks (1986: 182) argue, ethnographic texts are necessarily formalised accounts rendered so by the expectant criteria of an audience of professional anthropologists: "Having spent time in the field [the anthropologist] has the task of turning his [sic] texts into a professionally acceptable report." They describe in detail the procedure of reporting via anthropological quotes, critiquing such practice as being shaped by the formal structures that distinguish them from other professionals. Their critique scathingly extends to the anthropologist's gloss for treating their own idiomatic formulations and framings as 'what the native really means'. This is something that my own methods hope to avoid (and about which I have already written extensively above), although admittedly writing situated fieldnotes without the aid of an audio recording device can mean that the first-order exactness in all its precise and sequential wording can be lost. This will be discussed briefly in a shortly forthcoming section.

So, ethnographic accounts are required to be understandable, believable, and academically noteworthy (and not just 'stories'). They are also textually constrained by academic publication conventions and word limits. But this is not the only limitation to

its length; the length of an account is inextricably tied to preferred interactional referential practices in natural language use more broadly. In terms of conversational practice, Emanuel Schegloff and Harvey Sacks (1979) referred to the observed preference for 'minimisation' and 'recognitionals' as recipient-designed features as effective shortcuts. These shortcut preferences are observed specifically in reference to people in conversation, but their logic can be extended to ethnographic accounts (which are interactionally accomplished by readers). They refer respectively to the preference for a single reference form where possible, and one that can be understood by the recipients in that occasion. These can be extrapolated to other object and place references as such expressions hold 'indexical' features (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1986). Glosses and indexicals are common accomplishments in and through natural language and do not hinder the accomplishable meaning for the recipient by virtue of their shared recognitionals. Treating ethnographic accounts with the same reasoning (although not exactly the same practice) means that ethnographers can engage in glosses synonymous with a type of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973; Ryle, 1968). Thick description refers to the practice of accounting culturally for action beyond its physicality, and, although my analytical treatment of culture is as an occasioned accomplishment and not merely semiotic, its applicability to the ethnographic accounts remains valid. As mentioned, a *prima facie* treatment of the descriptions will accept the cultural inferences as a means of minimising otherwise cumbersome descriptive prose but respecifies analysis to consider how an action such as – to use the original example – a 'wink' might be procedurally-relevant and accomplished as visually available *in situ*.

As has been discussed, ethnographic accounts are tied to some of the same rules as other interactional accounts, namely those organisational rules which recursively pertain to the practice of 'accounting' (reporting on and describing an event – or sequence of events – as it was experienced or perceived). When providing an account (any account by anyone) an 'accounter' takes into consideration an audience or recipient (be they imagined, assumed, or specifically chosen), and the forthcoming account is delivered in a way that is firstly recognisable as an account, and consequently recognisable as an informational exchange in which references to situated meaning are designed to be understood by said recipient on that occasion. At least, a feature that makes an account recognisable as such, is its inherent syntactical design to be heard and accomplished as a description of a first-hand experienced observation that is readily available in its format and grammar as an attempt to help or guide the recipient to make sense of the information being delivered. In other words, an account differs slightly from simple description because it contains recognisable direction and intention to be received intersubjectively. While description is arguably passive, the provision of an account is an active attempt to have that account be understood and accepted. The argument being made is that what is often described as 'ethnographic description' is in fact an interactional practice through which description is delivered, curated, and represented with a purpose.

Ethnographic accounts – and vignettes in particular – are written accounts that deliver a snippet of information deriving from first-hand experienced observation of an event. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011: 206) call them "fieldnote excerpts" which are "transposed" into ethnographic texts. While this puts forward an idealisation of what published ethnographic vignettes are, not accounting for their recipient-design

restructuring and tweaking (see Walford, 2009 for confessional statements from ethnographers on this practice), I am less concerned with the debate about editing notes and more about how a vignette is selected and ‘cropped’. In an ever-unfolding no-time-out reality, a vignettted ethnographic event is a post-hoc configuration of organised webs of situated social conceptions, actions, practices, situations, involvements, moments, encounters, ‘ruptures’, and so on. This is not entirely fair, though, as members can and do account for ‘events’ and ‘moments’ and ‘instances’ as being such things *in situ*. An ‘instance’, then, may be an occasioned focus of associated practices and interactions – of ‘comings together’ – in time and space. Therefore despite the spatiotemporal boundaries of the vignette and the description it comprises lending itself to the formulation of an ethnographic reality; breaking time and space up into ‘bits’, blackboxing and compartmentalising a stream of experiential description, these boundaries trace members’ activities and should be recountable by them as a ‘unit’ of an ‘instance’. As Geertz (1972: 24) says of the appropriateness of his descriptive representation of the Balinese cockfight in imitating the ‘spurts’ of Balinese lived culture:

“Any expressive form lives only in its own present – the one it itself creates. But, here, that present is severed into a string of flashes, some more bright than others, but all of them disconnected, aesthetic quanta. Whatever the cockfight says, it says in spurts.

The phenomenological affordances of fieldnotes

In this section I wish to attend to criticism of fieldnotes as second-order materials, and specifically the perception that their representational value is marred by an unjustifiable analytic distance or an additional interpretative layer between the

naturally-occurring phenomena and their analysis. These criticisms betray a misplaced confidence in the ability for audio/visual recording technologies to faithfully capture phenomena in an 'objective' or value-neutral way. The reliability of recorded footage as is widely noted in a multitude of situations in which members require 'evidence' of something occurring: CCTV, filming altercations or offences on mobile phones, television documentaries and reports, tape recordings of police interviews, and so on. Recorded footage as 'the record' is something that holds relative hegemony across the board, including in studies of interaction, as investigators appreciate its potential accuracy in retaining the exactness of content, chronology and sequence. The issue with championing this form of evidence in its objective fidelity is the erasure of the observer, or at least the ease with which the investigator can be written out of observations. It should of course be mentioned that there has been work done to respecify video data as a topic of research rather than just a resource (see Mondada, 2006; Laurier, 2010) which have redressed such concerns by pointing out that watching video footage is a recognisable (interpretative) activity, too. Eric Laurier (2010: 9–10) deliberates the preference for video recorded data in light of Geertz' recognition of ethnographers' authorial styles for securing their authority:

“The camcorder, then, seems to promise that idiosyncrasies of note-taking, documentation and diary-keeping might disappear to be replaced by the impassive standardised recording of the digital camcorder. Events disclose themselves to the camcorder, they are not summoned or directed along the way by the ethnographer's presence.”

My argument is that the idiosyncrasies of note-taking are important phenomena in themselves that help account for and provide orientation for the reader to the

ethnographer's locally organised perception in their role as member-in-the-field. What is inevitably left out of ethnographic descriptions can potentially be reflexively topicalised as being of uncertain perceptive relevance *from the field*, whereas video data does not so much replace interpretative idiosyncrasies as it does disguise them behind a façade of pseudo-objectivity. Video footage, and indeed viewers of video footage, also miss out on otherwise observable things, and the latter relies on the same subjective methods of perception that in-field observers do. In discussion of footage from cyclists' helmet-mounted cameras, Robin Smith (2017b: 123) refuted that the orientation should be taken as the "participants 'view' nor even a proxy for it, but simply what the camera can 'see'." Camera technology cannot (yet) capture the full spectrum of light that the human eye can, but moreover what the camera can 'see' or 'hear' depends largely on its physical position and orientation, 'picking up' with more clarity what is closer to it. This is not always the case for socially organised human perception and therefore recording devices cannot be said to mimic the perceptive sensibilities of situated human researchers. The danger of using recorded footage, then, is the passing of all perceptive responsibility onto the viewer/listener, whose observations will be mediated by the affordances of the technology anyway, the consequences of which may not be apparent. In other words, video data can sometimes provide its viewers with a false sense of neutrality and reliability that what is being observed is in some way an objective capturing of an independently-existing phenomenon. The unapologetic presentational availability of idiosyncrasies in ethnographic description is a reminder that "the observer is a constituent feature of visually available mundane order" (Hester and Francis, 2003: 45).

Staying true to phenomenological ontology, interpretatively formulated ethnographic description built from observations based on a situated corporeal position are arguably robust in their retention of those humanistic methods of perception and understanding that may be missed by recording technologies. Garfinkel (2002: 147) demonstrated to his students through ‘tutorial problems’ the ways in which “phenomenal fields of ordinary activities are lost with engineering details of recording machinery”. One of these demonstrations involved setting them an assignment to tape record a telephone hearably summoning them personally, and then, separately, a telephone hearably summoning someone else. A finding, *inter alia*, was that the audio data of both settings sounded the same on tape, despite the telephone hearably summoning different people in the lived course of events in which the members were present. ‘Thick’ ethnographic descriptions may be able to account for such phenomena as corporeally ‘sensed’, and further describe the methods through which members practically accomplish them. For the analyst, in turn, these descriptions are part of the phenomena. They accomplish the event as occasioned and lend to them a timely reminder that the members’ interpretative practices that make up visually available order are well understood in situated, embodied, multimodal ways.

‘Good enough’ records of category work

Further to the above argument on the salvageability of phenomenological sensibilities through fieldnotes, it will now be clarified what specific contribution ethnographic fieldwork and fieldnotes can make to studies of situated interaction and category work. Despite the comparative imprecision of written linguistically-oriented fieldnotes, and the discrepancies consistent with the reliance on spatiotemporally organised

perception and memory-work opening them up to inaccuracies such as losing exactness in wording and precision in sequence and turn-taking, it will be argued that these materials can still be 'good enough' records of membership categorisation practices. Procedurally-relevant and locally-noticeable pauses, stutters, overlaps in conversation, and so on, will undoubtedly make it into the descriptions should they become a locally-accomplishable trouble. An ethnographic description of an interactional pause may read something along the lines of "...when we asked for their names they hesitated momentarily – a few seconds – but for what seemed like much longer..." While this kind of description may lack the precision of recorded temporal measurements, it arguably provides a 'good enough' account of the local relevance of the pause in terms of the collaborative organisation of the unfolding interactional scene.

As has been argued throughout this chapter, ethnographers are members-in-the-field. For some, this poses an issue and they would be required to suspend parts of their membership characteristics and interpretative practices. My position is (as has been previously noted) that a *prima facie* treatment of fieldnotes does not prioritise the ethnographer's perspective over other members in the field because analytic concern is visually available order and the accomplishment of local categories in interaction. As such, the ethnographer should not have to suspend their interpretative practices as long as their concerns are with granular detail and their observations can be made demonstrable. In a previous article I took Sacks' words and re-emphasised them: "If you *think* you can see it, that means we can build an observational study" (Sacks, 1995: 28, my emphasis). Like Andrew Carlin's (2003) account of observing a pickpocket despite not seeing the individual in question pick a pocket, the

ethnographer should not trivialise or mystify their observations any more than they would in their role as an everyday member of society. The reason for emphasizing this argument is because social scientists are often too preoccupied with externally verifiable facts that they overlook the locally-constituted mundane reality in and of naturally-occurring interactional settings in which members already routinely navigate and accomplish what we might call “collaboratively warranted facts” (Katz and Csordas, 2003: 281). And, moreover, that members’ orderly interactional practices only require the establishment of facticity to be good enough *for the practical purposes* of that orderly activity. Not every situation requires a full fact check for it to be produced in an orderly way. In the phenomenological interests of retaining a perspective produced through human interpretative methods, an ethnographer, as member-in-the-field, should not have to hold their own interpretative practices to a higher standard than those of other members. A good ethnographic description, however, should describe these situated uncertainties, while subsequent *prima facie* analysis can try to demonstrate how the observations are accomplishable (or not) in interaction. If done right, working backwards, an analyst should be able to demonstrate *how* such an observation – even with situated uncertainties – can be shown to be accountably observable in the materials (and the materials alone).

On this matter of situated interpretation, Sacks had this to say to his students:

Let me make a couple of remarks about the problem of 'feigning ignorance.' I found in these papers that people will occasionally say things like, "I didn't really know what was going on, but I made the inference that he was looking at her because she's an attractive girl." So one claims to not really know. And here's a first thought I have. I can fully well understand how you come to say that. It's

part of the way in which what's called your education here gets in the way of your doing what you in fact know how to do. And you begin to call *things* 'concepts' and *acts* 'inferences,' when nothing of the sort is involved. And that nothing of the sort is involved, is perfectly clear in that if it were the case that you didn't know what was going on – if you were the usual made up observer, the man from Mars – then the question of what you would see would be a far more obscure matter than that she was an attractive girl, perhaps. How would you go about seeing in the first place that one was looking at the other, seeing what they were looking at, and locating those features which are perhaps relevant? (Sacks, 1995: 83).

Concluding remarks on data and analysis

As mentioned from the start, this is a primarily ethnographic study in which the ethnographer's interpretative capacities are utilised as a powerful resource in the field, holding true to a phenomenological ontological position by making sense of the settings and their phenomena through a natural attitude. In enquiring, learning, sensemaking, interpreting with the same ethnomethodological affordances of everyday members, the field position adopted in this study does not try to 'fix' the idiosyncrasies of socially organised perception, and instead leans heavily into them, respecifying the orderly interaction co-produced through said idiosyncrasies as a topic of study in its own right. The data, then, is faithfully captured *prima facie* through vignettes. These vignettes *are* the data, in their chosen presentational role to display particular interactional moments from fieldnotes. This presentation style is chosen for good reason. In order to retain a 'good enough' categorial and sequential representation of the interactional moments, they are kept 'intact' and in their original

order as discrete, concrete interactional cases or 'instances' that showcase the Park Rangers' routine activities. This way the lived details of the work can be preserved and displayed, thus "*performed activity* as described in the 'instance' is the direct unit of analysis, instead of coded results" (Crabtree, et al. 2000: 671). Equally the data is not concerned with external generalisability of the quantitative variety; instead it follows that generalisation can be a members' method and is 'built into' ordinary activities in everyday life (Sharrock and Randall, 2004).

Orthodox ethnographic descriptions are treated as *prima facie* accounts of the routine work of the Park Rangers, and – à la Wieder (1974) – analysis takes the materials a step further by demonstrating the witnessable recognisability of the phenomena as mundane accomplishments of order. It is this step that accounts for the robustness of the analytical method employed herein. An adherence to membership categorisation practices provides a dividing line between the interpretive engagements 'in the field' and the 'ethnomethodologically indifferent', 'unmotivated' looking involved in analysing only that which is visually available in the materials, and without reliance on, or in accordance with, established formal sociological theoretical reasoning (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1986; Laurier, 2010). The focus of the study is the radically emergent ways in which local order is produced in and through the everyday work of the Park Rangers, but further, it seeks to demonstrate a working commensurability between traditional ethnographic methods and ethnomethodologically-inspired analyses without the latter limiting the human capacities and intricate, creative, embodied, immersive features of the former.

Ethical considerations

So far, discussion has focused primarily on the practical and epistemological reasons for my methodological choices. In this final section, I discuss the ethical considerations I have taken, and the dilemmas faced *in situ*. My ethical position broadly follows Nick Race, Dave Randall, Mark Rouncefield and Roger Slack's (2020) argument for practical, situated ethics. Ethics are not fixed, natural facts. They are intersubjective principles occasioned, in practice, by troubles in which doubt is cast on the judgment or direction of such a decision whereby questions arise as to whether something is the right thing to do (Race, et al. 2020: 174). Race, et al. make a valid case about philosophical and theoretical ethical quandaries and hypotheticals being largely irrelevant in practical terms, claiming that general ethical principles born from such philosophical considerations "are largely a product of 'before' and 'after' reflections" (p. 175). They draw inspiration from Brown, et al. (2016) who propose "situated, ordinary ethics grounded ... in the particular sensitivities and everyday judgments of research participants and 'the practice of being ethical'" (p. 177). In terms of my study with the Park Rangers, this involved a hands-on approach where possible, being an extra pair of hands, a potential witness in (rare) instances of altercations instigated by members of the public, as well as offering help with social media PR. An important point to be made in the practicality of ethical research behaviour is that the participants – the Park Rangers – are already striving to behave ethically in their engagements with members of the public. Practical ethical considerations are already being accomplished and 'done' by members in the lived course of their work, and are not extracurricular on their part, nor are they brought to the field by the researcher.

My loyalty to traditional ethnographic methods of participant observation and data recording is due in part to the ethical foundation that ‘slow’ research allows for. Although the events presented in vignette form in this thesis only comprise seconds-to-minutes-long moments, getting into a position in which these events could be observed, and curating them as fair representations of public Rangering practice (and, indeed, having the long-term contextual knowledge of how to assess this) mandated the years-long involvement. In hindsight, it may have been possible to record the material required to write a thesis in shorter time – particularly in the way that the material is presented and analysed – however the certainty of the fair representation of participants in the study required this to be methodologically a traditional ethnographic endeavour. Some shifts in the parks involved minimal to no scratchnotes (Sanjek, 1990) being taken, as I was preoccupied with helping manually with the tasks at hand, or simply because my time was better spent getting to know the Rangers reciprocally. The largely open-ended timeframe of ‘slow’ research allowed for this; to get involved in the practices that both allowed for a more embodied understanding of what such practices comprise, and also providing for the maintenance of a reciprocal relationship with the Rangers, being useful to them where possible.

The long-term ethnographic involvement necessitated a rethinking of consent. This rethinking considers that participants of qualitative research (and perhaps especially ethnographic research which does not involve the direct asking of questions or may not offer clear-cut temporal boundaries as to when they may be “on record”) may not fully understand what they are consenting to. Tina Miller and Linda Bell (2012) outline these concerns about ‘informed’ consent, and particularly the idea that it may not become apparent to the participants what they have consented to until the end of the

research process. This is true of inductive research, or at least exploratory research with no defined 'goals' or outcomes. It is also true of my study, which beyond the aforementioned initial reasoning offers little insight into what might be found or how it might conclude. Beyond the reassurances that observations and analysis were not to be evaluative, that I wanted to describe *how* the Park Rangers routinely did Rangering, rather than to critically assess their practice and 'fix' it,

No consent forms were issued, and as such, no written consent was received. The slow, iterative, processual, interactional – and regularly renegotiated – verbal consent built throughout the two and a half years in the field was arguably more ethical than a moment-in-time signing of an overly-legalistic document that is a written consent form. The concern with written consent is that the event of signing a form or document that stipulates the granting of research access and indefinite recording during time in the field is ultimately superficial and – more so – easily forgettable. My wish was not to dupe my informants into allowing me to surveil and record anything and everything I observed while on shift with them, which would have been an option had I had a written contract allowing me to do such a thing. After an extended period of time in the field, and as I gained trust and became privy to more potentially sensitive information and events, written consent signed-off months prior would have granted me a technical passport to write about anything that occurred while I was present, but would be tantamount to intentional deception should it be used as an argument to do such a thing. This insincere tick-box ethics does not facilitate real informed consent in such long-term fieldwork arrangements.

Instead, the ethnographic method of spending extended periods of time on shift with the Rangers provided the opportunity to discuss honestly the content of field notes and general interest of the study. In collaboration and negotiation with the relevant Rangers *in situ* and via feedback in which they were presented with examples of extended pieces of writing (in the form of ethnographic vignettes and subsequent analysis) I established an informal system of providing reassurances and potential vetoes on the presentation of certain observations. In reality the veto was never used in any serious sense that could be deemed as censorship, and the Rangers were reciprocally respectful that my observations were my own. While my position was not to evaluate their performance or pass judgment on it, and not to interfere with their ability to carry out their daily tasks, theirs was – by and large – to leave me to the research side of things. Of course, some members of the team took more of an interest in what I was doing, perhaps more out of personal or academic curiosity, but the management personnel were rather less concerned.

Getting to this position of trust is difficult to pinpoint in hindsight, and something I feel teeters uncomfortably close to the persisting neocolonial construct of the host/visitor dichotomy that ethnographic research uncritically falls back on all too often. I have previously discussed this in terms of challenging the traditional construct of ‘the field’, but it is difficult to get away from considering that access was built practically on these assumptions (i.e. assuming the situated role of the novice/stranger who wants to learn about Rangering practice from Park Rangers). The Park Rangers were accommodating from the beginning (having initially contacted them via Twitter and met with them on shift a few days later), and a system of renegotiated access was established early on. This would typically involve arranging the next stint in the field at

the end of each shift, allowing the Rangers control over when (and if) I should return. Legally-speaking, there was little stopping me from spending time in public space and observing their practice with or without consent, but, of course, legal affordances do not equate to ethical practice.

By treating the Rangers as “enquirers into their own cultural setting” (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982: 120) it is not intended to reject their position as a collection of individuals whose routine work comprises practical expertise on the lived practice of ‘Rangering’. Indeed it would be discourteous and inopportune to take such a position, not to mention intellectually dishonest. In this way, my position is to proceed cautiously with Sharrock and Anderson’s argument that the actor/subject/‘native’ should be constituted “as an enquirer into culture, *rather than* as an expert in it” (1982: 132, my emphasis). I argue that treating them as cultural enquirers or experts does not present as mutually exclusive statuses. Indeed it can be shown in observations that the Rangers’ modes of enquiry – which comprise part of their routine practical work – can be formulated as operating through a ‘professional vision’ (Goodwin, 1994). As member-in-the-field, the ethnographer can acknowledge this discursive expertise – albeit not uncritically – as a mode of communicative practice afforded to the Rangers by their greater experience. In this way practical expertise can be demonstrated to be procedurally significant in members’ accomplishments of their cultural enquiries, and this relational treatment of the Park Rangers as more knowledgeable about Rangering is an important (and accurate) articulation in field relations.

Another ethical consideration is regarding confidentiality and anonymisation. Debates around the ethicality of anonymisation involve potential dangers arising from

participants being personally identifiable in the data, against some ideas relating to (previously discussed) participants' 'voice'. In studies involving marginalised groups and their experiences, it may be an ethical choice not to remove identifiable features (with consent from informants) in order to direct political attention to that specific discrete case, and those particular individuals. The team of Park Rangers in this study are not a marginalised population per se, but their future operations are under potential threat of defunding (as part of broader austerity measures). As a result of this perceived existential threat, the team has ramped up its PR communications and social media output, documenting their routine and continual public utility. It is therefore plausible that academic attention could be beneficial to them by doing a similar job. It is also plausible that academic attention could have an opposite effect, shedding light on practice that may, at times, not be conventional or deemed appropriate by bosses or individuals in the funding organisation. I have always communicated my position about identifying or anonymising data to the Rangers as being largely down to them. I have made recommendations to them in previous publications to fully anonymise all individual and location-specific references based on the potential for some of the first-hand materials to be interpreted as comprising inappropriate practice by some individuals or local media organisations.

The decision being made in this thesis will take the lead from Park Rangers themselves, but my recommendations would be to anonymise references to individual Rangers but retain the identifiers to the team in its collective totality, as well as to approximate location descriptions. This is to retain some of the features of 'place' in the occasioned corpus, while reference to individuals and their biographies is ultimately unnecessary (unless this becomes procedurally relevant). Members of the

public who engage with the Rangers will also form part of the observed interaction; they are always anonymised as it is very rare that they will be known to me, anyway. In a study of Rangering practice, they were not the concern of the study, despite being co-participants of interaction. Whether I identified myself as a researcher to members of the public or not depended on whether it became procedurally relevant during my own (rare) involvement in encounters. The decision to identify myself as a researcher was largely left at the discretion of the Ranger leading the conversation, and on occasions that I remained 'covert' to them it was either because they deemed it irrelevant, unnecessary or, in some instances, unhelpful to their situated aims for me to be known as a researcher.

To quote Goffman on the necessity (or lack thereof) to identify informants at the individual level (1967: 2–3):

“...the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his [sic] psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another. None the less, since it is individual actors who contribute the ultimate materials, it will always be reasonable to ask what general properties they must have if this sort of contribution is to be expected of them ... Not, then, men [sic] and their moments. Rather moments and their men [sic].”

Finally, to discuss the '*cui bono?*' maxim (Brown, 1997): who does the research benefit? In activist research the central thesis is usually intended to be beneficial to the participants, while institutional and organisational ethics tend to use language regarding 'protecting' participants' well-being and not 'impacting' them detrimentally

(see BSA, 2017; ASA, 2011). There is a discrepancy between doing beneficial research and doing research that will not cause detriment to participants, with the latter being the minimum requirement. That is largely what my ethical considerations hinge on, but I propose a final point on the political character of hyperlocal, granular description using membership categories and treating their routine practices as orderly accomplishments. Following Garfinkel's (1967: viii) manifesto statement for ethnomethodology that such studies "are not directed to formulating or arguing correctives." It might be deliberated, how can descriptive studies of work that offer no 'fix' be beneficial to practitioners? The answer is that this is ultimately for the practitioners themselves to decide. It is arguably colonially assertive for ethnographers to make recommendations or decide what members will find useful. The politics of granular description is to provide an account of naturally occurring practical action – of what is actually going on – that can be known by and is recognisable to the very constituent members themselves. That members can recognise features of description does not mean that they already know it, as this would involve situated Cartesian thinking (something that granular observations can refute as being operational). Indeed, descriptions can make practical actions visible to members, and it is arguably ethical to provide them with the reflective tools that deconstruct their actions into accountable features, describe their haecceity, and display them back at them.

CHAPTER FOUR

DOING BEING A PUBLIC WORKER

Why are you doing that?

“Why’re you doing that?”

The Ranger looks up at the man from his kneeling position. He’s knelt down on one knee meticulously snipping the bush-like shoots growing around the base of a lime tree one-by-one with a pair of loppers.

“Sorry, sir?”

“What’s that about, what you’re doing down there?”



Figure 1: Trimmed 'suckers' around a lime tree

“Oh, these are ‘suckers’.” Replies the Ranger, setting his loppers on the ground to free his hands in order to speak with them. “They’re parasites that grow and take vital resources and nutrients away from the tree. So we are going all along here cutting them back to help channel the growth back into the tree so they can grow upwards and stay healthy.”

“Right right I see yeah, but why’re you doing it with that thing? Better off using what he’s got! He’s got the right idea!” the man replies laughing, gesturing to another Ranger doing the same to another tree on the other side of the path, albeit with a lot more ease because he’s standing up straight and using a strimmer to cut through the bush.

“Ah, he is young and very clever you see... or some might say ‘lazy’!” the Ranger replies in jest, loud enough so that the other Ranger being referred to can hear. The other Ranger looks over and laughs, as does the man.

“I am an advocate of ‘the traditional way is the best way’ ...hand tools give a good close finish.” continues the original Ranger.

“Hah, fair play to you – his finish is good though, nice and straight!” laughs the man as he walks away.

“Hear that? Nice straight finish, that! And look, no backache!” jibes the other Ranger, stretching his back theatrically while holding his strimmer. By now the man has carried on his way down the path.

“Yes, well, I respect my tools... you cannot cut low enough with that! And there’s no backache if you rest on your knee, like this, Jon...” The last part was intended (pedagogically) for me, as he began showing me how to avoid repetitive strain injuries.

Introduction: Public ‘approachables’ and work-oriented categorisations

The above is an example of how the Park Rangers, who do the majority of their work out in public view, are open to questions or engagement from (potentially sceptical) members of the public by virtue of – what would appear to be – their mere presence in public. Of course, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, it is not simply their ‘mere presence’ in public that invites engagement, but rather a categorial occasion entangled in space, activity, and the Rangers’ recognisability as members of a ‘public servant’ (or at least a ‘public worker’, or a ‘public character’, cf. Jacobs, 1961) category which produces a situated affordance to be approached in quite specific ways. The reportable phenomenon above (and throughout the rest of this chapter) may be glossed as: The Park Rangers, while out on shift in the parks, are routinely seeable

as members of an 'approachable' category. While not a phenomenon unique to Park Rangers, it is one of central organisational relevance to their everyday work experience, and one that serves as a perspicuous setting for the routine 'doing' of mundane civics. It is equally not an original observation; Erving Goffman (1963: 125) offered a possible reason for the approachability of certain public characters:

“...in cities, policemen, priests, and often corner newsstand vendors are approached by a wide variety of others seeking a wide variety of information and assistance, in part because it is believed to be clear that no one would seek to take advantage of these public figures. Policemen and priests are especially interesting, since they may be engaged by strangers merely initiating a greeting as opposed to a request for information.”

While Goffman's reasoning is plausible, this chapter sets out to describe how these focused encounters come about, and how they are accomplished by members *in situ*. It is posited that the provided rule-based reason of being approachable candidates because “nobody would seek to take advantage of” them is conceivable but of narrow scope, and relies heavily on the assumption that users of public space are sceptical of each other to the point that they take others to be potential tricksters or con-artists at all times. In this way, an alternative approach is to take what comes from the data, considering – in particular – how members in the field respond to and accomplish public social engagement. The participants' orientations are central to the analysis here. The initial analytic question, then, is: Through what organisational contingencies are the Park Rangers available as 'approachables'? Now, we can go some way to answering this by looking at the kind of things that they are approached about. After all, they are not approached about just anything, but the things – in substance and in

latitude – that they *are* approached about may be ‘surprising’, and can pave the way for an understanding of what it is to be a public worker, grounded not in theoretical tautology, but in the routinely emergent ‘things themselves’. Again, this involves consideration of the participants’ own orientations, and what it is they are concerned about or troubled with in the course of their quotidian practice.

Taking a look at the extract introduced at the beginning of the chapter: as it emerged, the man who asked “Why’re you doing that?” was not as sceptical about the cutting back of foliage as he was inquisitive about the reason for the one Ranger’s painstaking and precise methods. He may have been initially sceptical, although deciding on members’ private intentions is beyond the scope of this analysis. Certainly, however, what is publicly available here is how the Ranger’s first response accomplishes the question as one along environmental grounds. Scepticism about whether their practices are ‘environmentally friendly’ is something the Rangers have come to expect particularly during ‘cutting back’ season (starting in October and running through into the new year). ‘Cutting back’ tasks involve a number of different horticultural methods and practices. The ‘best’ practice or strategy is the subject of debate in horticultural and conservational circles, but typically depends (in the urban parks in which the Rangers operate, at least) on balancing plant health, aesthetics, safety, and conservation.

This extra, explanatory, ethnographic detail is perhaps superfluous, however, as it can be seen in the interactional data – paying attention to the participants’ orientations – that the Ranger initially hears the ‘trouble’ of the man’s question as environmentally relevant, rather than methodologically relevant. In this case the Ranger invoked the

culturally locatable reasoning that implied prioritising the health of the tree was the shared concern. This is not accidental, as, of course, when it comes to issues of ‘cutting back’ or (as may be perceived) ‘cutting down’, some reasons are more broadly accepted by passers-by than others, and in this way the ‘culture’ of popular environmentalism is consistent and familiar as an “apparatus for generating *recognisable* actions” (Sacks, 1995: 226). The question immediately occasions an account regarding very specific ‘care work’ regarding the trees. The scene is therefore assembled, in the first instance, as a recognisable scene of environmental querying, generating a response along the same categorial lines. That the Ranger refers immediately to the health of the tree, then, says something of the organisational – *cultural* – contingencies of the parks themselves, produced in an emergent and also competently retrospective way as “each another next first time” (Garfinkel, 2002). Importantly, then, the park ‘context’ is a resource for a specific cultural orientation, a collaborative ‘logic’, available to all competent park participants. When someone asks ‘What’re you doing?’ when you are using manual and power tools on trees, the assumption is that the questioner is actually asking for an explanation regarding the value of the task at hand as it pertains to the overall benefit or improvement of the park, and moreover the necessity of tinkering or tampering with a ‘natural’ object of such cultural import in this context.

In just these first few moments of the encounter, we can see how a passer-by is able to approach and engage a Ranger in a question about their practice, and more importantly, how this is treated as normal. Furthermore, the simple question is heard as specified, and occasions a response turning on the grammars of environmentalism. It is a display of public park competencies, and demonstrates the obligations of public

workers to explain their work to members of the public in a way that enrolls the questioner as a member of this very 'public' category. What I mean here is that 'member of the public' is exactly the category of person being addressed in such a response (not 'man' or 'boss' or 'power walker' or 'fellow manual labourer'), which perhaps says something about how this category of general public person is bound to public space. Talking specifically about the benefits of this work for the tree, and by extension, the park space, is an *occasioned* account which is 'recipient designed' for a 'member of the public'.

Moreover, as will be shown in further examples, when accounting for their practice and providing reasoning for specific actions, the Rangers typically communicate this in a way that constructs it as being 'strategic' and grounded in broader 'systemic' action. They communicate this through 'talk' around their actions, but also in the work activities themselves. At the core of their public practice is the trouble of the local categorial production of 'professionalism', which is recognisably negotiated and co-produced in the course of, and as a by-product of, routine interactional encounters in which the Rangers are approached by members of the public. What is fundamentally observable is that the Park Rangers' practice displays a *public* orientation *at all times*. While 'the public' may be considered an impotent or non-category in many situations and formal analyses, it is an imperative organisational category for the Rangers which cuts through all of their practices at all times, and this orientation to 'the public' is built into everything they do. This orientation is at the very crux of what it is to be a public worker. Ergo, the Rangers' everyday public practice is observably produced contingently through their visibility and their own specific availability as scrutinisable objects for members of the public, whatever the subject of their scrutiny is.

On this note, further problems around this negotiation of ‘professionalism’ arise from the data. Whether or not the man was sceptical of the removal of vegetation, the reason provided by the Ranger regarding “channel[ling] the growth back into the tree so they can grow upwards and stay healthy” which does invoke a systematic, methodical process (“we are going all along here...” in reference to the tree-lined path) was accepted by him (“Right right I see yeah”), who repaired his initial question to further specify his questioning of the Ranger’s methods. The Ranger has communicated a precise *professional* competence and the man has invoked another more general ‘common-sense’ competence in response. This brings up questions as we begin to locate the first analytical trouble: What is it about the Rangers’ work activities which elicits such methodological interrogation from laypeople?⁵ The next section will address the practical role of this orientation to ‘common-sense’ serves in navigating these professional work competences in public encounters.

It begins with the categorisation of the task as a work activity in the first place. The man’s initial question “Why’re you doing that?” is hearable as a question pertaining to legitimate work, rather than the legitimacy of the Rangers in doing that work. As the scene unfolds, the Ranger’s first explanation formulates it as a work activity, and the basal shoots (and their corresponding trees) as a work object. The Rangers, as professional practitioners, are allowed to ‘tinker’ with trees in the local visual contexture. The local and “constantly kaleidoscopic” order properties render them

⁵ It is assumed that this man is not an expert in this activity as he communicates little evidence of expertise, which might be recognisable in horticulture-specific language regarding the tools or the foliate object, or even in less mundane lines of enquiry. The Ranger’s explanation treats the man as a layperson.

mutually intelligible as work objects, at this moment, through the Rangers' activity (Rawls, 2008: 705). There is little 'odd' about a Ranger using gardening tools in the parks, whereas a nonuniformed person available as an 'ordinary' member of the public would likely be questioned as to their motives or framed as deviants for operating a similar course of action. By 'similar course of action' I mean in a naïve, literal, physical way. The argument being made is that tinkering with a tree is an entirely *different* phenomenal activity when done by incongruous actors (vandalism, as opposed to work), and, to paraphrase Garfinkel (2002: 93) it is the available workings of these (different) phenomena that exhibit the categories of actor that do those activities. In other words – hypothetically and ideally – it would be the questioning of their motives that would accomplish them as vandals, and the activity as vandalism. I say 'ideally' because, as is seen, the questioning still happens, albeit in different categorial formulations. The suggestion is never *quite* that the Rangers are vandals, because even during disagreements (particularly around trees), the scene is assembled in such a way that it is culturally locatable as work-based activity. A hypothetical accusation of 'vandalism' would not be a literal criminal accusation levied at the Rangers, but rather an argumentative categorial inference hearably intentionally invoking similarities in their practice, or a practical association with the type of person (i.e. criminals) who does vandalism, in order to challenge their actions morally (cf. Jayyusi, 1984).

To briefly say more on trees: as will be noted in further examples in this chapter and in Chapter 5, trees are sometimes work objects, sometimes objects to be protected, sometimes barriers or obstacles, and so on. Their procedural relevance is made accountable as they are "talked into being" (Heritage, 1984: 290). Just as Lynch and Woolgar (1990: 5) said about objects of scientific enquiry in laboratory settings, trees,

too, “are not ‘natural objects’ independent of cultural processes and literary forms” and their practical treatment by the Rangers invoke them here as normative objects of Rangering practice; as ‘maintainables’. The locally ordered relational configurations, in this particular instance, accomplished the tree as an object legitimately bound to the Ranger’s work role via his verbal response and the witnessable recognisability of his activity as a specifically work-oriented practice.

Yet, as we see, the Ranger’s methods are still questioned. His legitimacy to be ‘tinkering’ with the tree is not under threat here, nor is the general work activity of removing basal shoots. The predicates on which the Ranger’s work identity are produced (professionalism, expertise, environmental awareness, and so on) are appropriately linked to the categorisation of the tree-as-work-object via the response and activity (Reynolds and Fitzgerald, 2015; Hall and Gough, 2011). But the passer-by still finds it appropriate to provide his opinion on the (im)practical methods being employed, and the Rangers – through their jokes and continued discussion – accomplish this topic as apposite for the members present. It is difficult to imagine a different situation in which it would be appropriate for a layperson who is not directly involved in the ensuing activity to question a practitioner’s methods which do not directly impact them personally; albeit it is less difficult to imagine when that activity takes place *in public view*. Police officers, traffic wardens, doormen, street cleaners, among others, may be approached and challenged by people who may know very little about policing, traffic enforcement, security, cleaning methods, and so on (Bittner, 1965; Richman, 1983; Bearman, 2009; Ablitt, 2016; Ablitt and Smith, 2019). In this instance, however, there would appear to be little potential consequence beyond it being laborious for the Ranger; it is a simple passing comment. The observation that

Park Rangers are regularly approached by members of the public is an organisational springboard in this chapter which will be used to demonstrate features of public interactions and speak to issues of public space.

Taking the routine, orderly accomplishment of member-of-the-public-initiated approaches as an observable social fact, this ethnographic analysis points to publicly available interactional moments in which 'professionalism' made relevant and accountably co-produced. A recognisably stable feature is the Rangers' treatment of such approaches (or the possibility of being approached) as assumed 'auditing' events in which members of the public will question their practice critically. In what follows, I will showcase the category relationships that occasion the Rangers' treatment as public 'approachables' and further explicate certain contingencies in and of public space and the ways in which these *produce* their quotidian practice in lockstep with the demonstrable expectations and assumptions of members of the public. How Rangers 'do' being a public worker, recurrently exhibiting and orienting to publicness in the course of their everyday work, is a key argument herein. This will involve looking at the contingencies through which 'professionalism' and 'publicness' emerge collaboratively in practice. The exploration in this chapter begins to address a broader issue of this thesis, which is how the co-production of the public service of public park administration and maintenance is accomplished *interactionally*.

Coppicing hazels

The park is overgrown after an unusually long and warm summer. As 'cutting back season' begins, it's 'all hands on deck' on this particularly wild stretch of path. Branches from the bushy shrubbery have spread broadly and are spilling over

significantly onto the concrete, obstructing and effectively narrowing the path. One Ranger is equipped with a petrol chainsaw and a helmet with a face shield, another with a quieter electric chainsaw and similar protective equipment, while the rest of us have hand saws and loppers. We're cutting some of the smaller branches as close to the ground as possible, and the Rangers with the chainsaws are finishing off the thicker trunks. They've brought the van down (a flatbed pickup) and we're loading the branches lengthways onto the back as we go.

"Oh no! What're you doing to those poor trees?" A woman cries out from the path as she slows down to stop in front of the Ranger holding the petrol chainsaw.

"Er, coppicing—" he begins over the rhythmic spluttering sound of his chainsaw ticking over. His supervisor loudly intervenes:

"Hello, y'alright? I know it looks bad, but we're *coppicing* these hazels... you see, hazels need to be cut right back down every now and then to stimulate their growth." Now that the supervisor is dealing with this, the first Ranger gets back to work.

"Ohh, it's such a shame! Look how healthy and lovely they are— can't you let them grow naturally?"

"They've still got their roots so they'll pop new shoots out in no time! We've got to keep the park from overgrowing for the safety of the park users. It also helps protect the champion trees, see this one over here—" he gestures to a nearby oak, "We can't have these ones growing into this fella's space and stifling it out, you see."

"Okay, it just looks so awful to see you cutting down healthy trees..."

"Yeah I can understand that, but it's good for the wildlife, too, and we're keeping all this wood to build more habitats!"

"Well...I suppose..." the woman winces, scrunching her face up. "You know what you're doing..." she says ambiguously as she walks off.

Negotiating expertise and common-sense: Invoking trees' alternative

categorial status

As in the previous example, a member of the public approached the Rangers and expressed criticism of their practice. This also involved trees, although the approaching woman (unlike the man in the previous excerpt) immediately formulated this as the basis of her criticism, categorising them as “poor trees” which are, to her eyes, “healthy and lovely” and should be allowed to “grow naturally”. Evidently, this simple account that she provides for her criticism is bound up in the visual order as she sees it. But in this case ‘as she sees it’ does not necessarily mean a personally-held, subjective opinion. The short exchange demonstrates the first-instance organisational preference for trees not to be cut down or interfered with; notably, not only are we (and the Rangers) able to make sense of this as the woman’s own personal preference, but also as a general, popular, *public* preference. As touched upon in the previous section, trees are powerful cultural symbols in the contexture of the public park. When trees are oriented to in social interaction, such interaction is infused with a local politics that produces the materiality of the park as a public good, and further, the park users as stakeholders. The authority of the Rangers’ uniforms and their legal powers (as mandated by parks-specific by-laws) collapse into the background, as they must justify their work actions to a nameless park user.

The first Ranger’s slight fumble at being caught ‘off-guard’ before putting forward the specialist terminology of “coppicing”, and the supervisor’s quick interjection with “I know it looks bad, but...” display the shared preference for the aesthetics of the park, and moreover the moral categories which produce trees as objects that should

(generally) not be cut down. Through formulating 'looking' and perception as action, this response accomplishes the intersubjectivity of the woman's perspective as co-constitutive of the scene. In this way it is navigated as a superficial visual interpretation, which while not illegitimate, can be settled with (and, importantly, *requires*) an explanation. So it goes, this park user has communicated concerns about the current activity, which she interprets as "cutting down" trees. They are hearably *public* concerns, as the supervisor addresses her in her capacity as a member of a public category, justifying the practice by drawing on outcomes of *public* benefit. He initially offers an alternative method of categorising the trees as objects of a differently formulated local trouble, consequently positioning themselves and their activities as working to rectify a problem *for the benefit of the trees*. The initial language used by the Ranger is direct and technical, as he instructs that "coppicing" is a routine (and systematic and established) practice that "stimulates growth" in this type of tree. But as the woman continues to use more affective, emotive categories, he then mimics these methods by intermittently using less technical terms such as "pop new shoots out" and the correspondingly anthropomorphic category "fella" as he continues his defence, invoking further *strategic* and *systematic* reasoning such as "the safety of the park users", "protect[ing] the champion trees", and helping contribute to better habitats for wildlife. These accounts – which are undeniably hearable as justifications – are categorially *designed* for a specific category of public park user, achieving the woman's situated status here as a member of the public, and moreover producing her actions of verbal protestation as those of a legitimate park user.

In the course of this encounter, the subject is contested categorially. According to the Ranger, these are no longer just general 'trees', rather they are specifically 'hazels'.

Talking about 'trees' in general terms makes them accountable to a common-sense moral order as practically objective cultural objects in parks, but their alternative linguistic categorisation as 'hazels' here serves to account for them as particular, horticultural objects whose social domain is no longer in public stakeholdership. It may be so that the lay-public are entitled to offer an opinion on trees in general, but they do not hold the expertise to provide an input into the specialist work object of 'hazels', which require such expert maintenance and handling as 'coppicing'. In this way, the organisational relevance of the same material object changes starkly in the course of this conversation. The hazels are treated as 'sacrificials' in terms of their broader designation as work objects, inasmuch as their removal is *strategically* necessary. Nevertheless, at the same time, the mechanics of the removal are carefully produced as being non-destructive in any permanent sense, accomplishing (and arguably interactionally conceding to the passer-by) some intrinsic value for the hazels themselves. The duplicative organisation of the tree's categorial status serves to 'cover all bases' of acceptable reasoning, and justifies their strategic activity as a well-informed and thought-through practice which has multiple benefits, and whose sacrifice is only temporary and superficial.

To take a step back, an important noticing here is that, like the previous example, the preliminary account is organised as an explanation laden with technical jargon; recognisable as a professional account. Such an account is relationally configured by virtue of the Rangers' professional accountability to the park space and its trees. The supervisor's intervention is hearably defensive, but equally handled in a competent and articulate way that produced it as a legitimate description of work-oriented activity. This is achieved through the inference-rich category proffers delivered in the technical

jargon (Stokoe and Attenborough, 2015). When a passer-by asks a Ranger what they are doing or why they are doing that, it is often hearable in the first instance as a challenge to or judgment against their practice, as opposed to mere curiosity. The opening is quickly organised categorially into a standardised relational pair of passer-by as interrogator and Ranger as accountable (and thus requiring justification). That this is somewhat a 'default' organisation in interactions initiated by members of the public in which they ask the Rangers a question related to their practice, says something of the relational accountability of these public workers who work to maintain public space in public view of members of the public. They are ready to be approached and challenged, as it is indeed a normal occurrence on their shifts. What inevitably follows in each of these encounters is a production of the Rangers' practice as *professional* practice. In the following example, the Rangers' accountability in this relational contexture is accounted for and categorially assembled *pre-emptively* based on the assumptions of the visual order produced by a potentially sensitive activity.

Collecting lucky pennies

It's a sunny and therefore busy day in the park. This afternoon's main task is to clear the pennies out of the weir. People throw coins into the weir from the bridge for luck, and when there is a significant amount the Rangers choose to remove them in order to discourage park users from doing it themselves. The RSPB have set up a small gazebo in the park to solicit donations and the Rangers have decided the easiest thing to do is to donate everything we collect to them.

“Here Jon, put this on.” a Ranger passes me a hi-viz 'RANGER' tabard to go over my waders. “Don't want people to think you're up to no good...”

The Ranger hands me a wide broom and instructs me to shunt the coins into the corners and then under the bridge where it's shallower and more concealed before scooping them up and putting them in a large white bucket:

“Just doesn't look good rummaging in the water for money.”

This job takes the best part of an hour, with a number of people stopping to watch briefly at different times. At one point a man with a young child engages us from the bridge.

“Hello... What's that you're doing, then?” the man asks in a pronounced, childlike tone. He squeezes his son's shoulder, as if to be asking for him.

“We're collecting all the lucky pennies for a lucky charity!” replies the Ranger, directed at the young boy.

“Yeah all of this is going to the RSPB.” confirms the second Ranger.

“Great! How much've you found?”

“We don't know yet, but there's been a few pound coins!”

“Phwoar, chucking a whole quid in the river? Some wealthy people round here, mind.”

Mitigation via pre-emptive assumptions of the visual order: notes on uniform

Of course, the Rangers' incumbency as 'approachables' is not only categorially organised in “each next first” encounter with a member of the public, but equally “each next first time” there is a situation which may *potentially* occasion an approach (Garfinkel, 2002: 216). Membership of the 'approachables' category, then, is observable in and as pre-emptive measures in the Rangers' public practice. As stated, the visual order of the Rangers' accountability here is *pre-emptively* organised around

the assumption that such a potentially sensitive public activity may raise particular forms of interrogation by observers. Caution is taken, through the equipping with identifiable uniform and standardising procedure, to prospectively limit the scope of members' categorisations of our activity. The communicated intention is to demonstrate visually that we are not opportunists looking to cash in on other people's 'lucky pennies', but rather practitioners who are unambiguously engaging in work tasks. At the crux of this is the assumption that, as 'approachables', the Rangers are available to be approached or questioned at any time, and thus the public character of their practice requires of them a mitigation of potential negative categorisations by adopting a coherent and unambiguous strategy that can be made available as legitimate work practice in the first instance.

The first mitigating strategy was to provide uniform to keep up what Erving Goffman (1971) might call the 'normal appearances' of a scene. "Properly uniformed and certified" persons are available as 'functionaries' who "in exchange for accepting something like non-person treatment ... are allowed the run of otherwise private places" (Goffman, 1971: 308). The issue here, however, is that the weir is not a private place *per se*, but rather an area of restricted public access (and an activity only legitimate when performed by particular 'functionaries') while still being *in public view*. So, while according to Goffman a uniform may provide some form of non-person treatment – in other words, allow us to 'pass' as legitimate practitioners engaging in appropriate work practice and go about doing this undisturbed – the data shows this to be somewhat an overstatement. The Rangers are always uniformed, yet are still regularly approached while engaging in manual activities. On this occasion we were also approached, although admittedly not in such a critical capacity. This is not to say

that uniform is irrelevant; on the contrary, uniforms are predicates of legitimacy of a category in a specific context and activity sequence “stand[ing] in a relational configuration to each other ... thereby compos[ing] a mutually elaborated whole” (Hester and Francis, 2003: 41). The Rangers’ uniform does categorial work in and through the visual order to help produce them as an unambiguously legitimate and accountable type of ‘approachable’ person, more so occasioning a very specific order of approach hinging on their public work obligations to the parks and the people within them.

In this way, it is not as simple as suggesting that a Ranger’s uniform – itself – constructs the wearer as an ‘approachable’ in any kind of objective way. For example, a group of (non-uniformed) youths rummaging in the water for coins would likely be approached, too, albeit in a different way, for different reasons, and possibly by different people. In such a hypothetical event, an encounter would be organised around witnessing deviant or criminal behaviour, through which park users who orient to it might be required to take on legalised ‘witness’ status. This type of scene of criminality would be a ‘potentially integrative’ local event (see Sacks, 1995, in Laurier and Philo, 2006a: 199) in which involved passers-by might be co-opted into a potentially schedule-altering course of events (e.g. calling the police, providing witness statements, and so on) and occasion further ripples of focused interaction (e.g. answering inquiries to satisfy the curiosity of other passers-by). In any case, this shows how many different people can become ‘approachables’ in public park space, including how individuals who ‘approach’ can become ‘approachables’ themselves by virtue of the locally-relevant knowledge they may hold about events as they emerge. So, what is being argued here is not that uniforms make individuals ‘approachable’, but rather

that they serve to clarify with immediacy the wearer's categorial relationship to the space, and are a recognisably accountable feature of a category of person who is eligible to engage in normal, work-based activities within it. Working in public *occasions* certain trajectories of approach and excludes others. Uniforms visually configure those trajectories in the first instance.

In the instance above, the data suggests that, first and foremost, the man and child were interested in the activity at hand. What exactly that activity is, is of course formulated through the categorial relationships available in the scene. These categorial relationships extend to and include the man and child themselves, who, through their involvement further contribute to and configure the visual order of the event, accomplishing the activity as legitimate. Simply put, parents with present children are less likely to approach a possible scene of criminality or deviance (such as the hypothetical one described in the previous paragraph). Therefore their categorial involvement here as legitimate 'approachers' provides accountability to the scene as one of interest for curious passers-by, but not one of concern. Furthermore, it accomplishes the Rangers' activity as a notable event, but not an incongruous one. Uniform is undoubtedly a constituent feature of this first-instance, non-problematic formulation of the legitimate work activity scene. As a recognisable motif for legitimacy, it organises the availability of the wearer as approachable *by legitimate park users, for legitimate work-related reasons*. As such, being approached does not require one to wear a uniform, but wearing a uniform *in park space* demonstrates the Rangers' approachability in and through a certain 'normal' park order, inscribing the structures of role expectations of the Rangers and also the park users who might approach them. Of course, in asking me to put on a hi-viz 'RANGER' tabard, the Rangers demonstrate

their acute routine awareness of the practical affordances of uniform in pre-managing the scope and trajectories of potential interactional encounters in which the (work) activity itself is the foremost resource for the ‘approachers’ to initiate an approach.

Making ‘system’ visible and accountable when handling ‘sensitive’ objects

As has already been touched upon, the Rangers operate as constituent members of a locally-organised public park gestalt contexture (Gurwitsch, 1964; Garfinkel, 2002). In such a contexture, each element is contingent on and “exist through each other” (Watson, 2015: 37). More will be said later in this chapter (and in the next) of the contexture of the park in terms of how the Rangers’ routine work practices are an imperative component of park space, demarcating recognisable territories of accountability through locally-produced patterns of action. For now, however, discussion will focus on the ‘mapping out’ of recognisable temporal links across Rangering activities; the construction of these patterns of action as intended visual resources of systematic practice (and consequent legitimacy). This builds on the discussion of discourses of ‘strategy’ in justificatory responses in conversation by refocusing on the visual order, and how perception of pre- and post- activity actions and intentions can be made visibly accountable *in* the current activity itself. Following on from the previous section, it has been noted that the Park Rangers’ work activities are afforded a baseline legitimacy, although this is routinely negotiated *in situ* as park users’ approaches are afforded equal legitimacy in the park’s interaction order. That being said, this first-instance, baseline legitimacy is not taken as a given; Rangers are aware that uniform does not professionalism make. Professionalism is thus inscribed into their routine actions. While it has already been shown how legitimacy is designed into the activity at hand through conversational commentaries and discourses of

strategy and specialist knowledgeability (for example, in explanations about how hazels need to be ‘coppiced’ to stimulate growth), what is being demonstrated here is how objects can be handled to show sensitivity to past intentions. Further, how related work-based activities can reveal their trajectories into the future. Taken together, this shows how temporally organised ‘system’ is seeable in ‘snapshots’ of emergent practical action.

Returning to the data, a point unique to this example is that the man who did the approaching used his son’s childlike curiosity and naivety as resources to occasion a non-judgmental engagement. It is accomplished as such by the first Ranger’s equally childlike response: “We’re collecting all the lucky pennies for a lucky charity!” Notably, the professional, work-oriented categorisation (that collecting lucky pennies is a job) is not available in the Ranger’s verbal response alone, but their legitimacy in carrying out this action is further accomplished in the whole by virtue of its unchallenged status. The childlike inflection does not diminish the legitimacy of the response. The Ranger mirrors the man by orienting to the boy as a mediating resource in the interaction, but the reply tacitly acknowledges this as a social tactic to open dialogue. Ultimately in this encounter, the man is the recipient of the substantive explanatory/justificatory response via recourse to his son as a member of the category of ‘curious child’. In this case, then, we continue to see the fairly stable feature of Rangers treating enquiries about their work activities as potential auditing events, even when they are mediated by jokes or light-hearted deliveries.

There are two interesting features of the formulation of the activity as “collecting lucky pennies for a lucky charity”. The first is that collecting money for charity holds a

practical objectivity as being a positive endeavour; specifying the activity as effective charity work as opposed to describing it in terms of the practical consequences of not removing the coins (discouraging park users from climbing into the weir to retrieve them) makes a change from the previous examples. Orientation to the moral character of the activity of collecting lucky pennies comes through in the account. Secondly, the reference to retrieved items as “lucky pennies” acknowledges their sensitive ownership status. To borrow from and build on the trouble of Sacks’ gloss: the coins are contested as ‘possessitives’ or ‘possessables’ (Garfinkel, 2002: 181–182). They have been thrown into the weir, but not necessarily disposed of, and are certainly not to be considered ‘disposables’ (Ablitt and Smith, 2019). While they are no longer in the possession of the people who threw them (and cannot easily be retrieved by them), the *social* action of tossing them (‘inscribed’ in the coins and predicated by their inference-rich position in the water) occasions the objects as *lucky* pennies. A single coin could perhaps be seeable as an accidentally dropped coin, but the immediate intentionality of the throwers is inscribed in the available scene of a vast amount of coins spread across the shallow bank of the weir. Despite technically no longer being in anyone’s possession, removing the coins may be described as stealing (at least if removed by ‘ordinary’ members of the public). The Rangers’ trouble here is to produce an occasion – through their practical action – whereby the coins can be removed from the weir without them becoming ‘disposables’ or indeed personal currency.

In their practical handling, then, these coins display additional moral inferences; traces of activity and intent. While the activity of tossing the lucky coins into the weir is not observable at this moment, their current placement submerged in shallow water near the bridge is enough to cement their practical objectivity as objects of particular intent

to observers (including, indeed, the Rangers). The coins are not there by accident, nor have they been dropped or misplaced. For the Rangers, the dilemma is observably how to remove them sensitively, factoring in the emotive intention of their placement and their continued potential as functioning currency. This is recognisable in their careful handling, much like the way the severed branches in the previous example were loaded onto the van systematically and in a single orientation. The Rangers are bound to the maintenance of park space and therefore can be afforded some leniency in handling ambiguously-owned items such as 'lucky' coins in a weir within that space, but this activity must be designed so it is visibly in-keeping with their work-role requirements. The 'care' taken here is not to do with handling them 'delicately' as though they are someone's possession, but rather to handle them methodically and produce the coins as 'just another' set of items whose removal is part of the broader task of clearing up the park. Importantly, the activity's design must display its part in a systemic course of action, and thus 'system' must be seeable in the activity itself.

In handling them methodically (brushing the coins along into piles in the corners and under the bridge before removing them) the practice is seeable as work-related, and most importantly, certainly not for personal collection. Furthermore, being in public view, the white bucket was not just a practical preference, but a central 'bank' for the coins to remain 'auditable' in public view, and moreover accountably not being stolen, divided, or 'pocketed'. The second Ranger's detailing repair to the first's "lucky charity" comment provided further specific accountability of our intentions for the money. This money, which was once a collection of 'lucky' coins, is going to be put to good use as a donation to the RSPB. That the RSPB had set up a charity stall in the vicinity meant that the explanation of the moral intent for the money 'checked out' visually; it made

sense. This ‘happy coincidence’ is in-keeping with the Rangers’ tactical methods to make best use of the situation at hand; it is unlikely that this money would have been donated to the RSPB (specifically) had representatives of the charity not been there that day, but it is equally unlikely that the operation would have collapsed in such circumstances. There is a ‘Friends of the park’ organisation which would have likely received the donation otherwise. The use of the RSPB’s stall as a reference point available within that visible contexture is just a way in which a connection can be made between the current activity of removing the coins and a likely positive outcome for the activity. Notably, no dispute was observed here, as the activity and the explanation were accomplished as legitimate in the local contexture by virtue of it being constructed as future oriented. Providing an account of the observed action as organisationally bound to a conclusion that implicates other people (in this case the charity representatives) added immediately referenceable accountability. Whether or not the inquisitive man and his son were intending to ‘audit’ the Rangers’ practice, the entire operation – from its planning through to its practical execution and the explanation they provided – treated auditing as a possibility and sought to establish a robust categorial position as being legitimate practitioners doing legitimate work. When publicly visible, the Rangers’ practice must account for potential public auditing, and work to stave off potential ambiguity that could be used as criticism against them. The next example further demonstrates this routine treatment of members of the public as potential auditors.

“You picking litter?”

The worst of the storm looks like it has passed, but it’s still raining and the river is worryingly high and flowing rapidly. Hoods up and carrying litter pickers, we’re

scouting the hotspots and checking that people aren't getting too close to the water. The Ranger tells me someone's dog was washed away by the weir yesterday. A lot of plastic waste has washed up on the banks but they're slippery and we can only reach some of the debris by stretching out and reaching down with our pickers. The Ranger notices a man is hanging around in the vicinity with a professional-looking DSLR camera wrapped in a plastic bag to protect it from the weather.

"I don't know what that guy has his camera out for. Hope he's not taking photos of us walking past that rubbish..." the Ranger says to me. I thought this was unlikely; the stormy weather conditions and state of the river were surely the spectacle here. In further conversation, the Ranger insisted that this is exactly the kind of thing that members of the public would have a go at them about on social media.

A few minutes later – now on the other side of the bridge – a different man approaches us on a bike. He slows down significantly, balancing in place, without putting his foot on the ground.

"You picking litter?" he asks.

"Yeah, but it's not safe at the minute. We can't get down the banks in these conditions... We'll have to come back when it's better."

"Ah..." nods the man before cycling off.

Orienting to and collaboratively accomplishing the 'generalised other'

In the above excerpt, the trouble for the Ranger is the potential to be caught walking past litter without picking it up (because it is deemed too close to the rapidly flowing river and our priority is to check the areas in which people may find themselves in danger in the current weather conditions). The particular problem for the Ranger's practice is the public expression and availability of these priorities being

(mis)interpreted as a failure of his job; the exhibited order of the action of walking past litter while carrying a litter picker⁶ engages this possibility. The ethnographic description exhibits a concern for a possible threat from two individuals, who are organisationally produced as likely members of a category of public ‘auditors’. While this is not a revelation in itself, as a defining characteristic of the public worker is an orientation to what George Herbert Mead (1934 [1972]: 90) called the “generalised other”, (an assumed singular ‘crystallising’ attitude built from a multiplicity of possible perspectives that others may hold of you). What can be seen here is how such an attitude is relationally configured and not objective in its expectations and assumptions; it addresses expectations of practice and behaviour as configured in and through categorial relationships between people, practice and place. In the case of the Park Rangers as public workers, the awareness of the so-called ‘crystallising’ attitude is seeable in their work practice, as is demonstrated *inter alia* in the aesthetic choreography involved in the removal of pennies from the weir. In this current example, however, the orientation to the generalised other manifests in concerns of our practice being audited and documented. Importantly, the generalised other is not imaginary, hypothetical, or symbolically instructive; here the generalised other is a categorially-organised property displayed by the man with the camera, and later the man on his bike⁷. The Ranger sees a man with a camera, and in him he sees a

⁶ It is standard practice for Rangers to carry litter pickers with them on routine patrols, in order to keep up the material maintenance of the park as a by-product of their surveillance and enforcement job. It was also noted by one Ranger that it helps justify their patrols visually as a legitimate walking practice, and not simply them ‘having a wander’ around the park.

⁷ See, as a point of comparison, Barbara Simpson (2009: 1335) for ‘the generalised other’ as unknown (but real, actual) people who we engage with in ‘transactional’ conversations. She uses the example of speaking to someone on the phone when she calls the bank. This person becomes the ‘voice of the bank’ and is mediated by one’s understanding of the bank as “a generalised system of significant symbols”.

potentially incriminating snapshot documenting the perceived failures of his work-role requirements, and further their prospective public broadcasting and auditing.

The ‘generalised other’ is only available to the Ranger in this way *because the scene is available to be mutually assembled*. Of course, we are carrying litter pickers, and practitioners who carry litter pickers are typically expected to use such tools to pick litter, especially when there is currently so much of it due to the fast-flowing river. Like street cleaners, the Ranger “as a category of public worker is neither permitted to not see the waste nor to walk on by” (Ablitt and Smith, 2019: 874). In this way, the scene (as formulated by the Ranger) is one in which we are open to be criticised (and photographically recorded), but this is because this is a scene which is collaboratively assembled as culturally plausible action. Again, the litter pickers we were carrying were inference-rich resources that undeniably tied us to this category of action, but (and perhaps because of this) the question was not received as a neutral enquiry. The Rangers’ policy is to carry litter pickers on all routine patrols, but they are rarely directly oriented to or acknowledged by members of the public. This all points to ‘Are you picking litter?’ as an unusual question, and more so in this moment, a moral judgment on the failures of work obligations. The scene is *collaboratively* constituted as an activity of moral judgment which makes relevant the *collaborative* competencies of the ‘generalised other’. It is a collaborative production. The mechanisms involve triangulating the litter picker as a morally inferential work device – a (currently impotent) work tool – made practically impotent by virtue of the evidence of the continued existence of litter. The litter is produced as a work object. Its category-relevance as such is made clear in this triangulation by the carrying of specialist tools for picking it up, whose dereliction in turn invokes ineptitude, producing the Rangers

as failed workers. The 'generalised other' – as an activity – is accomplished with recourse to the mutual intelligibility of this categorial assemblage; its eventual accomplishment achieved in the Ranger's defensive invocation of safety "in these [weather] conditions".

It is worth saying something of the ethnographic organisation of these fieldnotes as two *related* encounters. There is no way of knowing from this ethnographic description what the man with the camera was doing; he could very well have been taking photos of the burst banks or the tumultuous churning white water. An affordance of the ethnographic method, however, is the available disjuncture between the Ranger's professional concerns and my own situated (lay)understanding of the emerging scenario as a situated observer. Regarding the Ranger's relational construction of the likely candidate vehicle of the 'generalised other' (who expects public workers to do the job of clearing litter), it is interesting to note that he was, observably, at least partially correct. Of the two people who we saw in those few minutes, one of them very directly asked if we were picking litter. It was not until the second encounter in that short period of time that the plausibility of the Ranger's concerns about our actions being audited by members of the public was accomplished as valid (to the ethnographer – as a witnessing party – whose competence in the routine features of the setting is not specific to Rangering (see Tolmie, 2011: 56)). The camera man's potential to audit or record evidence of apparent negligent litter practice was immediately available to the Ranger, and his presence occasioned the account to me about this being "exactly the kind of thing" that members of the public would challenge them about. Carrying on, the encounter with the cyclist shortly thereafter is a practical proof procedure of that general observation being made previously. Whether or not

either park user was actually challenging the Ranger's practice, these encounters are constitutively constructed as thematically linked public auditing events *by the Ranger himself* which turns on his account and foregrounds his responsibility for park maintenance. Such is the case that the encounters cumulatively and reciprocally showcase – ethnographically – the shared reality of the setting in which Rangers are demonstrably routinely aware of the 'generalised other'. But this ethnographic construct is sensitive to, and takes the lead from, the Ranger's own orientation.

Again, the 'generalised other' should be understood as a relational and collaborative activity, and while it should be noted that all action is publicly 'accountable' (in the sense that they are "observable-and-reportable" (Garfinkel, 1967: 1)) the Park Rangers' public actions are (and have been) the subject of closer scrutiny from members of the public for a multitude of reasons⁸. Therefore, relationally, the Rangers display a heightened awareness of – and a routine orientation to – the 'generalised other', not just as a social rule of normalcy, but as a potential source of personal and institutional trouble exhibited in asymmetrical interactional relations. The 'generalised other' is a collaboratively warranted and displayed orientation to the foregrounding of public work obligations, and a co-produced activity in itself. In all of the instances described in this chapter thus far, this has come through in the stable interactional methods and positions the Rangers come to take almost immediately any time they are approached by questioning members of the public. However, in this instance it has been demonstrated exactly how pervasive this concern is, and how separate encounters are produced as interconnected in and through a foregrounded and

⁸ These reasons include their commitment to the 'community', or their concerns about the environment, or because 'their taxes pay their wages', or because they believe in 'speaking truth to power', and so on.

perceived co-produced relevance of this public attitude. The 'generalised other' is accomplished not simply as an internal, 'mental' construction by the Ranger, but by publicly available orientations organised through interaction, co-produced in and through the category relevancies of situation. What is abundantly clear is that the 'generalised other' is not simply an imagined typology of normality. It is a practical accomplishment; an outcome of categorially-organised, publicly available interactional relations. We cannot say for certain that routine orientation to the 'generalised other' is a *motivator* for Rangering practice, but certainly that their practice regularly establishes justificatory positions by default, and through this the omnirelevance of the category of park user as auditor is accomplished. It *is* Rangering practice, and it is inescapable for public workers like the Park Rangers.

Burst banks

The city has just suffered its worst storm of the year, and the river has burst its banks in places. We're on the adjacent cycle trail moving towards an area of newly flooded ground ahead of us. In particular, as the Ranger explains to me, we're looking for immediate threats from the storm: fallen trees, blocked paths, or paths now underwater. The idea is to scout the area, assess the situation and alert the rest of the team of any issues via radio. If deemed necessary, the plausible solution is for more Rangers to come down in the van and cordon off potentially dangerous areas from public access.

Two older cyclists come up the trail from behind us. Without stopping one of them calls out:

“Better do something about that river, boys...” As he cycles into the distance, he shouts his punchline loudly so it can just be heard over the sound of rustling leaves and rushing water, “...*pull the plug out!*”

A lot can be gleaned about public expectations of the Park Rangers’ work roles from this momentary encounter with the cyclists. Another type of analysis may be inclined to describe it as a symbolic representation of the liminal space occupied by the Rangers, in terms of the ambiguous public expectations of the remit of their work. This may be so; it may be that this simple line ‘summarises’ and ‘represents’ what members of the public think the Rangers’ job is all about. However, it may be more useful to treat it, interactionally, as an accomplishment of the situation. In doing so, we can further see how the Rangers’ practice routinely and contingently produces the gestalt of the park space itself, specifically in the way boundaries and borders are practically accomplished by their routine maintenance.

Towards a practical accomplishment of park space

An initial point of notice in this excerpt, both in the preliminary ethnographic description and in the transcription of the cyclist’s comment, is that it shows how the Rangers are expected to deal with ‘external’ issues, because these issues are still, practically speaking, *park* issues. As is described, the Ranger was already on task in assessing the flooding situation caused by the burst banks of the adjacent river. The river itself is the joint responsibility of other Council departments and Government agencies, namely Highways and the Coastguards, while flooding is the responsibility of another Government sponsored body. Nevertheless workers from these teams typically operate on a call-out basis, and do not engage in routine patrols along the river. The

Rangers, whose technical remit is the adjoining park which borders the river, are the only uniformed ‘boots on the ground’ in the vicinity, and thus the only ‘approachables’ around of some visible authority or responsibility. The truth, of course, is that there is little anyone can do about high water levels, whether or not the waterways fall under their remit. What is also true, however, is that members of the public will still approach the Rangers to complain about, or ask them to address (or, at the very least, talk to them about) issues which are both outside of their technical remit and, sometimes, outside of the realm of their (or anyone else’s) capabilities. This fundamental observation demonstrates how the park’s spatiality is co-produced in a situated, emergent way through mundane practice. Moreover, this shows how the boundaries and gestalt of urban park space is defined socially and relationally, as opposed to purely geographically. Urban parks are more than just spaces with grass and trees and people in it, and in this excerpt (and in an aggregate of the ethnographic vignettes before it) it can be seen how a shared understanding of urban parks is co-produced in interaction.

So, to begin an exploration into what is happening in the above excerpt: it will be apparent to all readers, as it was to the Ranger and I *in situ*, that the cyclist who called out that we “Better do something about that river...” was joking. The futility of such a vague request as to “do something about” the rising water levels would perhaps – in another situation – be enough to accomplish it as a joke, but something occasions the cyclist to double down and confirm the light-hearted facetiousness of the request with a more blatant punchline⁹. This is not accidental; through the organisational

⁹ While I am acutely aware that explaining a joke is a guaranteed way to ruin it, and I do go on to explain it in the analysis, the basic summary is that the cyclist is invoking

mechanisms of established social conventions such as 'jokes' we can see the categorial relevancies which produce the reality of the Rangers and the parks in a mundane, orderly way. Sacks (1972a) notes that the category 'joke' is in a contrast set with 'serious', but the response accomplishing either one is dependent on membership categorisation devices of which the performer and recipient of the joke are constituent features. Both Sacks (1972a) and Schegloff (1987) note, also, the response turns (typically laughter) as being of import for the unambiguous achievement of a joke, but in this instance the cyclists did not wait around to hear a response before doubling down. Their backs were turned as they cycled into the distance, and over the sound of the wind in the trees and the thrashing river would not have heard a response (indeed, this is why it was not deemed relevant to record this in the description).

Without hearing a response, the cyclist still doubled down to make certain the joke was fulfilled and understood as such. In this way, its sequential character is less pressing here than the categorial work that is displayed in the two-part formulation of telling a joke to a member of the category of public worker, who may plausibly hear similar statements as legitimate requests for action. Indeed, once accomplished, the joke is hearable as a jibe at the category of entitled park user whose first thought may be to look to the Rangers for a resolution, but the interactional work required to get to that accomplished position involved repairing the initial formulation with a recognisably formatted punchline. Now, the cyclist employed a softener prior to the punchline, informally referring to us as 'boys', a proffer which suggests an intentional negation of

incredulity while making it unavoidably obvious that he is joking when he suggests "pull[ing the river's] the plug out". Rivers do not have drains with plugs.

the category-boundness available in other formulations. Hypothetical formulations of a 'serious' category might directly invoke the link between a public servant and securing a potentially dangerous public area for which they are responsible, for example, 'As Park Rangers, what are you going to do about the river?' Of course, this hypothetical reference to 'the river' is indexically hearable as 'the risks posed by the river on public safety in the surrounding area'. In the actual situation, however, the cyclist's reference is unambiguous in that he is referring to 'the river' itself as the trouble; a trouble which can be apparently rectified by "pulling the plug out".

That the cyclist felt it necessary to provide a further punchline in order to make certain that we heard the joke as such, says something of the shared understanding of the Park Rangers' category-boundness to park space. What sets a public park apart from other spaces with grass and trees, is its maintenance by Park Rangers, and moreover their availability to be held responsible or accountable for this maintenance. In this way, the Park Rangers are constituent features of the park, and the gestalt contexture is visually perceived in and through the Rangers being present and doing their job. Even though the cyclist softened his glib statement by calling us 'boys', there is a clear categorial reasoning involved in his orientation to us – in our uniforms – as members of a category of person for whom it may be an ordinary or routine experience to hear requests to "do something about" a local trouble in the parks. Whether or not he was aware that the river did not fall under the Park Rangers' responsibility is quite irrelevant. The relevancies are invoked even through the interactional device of the joke; the joke only works because such an inference could plausibly be made. The river thus becomes a practical park issue by virtue of its physical encroachment into

the park space, but also through the categorial assumptions of the visual order as demonstrated by park users, whether facetiously or not.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has showcased, through a number of ethnographic examples, some of the ways that the Park Rangers deal with the routine, locally emergent ‘trouble’ of being approached by members of the public, and furthermore the specific issues that are communicated in these encounters. It began by describing the stable and orderly phenomenon of the Rangers’ treatment as ‘approachables’ in the gestalt of the park, and through this set out to demonstrate how they handle mundane interpersonal troubles as part of their daily work practices. At the crux of the analyses is the categorial work in and of these encounters, and this is explored in the participants’ orientations to practices, objects, people, and places. From manual tools, to trees, to ‘lucky pennies’, to litter and debris, the Rangers handle or orient to these objects in the course of their quotidian maintenance activities – preferentially – in terms of their practical relevance to the job at hand, but also negotiate their intersubjectivity and demonstrate sensitivity to their contested categorial status. This contestation is seeable in their routine practical handling and hearable in their talk with members of the public, and is at the core of the co-production of the public service carried out by the Park Rangers (of which the park users are demonstrable collaborators).

It has been argued that being a *public* worker involves – centrally – an unremitting orientation to ‘the public’, and how they have no time out from this. When in uniform, the Rangers are available to be made accountable to members of the public, as legitimate, professional public practitioners. An important observation in this chapter

has been how professionalism (along with 'strategy' and 'system') is categorially, endogenously, and *collaboratively* produced as a by-product of these routine activities and encounters, and how continuously emerging relevancies and order properties equally reproduce and facilitate its use as a situated practical resource. I have demonstrated, empirically, how the gloss of 'professionalism' becomes innately relevant to situations of public work in the parks. What this means is the constituent mechanisms in the visual and moral orders accomplish the Rangers and their work practices as legitimate and professional; *ergo* the public availability of this professionalism becomes a resource by which members can see the organisation of public park space as park space. Accounting practices around legitimate work strategies are organised as locating an action within an activity of an ongoing project; such a project is communicated as having a cause, a consequence, and an expressed next action. This argument will follow on into the next chapter, and will be developed in close dialogue with observational data which shows the moment by moment character of people putting the institution of the park together in public interactional encounters. As the Park Rangers are a contingent feature of the 'normal' park scene, their very availability is contingent on the collaborative, mutually intelligible production of the phenomenon of the urban public park. The park is made and remade as a relevant organisational structure in each encounter.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASSEMBLING THE PARK

Introduction: Developing an argument for the accomplishment of urban park space

This chapter is the second substantial part of a thesis designed with a fairly straightforward organisational logic. In the previous chapter, the ethnographic descriptions from which analyses were conducted were all examples of encounters in which the Park Rangers were initially approached by park users. This was identified as an orderly phenomenon routinely accomplished in park space which was central to the organisation of the Rangers' interactional experiences on shift; they were shown to be routinely available to members of the public for numerous informational and potential auditing purposes, some of which involved engagement on issues for which they had little or no formal responsibility. Now, also central to the Park Rangers' ground-level management and enforcement role is the requirement to approach park users. This is done for numerous reasons, whether they pertain to routine time management (asking people to leave at the end of the day while locking up), or to 'check in on' them or to remind them of park rules if it appears that they might be breaching them, or to ask them if they require assistance should it be visibly apparent that they might need it, and so on. In what follows here, then, I will further explore the quotidian 'goings-on' in the Rangers' public interactional encounters, and how mundane civics are achieved on the ground, albeit this time focusing on these occasions in which they, themselves, approach members of the public. The argument continues in Chapter 6, in which observations are made of encounters of a similar

organisational structure to the ones outlined here albeit with a specific focus on the changing micro-contingencies of public space in public interactions in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some of the ethnographic examples in this chapter have been published previously in an article in an 'Uncomfortable Geographies' special issue in the journal *Emotion, Space and Society* (Ablitt, 2020), which argued for the interactional accomplishment of provisional private territories in public parks. The argument was couched in a specific, journal-oriented focus on the *public availability* of emotions and "affective intensities" (cf. Bissell, 2008; Muñoz 2020), particularly around the notion of 'discomfort'; with the simple aim of the piece being to offer an alternative take on the conventional theorisation of discomfort as 'disorderly'. The paper traced the phenomenon of the Rangers 'walking in on' situations deemed to be private by the participants and demonstrated how social order can be found even in potentially intense, awkward, uncomfortable, face-to-face interactional situations. It argued that private space is socially organised, and contingent on situated activity. Even in otherwise public spatial contexts (for example, public parks), there are mundane ways of 'doing' privacy that facilitate the assemblage of a scene wherein it is possible to 'walk in on' the incumbents of that space. In this way, it argued that territories are made and remade at ground-level, and territorialisation is done as an *occasional* activity (Laurier, et al., 2002). The kind of (deviant) activities that are sometimes done out of public view in parks (performing sexual acts, smoking cannabis, and so on) are immediately accomplishable as expectedly *private* events by approaching parties (including the Park Rangers) because they are incongruously produced in the park context. Competent members can disassemble the assembled scene and see "the

possible illegitimacy of some combination” of people and place that constitute it (Sacks, 1995: 90), but the ways in which these incongruities are dealt with delicately and relatively stably in interaction go some way to demonstrate their ‘autochthonous’ order.

While the analytic focus of this chapter is not the same – it is not about discomfort, nor specifically about social order (although there is still ‘order at all points’ and order is an inevitable by-product of practical action) – it will develop some of the rudimentary arguments around the accomplishment of urban park space, attending in some parts to similar issues of expected privacy and personal space. A main argument taken forward is that spatial productions and formulations are contingent on practical action, and that there may be something to be said about interrelating, multi-layered categorisations of ‘public’ space and the occasioned event of being engaged by the Park Rangers which provides for the categorial properties through which the park can be practically assembled.

Another notable point of difference to the aforementioned article is that most of the additional examples in this chapter comprise more mundane, unexciting engagements by the Rangers. By this, I mean that the approaches involve interruptions that are fairly trivial by comparison, in the sense that the social ‘stakes’ are not as high as, say, ‘walking in on’ people engaging in unequivocally criminal, illicit, or lewd activities. For example, in a description of an encounter with two women accused of picking roses, such an encounter is not recognisable as a territorial breach, and approaching them does not consist of ‘walking in on’ their activity. This is not to say that such engagements are inconsequential; the broad argument in this thesis is that it is exactly

in these mundane encounters where the co-production of 'Rangering' as a collaborative public service practice occurs. The quotidian management of the park is shown, in practice, to manifest in and as a series of mundane negotiations taking place at the peripheries of responsibility. A key noticing is that responsibility and accountability are fundamental orientations in these negotiations. Ultimately, the parks are cared for, looked after, managed spaces, and the Rangers are at the centre of this caring practice. Furthermore, it is in these mundane encounters that the urban public parks are realised and produced as locally organised social phenomena.

Therefore I will continue considering here in this chapter the question of accomplishing park space that was being developed at the end of the last. In this way it is important to note that I am not arguing that it is *only* in *this* phenomenon (of the Rangers approaching people) that the park is realised and 'assembled', and not, say, in the encounters described in the previous chapter. The distinction between these two types of encounter as different activities is largely made for the sake of the organisation of this thesis, but also to outline the differently navigated public relations that each showcase. Both are perspicuous settings for the display of mundane, ground-level, public, civic operations, but each is predicated on different practical contingencies and, perhaps, power relations. Moreover, the *haecceities* (Garfinkel, 2002: 99) of these moments between these people in these parks can be seen in both. The urban parks as 'assemblages of haecceities' is something that will be further explored in this chapter.

Locking up

Locking up happens at half an hour before sunset everyday. Today, a grey day in late

March, the sun is setting at 6.30pm, so the laminated A4 sheet cable-tied to all the gates reads 'THIS PARK WILL CLOSE AT 18:00 TODAY'. It is about 5.50pm and the three Rangers have already, separately, locked the four corner gates of this section of the park, leaving only the two centre gates on each side remaining to be locked. It's a quiet evening and there are only two people left in this fenced section of the park: a young couple who are sat on a bench along the central thoroughfare between the two centre gates. All three Rangers and I meet up by the penultimate gate, waiting while one finishes locking it. Once this is done, all four of us begin moving in the direction of the couple on the bench in order to inform them that the park is closing and to usher them out of the last unlocked gate. Both are already looking sidelong at us by the time we start walking towards them, and before we have barely taken a few steps (and are still 50 yards away), they get up abruptly and make a beeline for the exit.

Seeing schedule: Realising park time and park space

That the couple complied with the Rangers' 'rules' without even being engaged in focused interaction is notable. Their getting up and moving to the exit is seeable as compliance with situated rules emerging in those moments from the Rangers' course of action. The fixed, formal rules for closing may be written on the laminated sheet on the gates – 'THIS PARK WILL CLOSE AT 18:00 TODAY' – but these rules did not directly force the couple's abrupt exit, nor was their action coincidental. The relationship between the action of walking towards the couple and them getting up and leaving is not programmatic in a 'cause and effect' way, but rather the occasion of the approach initiates a procedure whereby 'schedule' – as a device – is not only invoked in the first instance, but is also seen to be a work domain of the Park Rangers. The Rangers are not just walking here; their walk is recognisably purposive as part of their

scheduled work practice of locking up, and moreover keeping to and ‘doing’ the park’s schedule. Walking towards the couple is recognised as an approach enforcing that schedule, even from an approximate 50-yard distance, requiring of them the invocation of common-sense knowledge of the social structure of the park, not just establishing themselves categorially as members of the public, but specifically as soon-to-be trespassers. The couple may just be sitting on a bench, but as a spatiotemporally contextualised – or “settinged” (cf. Sacks, 1995) – activity, this becomes a locally emergent trouble. With only one more gate left to shut, and nobody else in the vicinity, four uniformed Rangers walking towards them is an action which occasions their own activity as a ‘trouble’ for those Rangers, for the park’s schedule, and thus for the routine production of the park. And this is what is important for the analysis: how the collaborative handling of actions and events in parks as temporal, and of a routine park temporality, can produce the ‘the park’ and formulate it as a shared setting of mutual intelligibility. It is the setting of ‘the park’ specifically, and not simply ‘public space’ that becomes relevant in this course of *scheduled* action. As Sacks (1995: 521) had it:

“...it’s not simply that you invoke a setting, but one of the ways that you *make* a setting out of some course of activities, is by beginning to develop things like ‘time’ in it; and that involves being able to coherently use things like ‘early,’ ‘late,’ etc.”

Notably, here, it is ten minutes before the ‘official’ closing time, yet this prematurity does not appear to be practically relevant as a member’s phenomenon, inasmuch as ‘earliness’ is not formulated or oriented to by any incumbents in the data. Nevertheless it is clearly close enough to the closing time, or at least, the right time of day to

reasonably be closing. It is unclear (and irrelevant) here whether the couple are aware that it is not quite 6pm yet, and that 6pm is the official closing time. The acknowledgement in the course of this collaborative activity is that the Rangers are the actors whose responsibility it is to convene the *schedule* of the parks, and if they are seen to be closing up, then it is time to leave. Whether or not they are closing up ten minutes early, this action of closing up is accomplished as a scheduled activity; this *is* the schedule. Of course, park users can protest (and they do, particularly on warm summer evenings), and they can sometimes negotiate for a few more minutes, and they can convince the Rangers to temporarily reopen the gates to allow them to quickly commute through on bicycle, and so on. But the Rangers are still available as legitimate timekeepers; the legitimacy of the locking up routine is seen as a part of their broader work routine. Locking up at dusk – even when done ten minutes early – is still within the domain of legitimate park work *because* it is a normal feature of the park’s temporality, as something that is always, routinely, done at dusk; the normative ‘end of the day’ for the park. They are *timely* actions.

Of course, there will be a hypothetical limit to the plausibility of their actions being demonstrably ‘timely’, and this will be collaboratively produced and negotiated *in situ* by all co-present members¹⁰. To borrow from and paraphrase what Peter Eglin (2009: 50) said of students’ and professors’ adherence to university timetables: park users *have to* attend the quotidian park schedule, not simply as “a matter of clock and calendar” but to uphold the “normative, temporal order” of the park. The ‘doing’ of

¹⁰ While there is no fixed rule for how early this might be, we can imagine that locking the gates midmorning would not hold the same legitimacy as a ‘timely’ activity. We would be able to see ‘schedule’ invoked here too, however, from the formulation of park users’ inevitable protests. These would no longer be minor negotiations for ‘a couple more minutes’, but likely full-on complaints based on that practically objective park schedule.

locking up is an implicit instruction for park users to do what park users do when the park is closing: leave. It is a collaboratively produced activity in and of any 'closable' setting or establishment, perhaps, but the normative temporal order of closing time being essentially tied to sunset, and the imprecision of the situated measure of when this is (ten minutes leeway seems acceptable in this particular situation) on a grey evening in March in an almost-empty park, is something of a specified feature of this lockable public park, demonstrating its settinged haecceities. Parks are daytime places, for daytime activities. As it goes, at the end of daylight hours, the park ceases to exist as a legitimate space for those activities. The category of person who might exist in the park space at night is certainly not that of a legitimate park user.

To turn attention to the spatial element of this locking up procedure: another analysis might look at the gates as spatial devices, as boundary-makers or territorial thresholds which dictate what is and is not park space. I will consider, instead, that the normative material boundaries of the park – fences, gates, trees, and hedges – are used, reinforced, and manipulated by the Rangers to produce the space as distinctly organised, protected, and managed. Attention to the course of scheduled, management action in which the gates are recruited as practical resources is one observable way of realising park space as an emergent social phenomenon. It will be apparent that gates do not lock themselves, and from the residual evidence that the Rangers find of people rough sleeping (or dogging, or using drugs¹¹) in the parks overnight, it is clear that they are not infallible territorial structures. If someone wants to get over a fence, they will. Not all parks are fenced, and indeed, not all parts of this

¹¹ Or any such activity that might be “tucked away temporally” while “the city is not operating at full bore” (Smith and Hall, 2018: 382).

particular park are fenced either. Therefore a fence does not a park make, in any objective sense. Instead, routine practical action of systematically locking the gates every evening is – *inter alia* – what regularly accomplishes the quotidian territory of the park. ‘Locking up’ is perhaps one of the most obvious practices in which the gates momentarily come into being, or are perceived by routine members of the park.

Much like how Robin Smith and Tom Hall’s (2018: 383) outreach workers socially accomplish a rough sleeper’s temporary sleeping spot on the street as the rough sleeper’s own territory by *gently* waking them up with a sensitively formulated ‘Good morning!’, the couple on the bench see the Rangers locking up and subsequently walking towards them and accomplish the park as, suddenly, a territory in which they are not welcome. Such a spatiotemporal accomplishment is achieved only by the categorial work that is done in and through the coproduced course of action which positions the couple, at that moment in time, as on the verge of being interlopers in that space. The occasion of locking up encourages them to cooperate with the Rangers’ territorial procedures, coproducing the management and preservation of the norms of the park’s quotidian schedule. This being said, the park is not always produced as a territorial object; the territorialisation of the park can be displayed as a consequence of specific coproduced activities, but park space can also be realised in different, more mundane ways. This was briefly introduced at the end of Chapter 4, through the example of the cyclist joking about ‘pulling the plug out’ in the river, and will be explored further later on in this chapter. In the next section, however, I will showcase a moment of explicit territorialisation being done as a collaborative negotiation between a Park Ranger and someone identifiable as an interloper in an intra-park territorial production known to the Rangers as a ‘hotspot’ of antisocial

behaviour.

Walking in on a potential sexual encounter

On a mid-afternoon patrol, something catches the Ranger's attention from across the plain. A man and a dog; the same man who – as the Ranger reminds me – we had bumped into earlier while we were litter picking in the long grass further down the feeder canal trail – and who had seemingly actively avoided us at the time. While it is not expected that park users greet Rangers, it seemed odd not to acknowledge the presence of another person – regardless of who they were – in the secluded spot we had encountered each other previously.

From a distance, it looks to me as though the man is following his dog – which is off the leash – into the bushes by the brook running the periphery of the field. The Ranger, however, decides it is worth following him. This space is a 'hotspot' known to the Rangers – and, of course, to those who frequent it – as a specific meeting place for public homosexual encounters.¹²

“Let's see what he's up to...”

We had been litter picking similar secluded spots along the bank of the waterway, and so, it would not look like we were actually following the dog walker. Anyway, the decision to follow him into this space is, admittedly, partly down to curiosity. It has been a slow afternoon, and uniformed Rangers have the visible authority to enter any

¹² The Rangers recognise that there is nothing *more* deviant about gay public encounters than straight ones. It is, however, the case that this particular spot is recognised as a regular site of the specific phenomenon of 'cottaging'. This phenomenon was perhaps most famously documented by Laud Humphreys (1975) in his ethnographic study *Tearoom Trade*. Many of the sexual encounters described in his book take place in public toilets in a city park.

space in the park – and engage with any park user – that they wish. I am still quite certain that the man simply – and innocently – followed his curious dog into the bushes. As justification, we should, by rights, litter-pick around the brook anyway, as it is a seldom-tackled area.

The undergrowth by the tree-lined banks of the brook has created a barrier through which the man and his dog have since disappeared. A short while later, we arrive at the gap in the shrubbery in which they were last seen. Climbing through, it is somewhat disorientating, as we tediously navigate our litter pickers around plant limbs and tread brambles down so as not to snag on the half-full bin liners that we are carrying. The dog walker and his dog are not immediately visible, and all that can be heard is the sound of water cascading over the rocky bed of the brook. We continue picking debris out of the undergrowth, scanning the ground for hypodermic needles and condoms.

We manoeuvre around a bush and suddenly find ourselves in direct co-presence with the dog walker. He is standing by the bank, about five metres away, with his phone raised as if he is recording something in the brook. My immediate thought is that he is taking photos of his dog playing in the water.

“You alright, mate?” the Ranger calls out.

“Yep.” responds the man without shifting his gaze from his phone.

The sound of the brook recedes from my attention and aggressive growling replaces it. The situation becomes more tense as we become aware – from the growling – that the dog is not in the water, but much closer, at the man’s feet. Being faced with the potential danger of an aggressive dog, but also the uncertainty of the situation regarding the man recording, the Ranger asks:

“Whoa...is he okay?”

The man peers up from his phone, while keeping it pointed across the brook:

“It’s okay. He’s just warning you.”

Unsure about what exactly the man is implying his dog is warning us about (but nonetheless hearing this as a threat) we begin to retreat. As I turn back for the gap in the bushes in which we entered, I catch a glimpse of another man on the other side of the brook. In my haste, and with the undergrowth obstructing my vision, I made out the bust of a scrawny man holding his t-shirt up above his navel, pointing his own phone downwards as though he was recording something immediately in front of him while muttering what sounded like ‘sex talk’.

“What was that?” I asked the Ranger I was with, recounting what I thought I saw on the other side of the brook.

“Bummin’, probably. Probably a voyeur. You get them a lot round here – usually married blokes who come here to meet up with other blokes.”

Territorialisation: Established knowledge and emergent perception

This extended ethnographic vignette was one that I first described in a published paper (Ablitt, 2020) to demonstrate how ‘discomfort’ is ordinarily produced and navigated in ‘obtrusive’ practices. Goffman’s (1971: 51) concept of ‘obtrusion’ describes practices that demonstrate “the capacity of the claimant to press territorial demands into a wider sphere than others feel is his due, causing them to feel that they themselves could be seen as functioning intrusively...” This was the organisational focus from which the original analysis was built, explicating the interactional ‘tactics’ through which the Ranger and I (perhaps inadvertently) accomplished the dogwalker/voyeur/dogger’s

claim to that private territory in those uncertain, somewhat intense moments. An important point in that analysis was the respecified formulation of the dog as the emergent, immediate trouble. The dog became a mediator of the focus of the encounter, as the Ranger oriented to it as the problem (“Whoa...is he okay?”) rather than directly to the man of uncertain intentions. In serving as a resource through which the man could be questioned without being positioned as the source of the trouble, the dog’s growling is ultimately collaboratively and sequentially invoked as a reason to terminate the encounter. It was argued in the original paper that the Ranger’s initial attempt to reclaim the territory had failed largely due to the illegibility of the situation as a clear-cut scene of deviance. The Ranger could not get a tactical foothold to initiate an accusation of definite wrongdoing *in situ* and was thus obliged, interactionally, to stand down.

The conclusion made in the paper suggested that this may be due to the original activity not being demonstrably ‘obtrusive’ enough for the Rangers to leverage it as a public-enough territorial claim worthy of a counter-claim in the first place. The potential ‘doggers’ or ‘cottagers’ were relatively discreet and the fact of their activity was not verifiable in the moment. This maps on quite stably to Laud Humphreys’ (1975) observations of similar public sexual activities, in which he noted – much like this secluded spot by the brook – that the most ‘distinguishing trait’ of an active ‘tea room’ (public toilet block used for homosexual encounters) is “its isolation from other facilities in a park” (p. 11). He described the routine operation of “decoy activity” to minimise the risk of intrusion from enforcement agents (p. 87), or to avoid “penetration of the encounter’s boundaries by persons who are obviously minors” (p. 98), while a further tactic of ‘tea roomers’ is to “play it cool” if there is an intrusion into their activities, while

not “prolonging the interaction” any more than necessary (p. 98–99). For obvious reasons, these people do not want to be seen, and try to make sure they are out of public view when they are partaking in such activities.

I would like to build on all of this but take a slightly different approach to the analysis of this ethnographic description in this chapter. While it is clear from the comparison with Humphreys’ famed study that the territorial tactics implemented around phenomena such as ‘tea rooming’ or ‘cottaging’ are relatively stably produced, my position here is to take a step back and look at how spatial territories are assembled through layers of locally accountable reasoning that invoke an interplay between established knowledge and emergent visual and spatial perception. The construction of ‘hotspots’ is procedurally relevant to the Rangers’ routine patrols; the patrols are designed in such a way so as to occasion the possibility of ‘walking in on’ deviant activities. It is not by accident that Rangers find themselves in spaces or situations like this; it is their job to walk in on, disrupt, and in some way challenge instances of antisocial behaviour. Importantly, the practice of patrolling and the category of the ‘hotspot’ reciprocally produce one another: there can be no ‘hotspot’ without a space being made available as ‘patrollable’ and ‘policeable’, and, equally, a pedestrian practice cannot be considered an enforcement patrol without regular attendance of established spaces of deviant behaviour which might be ‘policeable’ spaces. This last part is not strictly true, of course; as will be seen herein, park enforcement is not necessarily limited to these spaces. However, a walk around the park that actively avoids these secluded spots is at risk of being perceived by fellow incumbents as just a walk around the park. As was shown in Chapter 4, a routine public orientation is reportable in the Park Rangers’ work, and professionalism is available and

accomplished in their work activities (and indeed it accomplishes them as emergently available as *work* activities). Avoiding ‘hotspots’ is not an option for public workers, such as the Rangers, who work in public view. They must be seen to be occupied by their work-based agenda; this is an organisational feature of their public work. As such, the danger of their patrol work being perceived as ‘just a walk around the park’ would have significant implications for the expected public auditing of their work.

In a related work practice, the Rangers look to these (already known) hotspot locations for residual objects of deviance – specifically hypodermic needles and condoms – in order to remove them and maintain the safety of the park. They keep a tally of these objects, and on one occasion we struggled to find any, even in those ‘popular’ hotspots in which they are normally in abundance; this was communicated as a problem, with the Ranger jokingly suggesting that he would be “out of a job” if he could not find any. What this points to is an interplay between situated incumbency and established knowledge as mutual producers of the ‘hotspot’. The Rangers know about these hotspots due to prior experience of the kind of activity that goes on there, and the kind of object they find there, but those activities and/or objects need to be found there for them to remain practically classifiable as hotspots. Of course, *former* hotspots can exist, and new *candidate* hotspots can equally be found. For example, when some low-hanging branches were removed from a tree, the former secluded hotspot underneath it became visible from the path, and was no longer eligible to be a hotspot. Equally, the Rangers sometimes find newly overgrown areas that construct organic hollows shielded from outside visibility, which they can infer would be an ideal candidate space for the kind of deviant activity which requires the seclusion that such a space affords.

It should be noted that sometimes the inferences on which hotspots are established can seem somewhat tentative to someone who does not share the same competences in park space that the Rangers do. For example, when happening upon a secluded spot with a tree with a low-set stump limb (pictured), one of the Rangers present made the claim that this would be a candidate 'hotspot' for the specific activity of 'arborphilia' (sex with trees). The reasoning for



Figure 2: Perceived candidate site for arborphilia

the claim was that, aside from it being secluded, the low-set stump would be the right height and angle for a phallic object, namely a vegetable such as a cucumber, carrot, or marrow, to be attached to it and subsequently used for sexual gratification. This is arguably the type of practice that most people would not have even the most basic knowledge about, let alone a working knowledge of the practical mechanisms through which it takes place. The Rangers, however, know enough about it from the inference-rich materials they have previously found in similar park spaces (objects such as phallic vegetables, condoms, wet wipes, pots of Vaseline, and other 'improvised sex aides') to reassemble those residual categories (cf. Williams, 2003) of activity and space, and to successfully make professional claims about spaces with correspondingly appropriate features. Whether or not the inferences seem overly speculative or farfetched, and whether or not they are even legitimate claims (and not, say, an 'in joke' between Rangers which I am not privy to) does not really matter. The publicly available practical reasoning here demonstrates that such inferences about

activities and spaces *can be* and *are* made by Rangers, and as such their assembling of the scene through an orientation to these mundane features is recognisably achieved with recourse to a specific, collaboratively-produced ‘professional vision’ (Goodwin, 1994). It *is* a speculative claim, but it is one grounded in a judiciously mediated understanding of the kind of thing that goes on in the park, and consequently, the kind of thing that they, as Park Rangers, need to keep an eye out for in order to do their job of park management.

An objectivated account of a ‘hotspot’

When we describe the interplay between established, locative knowledge of existing hotspots of deviant behaviour, and the current, emergent, observable incumbency of the activity or inference-rich features that accomplish them as hotspots, what is being done, collaboratively, is the production of a locally ratifiable account of a concretely locatable hotspot. The term ‘hotspot’ implies a spot which is *routinely* used, so the brief example above of the Ranger claiming that a site could be used as an arborphilia hotspot is perhaps saying something more of the space than simply the possibility that someone could use it for that purpose on one occasion. The space’s *eternal* features are invoked as appropriate for its *routine* assembly, each next first time, as a site of specific and essential efficiency for that exact purpose, above all else. What is otherwise just an overgrown space in the park with a tree stump at its centre is constructed and made sense of – *only* – through very niche park knowledge of the very specific park practice of arborphilia. The haecceities of the park permeate and organise the Rangers’ local practical spatial reasoning; the categorisation of this spot is endogenously organised with recourse to exclusively local, professional knowledge.

This exclusive, local, professional knowledge is of core analytic interest. I want to explore how apparent speculation becomes legitimised work practice, and how the spatial production of the parks is organisationally contingent on these speculative practices. To do this, let's return to the instance in the vignette involving the dogwalker-cum-possible voyeur. What is seeable in the ethnographic description is the collaborative practical action involved in objectivating the Ranger's initial account of an apparent park trouble (Lieberman, 2018; 2020). The objectivated account relies on the emergent production of evidence through distinct local perceptual loci in order to be accomplished as legitimate and not simply pure speculation or conjecture¹³. However what will be noted is that speculation is never 'pure', but an action accountably bound up in categorial and practical reasoning. Giolo Fele and Ken Liberman (2020: 47) outline objectivation as "a method that parties use to convert a confirmed account into a social fact that parties are able to orient to as something external to themselves." They further cite Liberman (2018): "Moreover, 'Objectivation is the work of turning our thinking or activities into objects that are publicly available for people to use for organising the local orderlinesses of their affairs'."

The incident of 'walking in on' the man in the brook is – much like the claim that a space might be used for plant sex – occasioned by a *speculative* yet practically informed claim. Focusing on the moments before the conversation with the man, the ethnographic description sets out the participant observer's emergent sense-making of the scene, tracing the perspective of an individual whose competencies are organised through differing properties of the park. It is available to be read as itself a

¹³ Similarities may be seen in the legal requirement for police officers to demonstrate 'reasonable grounds for suspicion' in order to initiate a stop and search, as stipulated by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984) (Home Office, 2014).

sceptical account of the Ranger's communicated speculations regarding the man's intentions. He had initially claimed that he found it unusual for the man not to acknowledge us when we had come face-to-face earlier on, and that (collaboratively accepted) reasoning coupled with the information that the place we had last seen him was a known 'cottaging' hotspot served as a justificatory account for changing tack to a course of action to 'see what he's up to'. My own (lay) justification for the appropriateness of such an activity was that we would simply be continuing the job of litter picking that we were already observably doing. The 'curiosity' I accounted for in the description is not a viable justification in its own right for following a park user around, hence the acknowledged action of 'admitting' it to the reader. This being said, the Ranger's routine activity of patrolling and exploring and checking in on people does involve an element of curiosity, but it is important to note that the Rangers' 'curiosity' is never just a stab in the dark. In fact, enquiries on the basis of 'curiosity' are never entirely 'random' in any setting. It is informed by the pre-formulation of plausibility, taking existing knowledge and offering it as a hypothesis for why such curiosity is reliably informed and why it is thus a valid reason for further exploration.

Curiosity – as a foundation for informed action (in this case following the man into the brook area) – involves the doing of heuristic category-work, and it is posited here that the category-work being done in this instance is inextricably tied to the recognisable job of Rangering, both in formulations made by me (a non-Ranger) and by the Ranger present. For me, in my lay-understanding of (with privileged access to) the practice of Rangering, curiosity is recognisable as achievable *in situ* through fairly basic visual references of what Rangers routinely do and how they normally behave (patrolling, litter-picking, looking out for deviance). In my situated explication, following the man

was justified because we were observably already picking litter, and more importantly it was a quiet afternoon with not much going on. I took this to mean that the Rangers would not typically go out of their way to approach someone on the basis of seemingly thin evidence, and that this may be for my own sake, as a form of ‘manufactured’ excitement, or to give me something to write about, to spice up an otherwise uneventful day. This may be true, but again this does not necessarily matter (nor is there any way from the data of establishing this). What is clearly observable, is the Ranger’s category-work for positioning the man as a valid policeable object. For the Ranger, the identity category of ‘man who snubbed us’ and spatial category of ‘cottaging hotspot’ is enough to establish incongruence in light of park norms. The device of ‘public deviance’ is seeable as an extrapolation of the incongruity, specified by the routine knowledge of that precise spot.

Taking a step back, what is seen here in the ethnographic description is an event of collaborative ratification for the proposed course of action. Ultimately it is incumbent on the Ranger to set out plans and to lead on them, and my own input or responsibility in the ratification process is not symmetrical. Nevertheless, my copresence becomes relevant in and through the described account of the justification for the action. That the Ranger reminded me that the man had previously snubbed us, and that the spot was a known cottaging spot, is enough to see the publicly available category-work being done, and moreover that it is available as specifically and exclusively justification for the action of ‘seeing what he’s up to’. As it transpired – although the events in the brook were hazily recounted in the ethnographic description (because they were experienced as vague) – the finding of the man seemingly not alone, and the man’s veiled threat, accomplished Ranger’s ‘curiosity’ as professionally *intuitive* and

therefore legitimate. Even the man's prior snub was achieved as a proof procedure in light of his continued reticence in his incumbency of the scene. The way these moments are acknowledged as continually related, further accounts for the emergence of the ongoing scene as one of deviance. In this way, the series of events described in this vignette offers 'good enough' evidence for the collaborative categorial construction of this space as one at the centre of a situated territorial dispute, but moreover as one produced as a hotspot with recourse to existing professional and longitudinal knowledge further substantiated by the situated incumbency of the type of activity which the space is known for. The man's activity co-produces the space as a policeable hotspot, not only by occasioning the Ranger's patrol approach in the first place, but by continuing his evasive behaviour inasmuch as he does not provide an account of his incumbency in the space (which is hearable as a tacit expectation of the indexical "You alright, mate?") and then later when he uses his growling dog to threaten us.

It is noted, as it was in the original analysis (Ablitt, 2020), that the evidence provided in the ethnographic account is only 'good enough' to showcase the collaborative sensemaking going on within it, and not for other external purposes such as, for example, as a legal witness statement. What is interesting is that, particularly in the imprecise way the account is written, the reader is made aware of the vagueness of what was witnessed, however, this does not hinder the collaboratively warranted facts coproducing perception as mutually negotiated and categorially organised (cf. Smith, 2020). I had heard the 'sex talk' upon seeing the partially-obscured man across the brook holding his t-shirt up pointing his phone down in front of him, and this was corroborated by the Ranger retrospective acknowledgement that they were "Bummin',

probably.” The assembled scene makes sense, because its collaborative assembly is based on a number of plausibly interrelated categorial inferences, which are made with recourse to the Park Ranger’s professional expertise.

As Michael Mair and colleagues (2013: 407–408) noted in their analysis of a military inquiry of an issue of friendly fire in the Iraq war, there was an ‘interpretative asymmetry’ (Coulter, 1975) in the way that the implicated pilots’ *in situ* seeing of a (potential) hostile force was not available in a video of the incident. Such an impasse was navigated by asking the pilots to provide ‘in the moment’ accounts in order to ‘speak beyond’ what was captured in the video, serving as ‘resources’ for the retrospective recovery of the detailed scene. In any case, similarly describable situated analytic events can be seen here in the case of ‘walking in on’ the scene of potential sexual activity. Although rendered *post hoc* as ethnographic fieldnotes, the event is available as an emergent activity, from prospective hypotheses, to the woolly, high-intensity situated account, to the retrospective accomplishment by the privileged eye of the Park Ranger, establishing the experience as one that the Ranger anticipated in the first place. At least, the Ranger’s intuition is maintained and legitimised as an organisational feature in and of this event; and the production of the space by the brook is achieved as a perspicuous work domain of Rangering with recourse to the initial and hearably technical formulation of ‘hotspot’. The description of what happened during the exchange with the man by the brook and all that it entailed, was very much couched in a demonstration of the success of that intuition, showing me exactly what goes on in a ‘hotspot’. The retrospective narrative confirming that the thing the Ranger anticipated finding was the thing that we did indeed find, does the situated work of showcasing generalisability and replicability. This is arguably an

important feature in the construction of a 'hotspot', which, as has been previously mentioned, is a term that implies a spot of *regular* use. In this way the resource of successful intuition (as distinguishably organised from mere 'curiosity' or 'speculation') does the heavy lifting here.

To conclude this extended section, it is argued that description of accounting practices involved in constructing 'hotspots' is a perspicuous setting (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992) for the showcasing of collaborative, multimodal spatial production. The categorisation of a hotspot is emergently achieved in lockstep with the practical patrolling activity concomitant with the Park Rangers' routine experience, and perhaps points to a crucially *mobile* organisation of the local haecceities of park space. So called 'chance' encounters initiated by approaching Rangers are in fact acutely practically oriented to categorial incongruities heuristically constructed with recourse to the orderly 'professional vision' that organises their work-contingent perception. 'Intuition' is demonstrably ordered through spatialised invocations of the public expectations and practical contingencies of Rangering, and not merely on a whim. The organisational power of local social order is displayed in how the Rangers are able to make categorial inferences drawing together residual artefacts of practical activities and the materiality of a space, and further how their communicated intuition is collaboratively objectivated. Objectivated accounts of 'hotspots' may begin with tentative inquiries (i.e. 'Let's see what he's up to...'), but can be reified by invoking observations of an emergent incumbency of a 'deviant' activity as a resource, and then talking those observations into being in *post hoc* narrations. The observations are treated as proof procedures of that professional intuition in these *post hoc* narrations. Even ethnographically unclear events are shown to be reasonably coherent when

looking to a participant's orientation; the vignette may provide weak evidence for external validation, but the ethno-analyses demonstrate how the knowledge of the park space, and the 'hotspot' in particular, is collaboratively realised and brought into being by members themselves. The asymmetry in the reasoning that informs action between a Ranger and a non-Ranger participant observer reciprocally demonstrates the Rangers' expertise as driving their authority on park-related matters; and the privileging of their accounts of 'what happened' in a situation in which both parties are co-present is shown to be contingent on similar orientations to situated demonstrations of expertise. This displayed general park expertise can function differently *in situ*, but is still at the crux of the production of park space as situated expectations are navigated in the doing of park service roles, as will be shown in the next section.

Picking roses

We come past two women in the Rose Garden (we're heading down the path in their general direction, while they are stood on the lawn just a few metres off the path). One of the women is holding a few differently-coloured roses, and is leant forwards sniffing rose petals that her acquaintance is holding out in her hands. The Ranger calls over, pausing momentarily on the path as we come perpendicular to them:

“Scuse me, hello there!”

They look our way and the woman who was leaning over straightens up, the other cups her hands (full of petals) to her chest. They seem a little embarrassed.

“Could I just ask you not to pick the roses please?” He intimates moving away before he has finished speaking, but stops again when the woman holding the bunch of roses responds:

“Sorry...?”

“The roses; we’re just asking people if they could please enjoy them without interfering with their growth.”

“Okay, alright, but we weren’t picking these– well... we picked them up off the ground.”

It is early autumn and the ground is covered in petals and leaves, so this makes sense insofar as the petals are concerned, but not so much the full flowers.

“Oh, alright, no worries then. Just making sure ‘cause people do unfortunately come down here a lot to take cuttings.”

“No, we’ve just got these from the ground to make some presses.”

“Yeah by all means, that’s alright then. We’ve just been asked to keep an eye out because we don’t really want people taking the Park home with them, especially around this part with all the protected species.”

“Of course not.” The women scoff hastily.

“Anyway sorry to bother you, ladies!” The Ranger says, holding his hands up. He begins to move, but pauses again as the other woman continues:

“Hang on a minute... isn’t that what your volunteers are doing anyway? Clearing out the rose beds?” She says, gesturing into the distance down to the far corner of the Garden, to a group of people in hi-viz tabards milling around some bare rosebushes.

“Yeah, but not the ones still in flower–”

“Hmm, I thought they said all of them...”

“No, no– they’re perennials y’see, so they’ve gotta be pruned and looked after all year round.”

“Oh right, right...” the women murmur, smiling, as we walk away.

‘Taking the Park home’: Achieving the park through categorising ‘possessitives’

In the above excerpt, the Park Ranger ‘checks in’ on a very different kind of potentially deviant behaviour than in the previous example. In this case it did not amount to ‘walking in on’ an explicitly deviant activity, but it still involved approaching and interrupting people engaging in what may be an instance of mundane norm-breaching. As we saw in the previous chapter with the disagreement regarding the coppicing of hazels (and of course more generally), it is a commonly accepted preference for ‘natural’ objects be left alone, and to be appreciated non-destructively *in situ*. The Rangers find themselves on the receiving end of scepticism when their practices implicate the apparent destruction of wildlife, and this is reciprocal inasmuch as their own job involves protecting the park from vandalism. This vandalism is often committed against organic objects, such as disposable tray barbeques scorching the grass beneath them, or slacklines tied between trees tearing the bark off them, or local restaurant proprietors collecting bin liners full of wild garlic, or children ripping branches off trees as they climb them, or people picking daffodils or roses, and so on. What is particularly interesting in this situation is the negotiation of legitimate ‘possessables’ against a common understanding of growing vegetation as ‘possessitives’. These terms derive from Sacks’ gloss (Garfinkel, 2002: 182) in which he intended to demonstrate the difference in status between ‘possessable’ objects (which could potentially be legitimately taken as a possession by someone who may happen upon them) and ‘possessive’ objects (which are still the possession of someone else, and whose repossession may be considered theft). It may be remembered that these concepts were briefly mentioned in the previous chapter in a discussion about lucky pennies, however, in what follows I would like to discuss how

park space is realised in and through the mutual elaboration of certain objects – in this case, roses – as ‘possessitives’.

When the Ranger engages with the women initially, they stop what they are doing (sharing and smelling rose petals from each others’ hands) and look embarrassed. This is not necessarily an accomplishment of guilt; they do not hide or drop the items they are holding, and respond to the Ranger asking him to elaborate (‘Sorry...?’). In his reformulation of asking them ‘not to pick the roses please’, he de-specifies the policeable action in favour of orienting to an alternative preferential action ‘please enjoy them without interfering with their growth’ and further de-specifies the target of the accusation, (‘We’re just asking *people*’). The woman accomplishes it as an accusation all the same, and rebuts the claim of wrongdoing by insisting they did not pick the flowers, but rather found them on the ground. As is evident in the contextual ethnographic description, this is somewhat a dubious claim particularly in regard to the whole, intact roses she was holding. Her friend was holding petals, of which there are many more scattered on the ground in the area. Either way, taking the analytic lead from participants’ orientations, the Ranger chooses to accept this rebuttal but doubles down on the general trouble that ‘people do unfortunately come down here a lot to take cuttings’. This is hearable as justification for his initial accusation, invoking the trouble as a recurring one; notably, the activity of taking cuttings is oriented to as the trouble, and not the women who may or may not have done this. The women clarify their intentions to take what they found on the ground to ‘make some presses’. This, of course, does not actually provide a direct alternative for ‘taking cuttings’, but is hearable as doing the work of proving that their intentions are not to propagate new plants elsewhere (which is typically why people might decide to take cuttings).

It is the next line that makes this interaction as particularly analytically interesting in terms of park space:

‘Yeah by all means, that’s alright then. We’ve just been asked to keep an eye out because we don’t really want people taking the Park home with them, especially around this part with all the protected species.’

It would appear that taking plant matter (accepted as being found on the ground) away for the purpose of making flower presses is an expressed activity that can legitimately accomplish those objects as ‘possessables’. The categorial configuration of the roses being found on the ground, with the additional layer of not being used for propagation, positions the women’s intended practice as relatively morally irreproachable. Of course it is beyond the scope of the analysis to decide whether the Ranger actually believes that the women really did find numerous roses of different colours with stems still intact on the ground, but what is publicly available is the acceptance that pressing flowers is an activity not conducive to the moral category of ‘plant thieves’ (‘Yeah by all means, that’s alright then’). The would-be morally reproachable action is formulated as ‘taking the Park home with them’ and ‘especially around this part with all the protected species’. Perhaps the roses, as apparent ‘protected species’ would be ‘possessives’ if it could be proven more directly that they had indeed been cut from the bush, or if the women’s expressed intention was to propagate them in order to populate their private gardens.

‘Taking the Park home’ is a formulation denoting hearably immoral practice; this is quite clearly accomplished by the women who are heard to hastily agree (‘Of course

not'). The statement, in the context of the brief conversation, firstly positions roses as valued cultural objects (adjacent to 'protected species'). Moreover, it gives them representational status as 'the Park' itself. Categorially, the roses potentially becoming 'the Park' itself does the important moral work of heuristic implication that taking cuttings is tantamount to taking the Park home. Notably, the actual roses that the woman is holding – due to their accomplished status as 'found' objects – are not so much incumbent objects of this moral category. Indeed the women's emphatic agreement with the Ranger's statement that they do not want people 'taking the park home with them' (while still holding the roses) positions those possessed roses as differently categorially organised: as 'possessables'. The simultaneous work being done here, now in reference to adjacent, hypothetical roses (which may have been cut from the plant) realises the park's collaborative achievement as a 'public good'.¹⁴ This categorisation device invokes park users as incumbents of a public category, which (crucially) achieves for them no privileged status above any other individual whose relations in the park are equally organised through that same category of 'member of the public'.

Equally, the categorisation of the park as a 'public good' invokes the imperative of *sharing* it. No single person who can be categorised as a member of the public has the right to make any obtrusive claim to a 'public good' which may supersede or infringe on the usage rights of other members of the public. The relational category of 'member of the public' is *ideally* organised around coexistence in and 'equal rights' to

¹⁴ Similarities can be seen in the previous chapter when trees are implicated in a similar categorisation. The realisation of space as a 'public good' involves the invocation of public 'rights', which becomes extremely pertinent in spatial negotiations in the next chapter in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

shared space. Making an obtrusive claim to the space or to objects within it may morally challenge the uncomplicated categorisation of an individual as simply a 'member of the public'; they might instead be 'interlopers' or 'deviants' (as in the previous vignette), or trespassers (as in the 'locking up' vignette had the couple not exited the park), or, in this case, 'vandals' or 'thieves'. Therefore, to suggest for formulation of 'taking the Park home with them', the Ranger is making a moral claim invoking the incredulity of an unspecified (and hypothetical) member of the public whose immorality is seeable in their decision to defy the shared, relational values of the park, the implication being that they are choosing to colonise public park space in such a way that they would wish to keep that 'public good' for their own private use.

A final point of interest in this section is how the woman's closing rebuttal ('Hang on a minute... isn't that what your volunteers are doing anyway? Clearing out the rose beds?') makes a comparative point along practical lines. With the local trouble being respecified at this point to imply that taking cuttings involves interfering with the plants and is thus an immoral activity; the moral equivalence of volunteers (also incumbent in the space) doing similar activities is seen as a challenge to the Ranger's reasoning. He responds with a series of technical points, (starting with 'Yeah, but not the ones still in flower-') despite the women communicating their own local knowledge ('Hmm, I thought they said all of them...'). The Ranger's final point as we initiated closing the encounter, further invoked the technical knowledge that the roses are 'perennials' and therefore must be 'pruned and looked after all year round'. This is a similar tactic to the use of technical language around 'coppicing' in the previous chapter, and achieves a practical close to the interaction. Again, whether or not the Ranger was clued up on

the volunteers' activities that day are beyond the scope of this analysis,¹⁵ but certainly what was said was accomplished unproblematically *in situ* as the kind of local, work-specific knowledge that a Park Ranger might have, and perhaps says something of how their accounts are privileged in constructing the local park order. Having information about volunteers' activities in park space is something that is arguably in the fundamental domain of the work of park management, and therefore it would not be befitting of the Rangers' work role requirements to claim ignorance about such activities if they are oriented to by members of the public. The truth, however, is that the complex, multi-organisation management of the parks in the city can be a problem for communication, and means that the Park Rangers are indeed sometimes unaware about mundane decisions and allowances that pertain to the parks and their use. They are sometimes not informed that volunteers will be operating in the parks on a given day. This sets up another interesting trouble that they are required to navigate in the local order.

Volunteers painting benches

On a routine patrol around the lake one morning we come up to a bench with a group of 7 or 8 people milling around it, many of them holding mugs. At a quick glance they look to be in their 50s and 60s. A few of them are wearing the same black t-shirt with a small circular logo on the chest, which is too small to read, and at least two have green tabards on. A couple of them are crouched down holding wide brushes, painting the bench a dark brown shade. They've put a plastic sheet down beneath the bench and there's a can of paint and two large silver pump flasks placed on top of it. The bench

¹⁵ Ethnographically, I can confirm that at this point the Ranger had not been made aware of the presence of volunteers, and had not been informed about their activities regarding the rose bushes.

looks onto the path and it is only when we are very close that we catch the attention of the group. One of them (not wearing a black t-shirt) is facing away from us, stood firm, feet astride, with arms crossed, speaking in a group. Before we say anything he turns his head to face us and smiles, feet still planted facing the bench.

“Mornin’!” the Ranger calls out as he carries on walking past, raising his hand to wave.

“Morning!” replies the man. The rest of the group (including the ones painting) look our way and smile, nod, and generally acknowledge us. We stop walking and the Ranger inspects the work from the path:

“That’s coming along nicely.”

“Yeah, proper artist, is Gill over ‘ere. We’re going to do a couple more before lunch if we can get round to it.”

“Along here is it? They could definitely use a lick of paint, mind. Can’t think of when these ones would’ve last been done.”

“Fair few years if you ask me.” the man grumbles.

“You lot volunteers...?” asks the Ranger.

“Yes, we’re with ‘Friends of the Park’, but we take payment in biscuits...!”

“Very good, so do we!” the Ranger retorts, getting a laugh from the volunteers before carrying on the patrol around the lake.

Normal park appearances

On this occasion, the Park Ranger strikes up a conversation with an apparent lead representative of an organised volunteer work group. This was established by the way the man pre-emptively oriented to us as we came past them on the path, and how he accomplished the response to the Ranger’s greeting. The group did not fit the visual

profiles of a professional work group: it is highly unlikely that contractors tasked with doing the 'donkey work' of painting would be of that age group, and even more unlikely that 7 or 8 people would be *employed* to paint a single park bench. As we have seen from the Rangers' own recognisable attempts to visually demonstrate their consistent industriousness and diligence in public view, standing around drinking tea is not something that public workers do if they want to display their efficiency and productivity. Whether matching t-shirts and green tabards might be described as 'uniforms' is debateable, however they certainly do the work of associating their wearers to each other in some relatively formal collective organisation. Nevertheless, while they did not fit the visual profiles of a professional work group, they did indeed fit categorially congruently with the park contexture as people who are doing legitimate park activities. The way the Ranger orients immediately to their activity as work-based, doing the recognisable action of 'inspecting' it and subsequently complimenting it, achieves, firstly, the normalcy of the scene, and secondly, the initial position that this is legitimate work (as opposed to, say, vandalism or unauthorised guerrilla community restoration). The action of 'inspecting' also does the situated collaborative work of "categorising the categoriser" (Sacks, 1995: 45), displaying – through his 'seeing' of the activity as maintenance work – the Ranger's own competence as a maintenance worker.

This categorial machinery is imperative for the accomplishment of the normalcy and legitimacy of the activity in the space. As Sacks (1995: 45) suggested, this is how 'perspective' is realised: if a Ranger proffers membership of the category 'worker' to the bench painters via the mundane practical orientations of 'inspecting' the work, then a member hearing this (a hypothetical passer-by or other park user) would organise

their decision about the appropriateness of an applied category around how that same category might be applied to the categoriser. As has been established, the Park Rangers are regularly oriented to as legitimate workers, and thus their own unproblematic categorisation as workers by passers-by and park users does the work of providing an anchor for the (perhaps slightly more problematic) application of the 'worker' category to the bench painters. If a recognisable public worker is seen to recognise someone else's activity as work, then it is more likely to be seeable as work. That being said, the incumbents of the encounter do not entirely rely on the orderly inferential category proffers discussed thus far. The Rangers' job of establishing legitimacy of such activities in the park requires more clear-cut confirmation than what is inferred from the first instance categorisations.

Goffman (1971) noted that "stocked characters" (police officers, street cleaners, newspaper vendors, and arguably volunteers with matching t-shirts and tabards) are constitutive of the 'normal appearances' of a public scene by simply existing unproblematically in them:

"These characters can be anywhere in public places and be of little interest, their freedom to be present being linked to the tendency of the user of the street to treat them as non-persons, mere background figures who function within a different frame of reference from co-users of the streets" (Goffman, 1971: 307).

Of course Park Rangers may also be considered 'stocked characters' with certain public responsibilities, and perhaps it is this responsibility that tunes their perception into fellow 'uniformed' characters operating within their domain of accountability. It must not be forgotten that this group was approached because their practice in some

way foregrounded them and made them visible; they are not “mere background figures” to the Ranger. In this way perhaps Goffman’s general paranoia regarding individuals’ deceptive intentions can be forgiven here. He goes on to express concerns about these ‘stocked characters’ relative invisibility:

“And in consequence, of course, by use of the costumes and props of these stocked characters, villains can attack the whole of the public plant, effectively concealing alarming activities” (Goffman, 1971: 308).

While there is nothing to suggest that this group painting the bench are doing anything illegitimate (Goffman, for example, goes on to list instances where thieves and bandits dressed like construction workers and traffic officers have gone on to commit blatant crimes in plain sight), the group’s representative and the Ranger both recognisably orient to achieving further confirmation of legitimacy through information-sharing. As was observed in Chapter 4, accounting practices around legitimate work strategies are organised as locating an action within an activity of an ongoing project; such a project is communicated as having a cause, a consequence, and an expressed next action. The cause is the collaboratively produced understanding that the benches ‘could do with a lick of paint’ because it has been a ‘fair few years’ since they were last painted. The consequence is the current action of doing the painting. The expressed next action is that the painters are ‘going to do a couple more before lunch if we can get round to it’, which is then specified and spatialised by the Ranger’s informed question: ‘Along here is it?’

The talk contributing to the collaborative construction of the park as a shared work domain also displays a temporal orientation. Both parties are aware of the longitudinal

status of the maintenance routine (or lack thereof) of the benches, and by extension are hearably in agreement regarding the park space as they do the recognisably benign type of 'complaining' that colleagues might do about mutual work, which does not attribute blame. Importantly, they mutually elaborate the park as a space that requires maintenance, but they do so as somewhat situated 'equals', by acknowledging the practical remedial work of the current course of action, rather than simply complaining about it as a request to do something about it, as a park user or 'concerned citizen' might. Following all this, the Ranger's question, 'You lot volunteers...?' is hearable as confirmation of what has already been established, perhaps to avoid a Goffmanesque scenario of letting potential vandals get away with their vandalism. After all, the buck stops with the Park Rangers if this were to hypothetically be the case, and it would thus have embarrassing ramifications for the team. Notably, the representative maintains the relational consistency (as equally legitimate workers) achieved throughout, even after being questioned about being volunteers; joking that they 'take payment in biscuits'. The Ranger reciprocates the joke about payment for the work, and this achieves the closing of the negotiation in an orderly manner, maintaining this encounter as a 'normal' occasion of checking in on what is already quite a normal park scene.

Conclusion: The park as an assembled activity

In this final section on the normal appearances of volunteers working in the park, the normalcy extends to the Rangers unproblematically checking in on them and corroborating the fact of their legitimacy without altercation or disagreement. The Rangers can do this as part of their own legitimate practice, while reciprocally legitimising the volunteers' practice in terms of the park contexture as a viable shared

work domain. This ties together the discussions across the previous sections in which the park is treated as a 'public good'; the volunteers' activity co-produces the phenomenon of the 'public good' by treating the benches as 'maintainable' park objects, and the Ranger's situated approval of that maintenance work – despite not having prior knowledge of the volunteers' operations in the park that day – demonstrates the emergent character of the co-production of public services in the parks. Volunteers are clearly valued 'colleagues', but their accomplished legitimacy relies on the same mechanics of the Ranger's professional 'intuition' that constructed the incongruity of the dogwalker-cum-potential voyeur. Ultimately, the Rangers' routine practical inquiries produce and maintain these 'normal park appearances'. The recognisable ordinariness of the work that they do – even in those intense and somewhat adversarial moments engaging with interlopers – plays a collaborative part in achieving the orderly phenomenon of the park.

This chapter has also demonstrated how the gestalt contexture of the public park is made and remade in particularly mundane, unremarkable interactions; and in doing this has made an attempt to document the moment-by-moment character of co-present people putting the park together, assembling it, and 'talking it into being' in the course of their routine interactions (Heritage, 1984). This is done, *inter alia*, by invoking such things as normal park schedules, normal park activities, and normal park objects. Without having to rely on or orient to a written park charter or rulebook, the contravention of these shared, *situated* norms and rules is often recognisable and consequently negotiated with recourse to a shared understanding of park space by the co-present parties. This is achievable because the social phenomenon of the public park is deftly achieved, collaboratively, by incumbents in the course of their

mundane practical activities. Notably, participants need not be questioned or surveyed directly about the ordinary features of the park and their place within it, because their 'naturally occurring' interactional orientations already 'do' that publicly available work of situated (and largely assumed) sensemaking that produces the social order of the park, as a by-product. The park's haecceities – their 'just thisnesses' – are seeable in the doing of routine action and interaction, producing its recognisably autochthonous order that sets it up as specifically, and *socially*, a public park, and not merely a space made up, *materially*, of trees and grass and people.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDING ORDER IN THE PANDEMIC PARK

A summary overview of Covid-19 regulations in the UK

State-imposed quarantine and isolation regulations and stay-at-home orders – popularly known at the time as ‘Lockdown’, and in hindsight as ‘Lockdown 1’ – were introduced across the UK on 26 March 2020 as public health measures to suppress the spread of the potentially deadly ‘Coronavirus disease 2019’ (COVID-19). These measures came into force some 15 days after COVID-19 achieved pandemic status, with the Coronavirus Act 2020 passing through parliament and receiving royal ascent, granting the Government emergency discretionary powers to, inter alia, enforce the suspension of public gatherings. The Conservative Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, communicated some general but vague instructions relating to the COVID-19 lockdown measures via a televised broadcast. The crux of the broadcast was to urge people in the UK to stay at home except “for the following very limited purposes:

- Shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible;
- One form of exercise a day – for example a run, walk, or cycle – alone or with members of your household;
- Any medical need, to provide care or to help a vulnerable person; and
- Travelling to and from work, but only where this is absolutely necessary and cannot be done from home (Johnson, 2020).”

Before and during this Government-mandated partial stay at home order, State and media guidance brought two related misnomers into the public lexicon: ‘social

isolation' and 'social distancing'. Both of these terms are better understood by replacing 'social' with 'physical', with the former involving staying at home as much as possible, especially if believed to have developed COVID-19 symptoms (in which case all members of a household are, at the time of writing, expected to remain indoors and completely physically isolated from other people for a symptomatic period of 14 days). The latter applies while outside of the home and involves remaining a minimum of two metres/six feet away from people who are not members of one's own household.

'Social distancing' practices – herein referred to as 'physical distancing' – have been hastily described by media and lay-commentators as a constitutive part of 'the new normal', by which it is meant that institutions of 'normality' have changed how they function, with schools and universities closing their doors, non-essential shops, restaurants, and businesses either closing or moving their operations to delivery-only. Moreover, however, 'the new normal' refers to the somewhat abrupt and ongoing revisions made to the expectations for public behaviour, and the sudden reorganisation, renegotiation, and necessary relearning of 'normal', taken-for-granted public social and interactional norms. The sharing of, and co-presence in, public space is now realised as a lived issue whose negotiations and microcontingencies were once dealt with via what we may call a Schutzian 'natural attitude', embodied in largely mutually-agreed notions of personal space and individual privacy (Schutz, 1962). The interaction order plays out differently in the so-called 'new normal' system of the era of COVID-19 (cf. Goffman, 1983).

Moreover, regulations to enforce physical distancing became policeable under the new legislation, although – since public health matters are devolved – each devolved

legislature operated slightly different timelines and details in their regulations. Due to the aforementioned imprecise communications by the UK Government, as well as the differing devolved measures, and the relatively fast-paced developments and changes to the 'rules', public cooperation has not run entirely smoothly, and police forces and other public enforcement agencies have been required to think on their feet and exercise more transparently subjective discretion. As one police community support officer told me:

“It’s changing all the time. We had a person say that they needed to deliver cat food to their friend’s house, and we had to accept it because it’s an emergency if the cat would die without food. So now we [the community support policing team in an inner-city area] have written it in not to fine people for delivering pet supplies.”

For the Park Rangers in Cardiff, too, COVID-19 'lockdown' measures became a local issue in terms of their quotidian work. The city's park spaces are ordinary, regular sites for leisure and exercise, and following the Prime Minister's assertion that "One form of exercise a day – for example a run, walk, or cycle – alone or with members of your household" is an acceptable condition for being in public, the parks remained open and accessible to people who wished to use them for these purposes. Indeed, as in 'normal' times, urban parks are occasioned as appropriate candidate sites for exercising in public. But more so in the era of COVID-19, because exercising is one of the few reasons to be outside, park spaces are some of the only legitimate sites in which members of the public are able to exist outside of their own homes. This has meant that the parks have become some of the busiest public spaces in the city, and consequently the spaces that require policing with recourse to maintenance of physical

distancing practices. In the first lockdown of 2020, Park Rangers were asked by their management to suspend their routine maintenance operations and instead to help the police enforce the lockdown measures in specific relation to park space. A silver lining of the foregrounding of parks in the political discourse, and perhaps one of the few positives to come as a result of the pandemic, is that the value of the parks and the work that the Rangers do to manage and maintain them is finally being realised, and in 2021 the Ranger service received its largest funding allocation of the last decade, with a budget increase secured for the next three years, meaning they will be able to bring three agency-employed Rangers onto full-time pay, with further plans to establish a trainee and apprentice scheme for new Rangers.



Figure 3: A COVID-19 'social distancing' sign

Introduction: Occasioning the pandemic in ordinary park relations

So far in this thesis I have exclusively analysed public encounters between Park Rangers and park users; mundane relations which display at their organisational core the omnirelevance of the standardised relational pairing of 'public worker' and 'member of the public'. This chapter is no different in this respect. What is different,

however, and what warrants this chapter being written in the first place, is the context of the global pandemic. The lockdown measures brought in to manage the spread of COVID-19 have changed the ways in and conditions through which people use, and interact in/with, public space. This has produced new issues for the Park Rangers, who are still required to operate in and manage the park spaces, albeit now with the altered task of enforcing somewhat imprecise state-imposed physical distancing and stay-at-home guidelines that handle as impropriety mundane park activities that may have previously been treated as wholly appropriate, ordinary public conduct and behaviour.

In this chapter I will describe some encounters between the Park Rangers and members of the public as they go about maintaining order and enforcing rules relating to physical distancing. In doing this I will demonstrate two related things: the dependability of the visual order in maintaining the role contingencies of existing participation frameworks in and of public park space; and, further the multi-layered occasioning of the pandemic context, and how it has become an inherent organisational feature of public space. The broader argument builds on the previous chapters inasmuch as it shows how the 'collectivity' (cf. Coulter, 2001) of the public park is collaboratively produced in and through practical action and interaction, and moreover, how this relatively stable production is not ontologically or existentially threatened by the so-called 'new normal' of the COVID-19 pandemic. What is argued herein builds on and follows what my colleagues and I have argued in a previous paper (Smith, et al., 2020): that even in the 'unprecedented' times of COVID-19, mundane everyday actions and relations are still recognisable by members. Despite the uncertainty that an event of such epic magnitude and widespread consequence

produces, there is still a continued local orderliness available in the Park Rangers' public interactions, and indeed all publicly available action. In what follows it will be noted that the management of 'normal behaviour' in public park space is emergently mediated through glossed invocations of the global pandemic, and the data points to COVID-19 as a contextualising device that organises a way of seeing and occasioning troubles in the park. Now, in a time when regulations are at the fore and regulatory frameworks might be understood to be the origin of this COVID-19 contextualising device (inasmuch as it may be assumed that its relevance for occasioning troubles in the park may be especially available to public servants and those tasked with upholding the regulations), this chapter will demonstrate that – even after less than a month into the first lockdown – members of the public are competent and 'fluent' in the categories and category work involved in COVID-19 systems. It is thus shown that the 'policing' of the pandemic is collaboratively produced by competent members who are demonstrably not entirely baffled by the 'new normal'. The COVID-19 pandemic is also a perspicuous setting for seeing the multi-layered organisation of situated activities in park space, displaying layered spatial and contextual categories and their organisational consequences for such 'normal' park behaviour.

COVID-19 as a contextualising device and in-built feature of public space

As stated, this chapter pays attention to members' orientations to COVID-19 as a contextualising membership categorisation device in naturally occurring interaction (Sacks, 1995). Much like how Sacks' (1995: 515) analysis of group therapy sessions demonstrated the omnirelevance of the membership categorisation device of 'patient–therapist' for organising the talk during the course of the sessions, it has been noted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 (and will be again in Chapter 7) that the Park Ranger–

park user relationship is omnirelevant in interactions. Rangers do not need to introduce themselves or formulate their requests, advice, or any response as one being made 'as a Park Ranger'; this is largely assumed to be the default position in park space. Their routine orientation to the public as a consequential 'stakeholder' in the course of their everyday work demonstrates this omnirelevance. Similarly, COVID-19 is hearable as the assumed – or glossed – 'motivator' for enforcement activities in park space during the pandemic inasmuch as it is displayed as organisationally consequential for the activity at hand. In this way the pandemic is not simply an incidental occurrence happening independently of the quotidian management of the city parks, but rather its pervasiveness is recognised in park enforcement procedures, and furthermore its consequences are displayed and available in the mundane activities through which the parks are assembled. Now that COVID-19 is recognisably produced – through the ongoing negotiation of altered configurations of embodied action – as an in-built feature of public space, its organisational capacities for mundane park relations should not be underestimated. It has been shown throughout this thesis so far that the Park Rangers' routine practical management and enforcement work gets done as a fundamental social fact of park space. What they do in park space reciprocally produces that space's autochthonous order, in a very normal, ordinary way. Now, while the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the range of their work role requirements somewhat, and they are now focused exclusively on enforcement (whereas previously they did this work alongside and in-between other maintenance work), the fact of the matter is that they always did this enforcement work of upholding the norms, rules and codes of public park space. However, in the times of COVID-19, this recognisable enforcement work is seeable, largely, in the first instance, as work pertaining *specifically* to the enforcement of COVID-19 regulations. This observable

phenomenon is at the crux of the analysis in this chapter, and points to the local production of a pandemic 'context'. The question is: How can the 'context' of COVID-19 be recovered as a members' phenomenon? Further: How is the trouble of COVID-19 produced as an ongoing members' accomplishment?

Three lads reading on a bench



Figure 4: Approaching the lads on the bench

Today we're patrolling Roath Park; two Rangers, a young PCSO, and I. We're looking out for people who may be flouting 'lockdown' rules. It's an overcast Tuesday afternoon in early May, and there are very few people in the park. Across the Rec, there are a couple of people sat on the grass, but they're behind us now and too far away, as we've been making our way north towards the Lake. Two abreast, we're walking at a distance, but find ourselves drifting closer to better hear each other as we're muffled by our face masks. At times we pause or slow down to keep appropriate distance from each other.

Along the path past the tennis courts, the more senior Ranger says: "Ah, here we go...here's some. Let's see what's going on here..."

Three young men are sat on a bench, hunched forward, reading books and magazines. They haven't yet noticed us. As we make a purposive beeline across the grass towards them, the PCSO puts on his hat (which he informs us he should be wearing at all times), and joins the more senior Ranger up front. The second Ranger hangs back slightly, stood between but behind them, and I hang back further. In this brief moment before engaging them, the young men have clocked us and are flitting between looking down at their reading material and up in our direction. They all settle on looking down, focusing on their books.

"Afternoon lads, all alright over here?" calls the senior Ranger, pulling his mask down to his chin to do so.¹⁶ The Rangers and PCSO stop in the same formation they walked over in. The lads are polite enough, peering up from their books and reciprocating the friendly greeting. Two of them are still in their hunched reading positions, books open, with feet planted firmly on the ground, but the one closest to us has closed his book and laid back on the bench with his foot resting on his opposite knee.

"You lot a family?"

The closest lad peers up at the Ranger, squinting as the sun shines through the trees.

"We're students."

"Ah right, in a house together, is it?"

"Yeh, just out for exercise—" begins another lad, looking up from his book.

¹⁶ In hindsight this may be readable as an inappropriate action, however there was no mask mandate in the UK at this stage, nor was there much official information regarding their efficacy (on the contrary, public health officials were actively discouraging their use in non-clinical settings, due to the global PPE shortage). Park Rangers chose to wear masks as an extra precaution on top of maintaining significant physical distance.

“Reading...” the first lad quickly follows.

“Alright, so that’s fine but you know you can’t be sat on the bench.”

“Oh okay, yeah...”

“Yeah, we need you to keep moving, unfortunately.” The Ranger gestures with his arms in a swinging motion following the path, then waving towards the northern gate.

The lads begin getting up at his direction.

“Oh right okay, yeh no problem...” they murmur apologetically, now stood, but not moving.

“Okay, you have to keep moving, alright,” repeats the Ranger, still gesturing, at which point the lads begin slowly traipsing northwards towards the exit of the park.

“Cheers lads. Have a good day, anyway– keep safe!” he calls out as they continue walking three abreast on the path.

A jogger coming towards us swerves off the path and out of the way of the lads, prompting the PCSO to shout hurriedly “Try to keep two metres apart, okay!”

The boys continue walking away without a response.

The local trouble of sitting on a bench

In this instance, the group on the bench was treated by the Park Rangers as a local park trouble, requiring their approach and involvement. Perhaps more so because they are patrolling with a PCSO (a member even more category-bound to rule enforcement), their visible interest in the lads and what they may be up to accomplishes the scene as one of a local trouble, and the lads as categorial incumbents of the problem activity. A group of Park Rangers and a PCSO do not just approach and begin asking questions of park users unless it is procedurally relevant

to their quotidian public management/enforcement work. Their very attendance here occasions it as a scene in which 'something is up'. This is verbalised in the Ranger's situated commentary "here's some", in which 'some' is an indexical category hearable as pertaining to the categoriser's situated activity of patrolling with the intention of seeking out potential lockdown rule-breakers. It is therefore heard that 'some' are 'some' candidates of the occasioned category 'lockdown rule-breakers'.

The lads were available as potential 'rule-breakers' for two reasons: the first being that they were not categorisable in the first instance under the device of 'family'. This is demonstrated by the Ranger's hearably insincere question "You lot a family?" but can also be heard earlier in his opening reference to them as 'lads' – a hearable collective category of young men of similar age, which – of course – *could* be used to refer to brothers, cousins, and so on, but whose possible categorisation as such diminishes with the improbability of *three* young adult brothers of similar age reading in the park *together*. Either way, the way this scene plays out – its endogenous production and lived organisation – turns on this implicit (but very unlikely) possibility. In the first instance, however, the visual ensemble of the bench incumbents was not familial, and that is what accounted for their availability as a potentially illegitimate group and an incongruity in the local contexture. 'Family' is a category of 'household unit' as families are typically understood to live together. The second reason for the lads' availability as potential rule-breakers was that they were stationary, sat on a bench, reading, and therefore not seeable as doing exercise (which, at the time was one of the only acceptable reasons to be outside, more so in public park space).

That 'family' is a proxy for 'household unit' is accomplished by the lads' response that they are 'students', which the communicating Ranger understood to mean "in a house together" (i.e. a student house-share). The 'household unit' is made relevant as a category device through the tacit procedural relevancies of the COVID-19 pandemic as an organisational device. The retort of 'students' in direct response to 'family' accomplishes the orderly hearing of 'types of household unit'; a category device of procedural relevance predicated by the Rangers' accountable practical activity of engaging and questioning the lads in relation to lockdown enforcement. This is of central importance here (to members and analysts alike): the pandemic is not directly formulated but is understood as organisationally relevant for the entire encounter in the first place. Moreover, the lads' fluency in what category work is significant to the pandemic 'social distancing' guidelines is demonstrable; in 'normal' times this approach which opens with "You lot a family?" would surely be a remarkable occurrence, but here it is treated as an ordinary question, and receives an ordinary – and *competent* – response. By collaboratively orienting to and displaying categories of household unit, all co-constituent members make sense of the conversation as one in which the possible illegitimacy of the combination of people comprising the scene is being assessed (cf. Sacks, 1972b). Moreover, there is an immediately recognisable *consequence* to this seeing of a dubious household collective. It is not merely the case that the Park Rangers and police go around deciding who is or is not a legitimate household for trivial survey purposes or for fun; indeed it is clear that this is a purposive line of questioning from which a course of work action will develop. Mundane civics begin to emerge in the first instance.

With the identification of the lads as being student housemates, and consequently *legitimate* 'withs' under the 'new normal' of physical isolation and distancing guidelines (see Goffman, 1971: 20), the second line of inquiry is pre-empted by the lad who begins unprompted "Yeh, just out for exercise—" Of course, this is accomplished as self-evidently untrue at this moment in time as they are visibly sat down reading, and the recognisable designated speaker quickly interjected with the remedial "Reading..." The Ranger, however, does not chastise them for reading. Rather, he topicalises the local trouble as being the lads' activity of sitting on the bench. A scene in which young men are sat quietly reading on a bench in a park, is, in 'normal' times, not one that would trigger engagement by the Rangers. This is not a scene of antisocial or disruptive behaviour – on the contrary – it is an archetypal scene in which members are visibly minding their own business, and moreover, are peacefully and unproblematically co-present in park space, engaging in recognisably appropriate, nondisruptive, personal activities. Students reading on a park bench can usually be seen as features of a normal park scene.

Nevertheless, on this occasion, such a scene is made available as a local trouble for the Rangers. The 'new normal' is invoked in this mundane interaction by virtue of its treatment as grounds for engagement. Again, without mentioning COVID-19 or lockdown measures, the lads' quick response that they are "out for exercise" accounts for the expected legitimacy of their public activities in relation to the pandemic guidelines. While the interjection of "Reading..." is (as mentioned above), *remedial*, this is not to say that it is an unreserved correction. It can be heard as a *modifier* which adds the credibility of being a visibly accountable occurrence for which there is immediate evidence. Paired with the original unprovoked self-excusing "out for

exercise” the scene can be reasonably constructed as either a belief that reading can be considered a form of exercise (i.e. the combination of parts – green space, fresh air, mental stimulation, peacefulness – relating to mental health discourses), or that the inevitable preceding walk to/through the park to get to their current location was the exercise, and this is posited as a legitimate rest break.

A tentative association is made between ‘reading’ and ‘exercise’, to which the Ranger does not enquire further. In an occasioned scene of measured interrogation, not continuing with the direct topicalisation of the relational pair being floated by the lads is recognisable redirection away from the futility of a debate. The Ranger’s questioning is, of course, purposive – the local trouble is produced as the lads’ seated, stationary position on the park bench – and the practical accomplishment of the engagement is getting them to move on. By topicalising this trouble directly while cautiously accepting the lads’ excuse as ‘fine’, he does not make any accusations against them, but instead uses the available evidence of the ‘here and now’ to make his argument. The lads unproblematically hear this as an authoritative instruction to move on, and comply. Here the standardised relational pair of interrogator-interrogated achieves success in establishing a practically accomplished, situated instructor-compliers relationship.

Organisational work is thus done by the untropicalised COVID-19 pandemic device, which accomplishes the otherwise peaceful reading/sitting scene as a local problem in relation to that pandemic device. Punctuating the instruction with ‘unfortunately’ further invokes empathy, heard to be duplicatively applicable as a subtle interactional repair acknowledging that sitting on a bench is not *normally* an issue – and that people who sit on benches (including these lads) would not typically be seen as interlopers –

but the work activity of lockdown enforcement requires such an activity (and its incumbents, i.e. the lads) to be treated that way. Moreover, it works to relinquish some personal responsibility for the decision and place it, instead, on the Park Rangers' unorthodox work role-requirement in terms of the 'new normal'. This is a common tactic used in public relations, for example when retail staff blame inflexible company policies for their inability to provide a refund, perhaps agreeing that the policies are unfair or unreasonable but ultimately falling back on the fact that there is 'nothing they can do' or 'that's just how it is'. COVID-19 is a fertile context for this type of tactic as public knowledge relating to the virus and its response by different organisations are in constant flux, and in some instances the 'normal' expectations for members to provide robust reasoning in public policies, decisions, instructions, and so on, are tempered by the discourses of the 'new normal' invoking uncertainty and collective renegotiation, and ultimately a requirement for compliance with decisions that may not make sense. The suggestion is that the enforcement agents recognise that the new rules that they are expected to enforce seem not to make practical sense, or at least seem to be hastily cobbled together and thus imperfect. Perhaps, then, the human empathy being shown by the Ranger is a demonstrable invocation of hopeful *reciprocal* empathy; co-producing the public administration service as an imperfect forum in terms of the altered expectations of the current COVID-19 context, but one that still needs to be done, and one that the lads could help the Rangers with by complying, even if it does not seem to make practical sense. The lads' hesitant but ultimately unquestioning observance of the Rangers' instructions despite their activities not endangering other park users (as physical distance was maintained) accomplishes this, demonstrating the power of the organisational norms of participation frameworks of mundane civics.

Indeed, no explicit reference was made to public safety or these members' potential for spreading disease by sitting on the bench (until the end when the Ranger calls on them to "stay safe"), but the sequential communication produced opportunities for inference-rich categorisation practices without having to topicalise COVID-19. Notably, from the way this encounter played out, the Rangers did not see the need to provide any explanation for why this may be an issue of public safety worthy of intervention. It was simply assumed that this was about the pandemic. Similar can be observed in the following vignette, describing another encounter from later that same day, albeit this time led by the PCSO to arguably somewhat lesser success. In this encounter, however, there is more observable resistance and the situated requirement of a more directly referable explanation.

Family dog-walking and an incidental ballgame

The Rec is fairly empty today, a slightly overcast Tuesday in May in the middle of a state-imposed lockdown. Of the few people, there are mostly lone joggers and dog walkers. Groups stand out, and are of most interest to the Rangers and PCSOs who are looking for people who may be breaking the rules of only being out within their household units.

On the way back to the van we catch sight of a group of four with a football and a dog in the middle of the field. Three figures are standing, and one is sat on the grass. We were already walking in their direction as they're directly between us and the van, and on this overcast afternoon there are only joggers and dog walkers about, with this being the only visible group of more than two in the vicinity. From a distance I can't make

out the composition of the group, but as we move closer it becomes clearer that it is comprised of two older teenage boys in shorts and trainers having a kick-about with a football, a younger teenage girl in a hoodie sitting on the grass reading a book, and a middle aged woman with straight blonde hair standing holding a leash with a small dog at the end of it. They're undoubtedly a family, but they're relatively stationary and we're already visibly purposively walking towards them.

As we're walking over, the PCSO offers to take the lead on this engagement, as the Rangers had already taken turns leading in previous engagements that day.

"I'll do this one, I don't mind..."

The woman is standing hand on hip, with the dog pulling at the leash. She acknowledges us with a smile and when close enough, the PCSO begins with an apologetic opening: "Hi there...sorry, you can't play ballgames—" he says to the woman. The boys do not look up or acknowledge us, and continue to scrap for the ball. The girl is still sat cross-legged with her book open, but is looking up at the officer.

He continues: "I know it's a difficult time, and if you were doing any other exercise it'd be fine...because you're a family, yeah?"

The woman confirms, still smiling cheerily with eyebrows raised, "Yes, I'm Mum."

Still oriented towards the woman, the PCSO continues, "Yeah, so it'd be okay but I'm really sorry... if people see you guys playing with the ball it might make them think it's okay..."

The boys have stopped playing with the ball by now.

The woman tilts her head to the side and looks confusedly at the PCSO "Oh, okay..."

The more senior Ranger steps in loudly "We've had full-on football matches here..."

“Oh, really?” she replies, tutting theatrically.

“Yeah, so—”

The boys murmur in acceptance of the rules, as if agreeing that full-on football matches are not acceptable.

“Sorry to ruin your fun— we know you’re a sensible lot but we just can’t have people playing here; you have to keep moving I’m afraid.” The Ranger continues, gesturing cyclically with his hands.

All the family members are engaged at this point, verbalising defeated compliance, but the PCSO continues by communicating that he has already issued fines to people who ‘break the new rules’.

“Hah, well I’m not breaking the rules, I’m walking the dog— you’ll have to fine them!” the woman jokes, gesturing at the two teenage boys.

We share a laugh and continue along towards the van.

“Come on then...” the woman says to the kids, as she ushers them away from the spot where they’d been stationed.

Seeing a legitimate household and resituating the local trouble

In this instance the seeing of the ‘household’ category device was less problematic than in the previous example of the lads on the bench. From a distance, the group of four whose constitutive members were not yet identifiable made for a temporarily perceptible local trouble for the Rangers and the PCSO. Exploiting the coincidence of our already-established pedestrian trajectory, we used this opportunity to inspect the group more closely. By the time we were close enough to recognise the group as a family, the woman with the dog had already acknowledged us. The PCSO opened his

communication by invoking “playing ballgames” as the local trouble requiring his participation. Of course, as in the previous example, the PCSO’s engagement with members of the public is what accomplishes the scene as one involving a local trouble. Uniformed officers – as members bound to an ‘authority’ category – cannot easily withdraw from an activity associated with that category, without it looking like a blunder and potentially delegitimising the course of the work project. The local organisation of the category is already in play in the practical action of *patrolling*; a group comprised of Park Rangers and a PCSO walking in an undeviating manner in the direction of a group of park users is an accountably purposive action which already builds a relational pairing in which the park users become a category of person to be engaged with.

The above analysis may read as implying that the officers would wish to abort their intentions to engage with the group upon discovery of their legitimacy as a family, and that the only thing stopping them from doing so is their responsibility to see their work project through. This is not what I am suggesting, as it is outside of the remit of this study to deal in hypotheticals. I am, however, saying that intention is seeable in the practical action of walking towards a group of park users while recognisably patrolling. Whether or not they would have changed their tack upon noting the visual composition of the group as familial is quite irrelevant. What did occur was the instant specification of the issue as being the ballgame. In the same sentence the PCSO displayed an orientation to the proffer of the ‘family’ category device. He did this fairly confidently in the form of a rhetorical question “...because you’re a family, yeah?” to which the woman with the dog confirmed her categorisation in terms of that device: “Yes, I’m mum.” She was available to be seen as a parent in that visual contexture owing to her

recognisability as the significantly older member through which the relational assemblage of the family can be accomplished. The character of the association between the two boys playing football and the girl sat on the grass reading was made available only by the presence and mediation of the mother. The boys were obvious 'withs' with each other, but the girl could only be seen as their sibling by virtue of the mother's relational organisation.

That the PCSO oriented and made representations to the woman regarding the ballgame (rather than the boys who were currently engaged in the ballgame) accomplishes her category-boundness to parental responsibilities over the boys. This is further topicalised when the PCSO discusses fines for people who break public social distancing rules and the woman replies in jest suggesting that she is relinquishing those responsibilities: "Hah, well I'm not breaking the rules, I'm walking the dog– you'll have to fine them!" She displays an astute competence in handling the enforcement situation by rebuking the category proffer that attempted to position the boys' practice as legitimately policeable; exploiting the duplicative organisation of 'family' as both the categorisation device through which her responsibility for the boys is displayed, and as a category within the device of 'park user groups' which is comparatively harmless and noncriminal, and therefore not a legitimately policeable object. Her simultaneous method of re-appropriating personal responsibility in terms of 'the rules' is also notable, as she accounts for her own practice as being firmly within the rules, and in doing so sets up the PCSO to acknowledge that his proffer of 'fineable' activity is incongruously applied to the category of 'children'. Children cannot be threatened with fines; particularly when their category relations within that visual contexture relate to 'family' and not, say, 'group of delinquent lads'.

It is important to note that the woman's position is recognisably argumentative, and that she is weaponising the displayed and invoked categorial relations by reassembling the scene in terms of the contingencies of 'normal' times: kids can have a kickabout in the park (indeed it is the most legitimate place for kids to have a kickabout). The selective acknowledgement of the COVID-19 pandemic context serves as an insight into how 'lockdown' rules are navigated in this situation: the theatrical tutting at the Ranger's interjection regarding "full-on football matches here" partially displays the absurdity of the situation in which playing football on a field marked with football pitch lines is perceived to be deviant, while also demonstrating her dismissal of the Ranger's attempt at producing categorial parity between the boys' kickabout and "full-on football matches" *in terms of the epidemiological consequences for the spread of the virus*. It is clear from the fact that she eventually ushered the boys away that she was willing to comply with the 'letter' of the law, however the 'spirit' of the law was another matter, and her continual rejection of the category proffers levelled at her and her sons display her disregard for the hypothetical basis of the reasoning invoked in their chastisement. What is most interesting, however, is the relatively stable production of the space as a legal jurisdiction, and the interplay between this and the 'normal' contingencies of park space.

Notes on the multi-layered organisation of context

What is evidently the case here in the encounter with the family is the ontological challenging of the 'settinged' norms of park activities. Fundamentally, what is going on here is that the type of activity that forms part of the normal park scene (the type of activity that, indeed, is constitutive of the quotidian assemblage of the public park), is

being treated as a trouble. The treatment of the kids having a kickabout as a trouble forms the basis of an ontological problem for the practical accomplishment of park space in which the apparent categorial discrepancy is subtly leveraged to imply an absurd position. Public parks are normally the quintessential place to have a kickabout, and exercise is allowed, but 'ballgames' are not. This section considers what this means for the local organisation of park space within the 'context' of the pandemic. It is observed that COVID-19 is not immediately formulated as the troubling context in any pure, specified way in the above description, yet all members present organised their talk and actions around this unformulated context as something consequential and through which particular relevancies were invoked. These relevancies can be seen in reference to "a difficult time", and to the "new rules", but also in the way that the request to stop playing ballgames was ultimately accepted. The members present did not ask for clarification on the matter, and all parties were able to "repair the indexicality" and continue the interactional sequence as a course of action without issue as to what the that troubling context was (Eglin, 2009: 45).

Taking a step out, I will briefly outline some of the mechanisms through which interactional scholars have considered how to deal with 'context'. When discussing the place of unformulated contextual knowledge in ethnomethodological analyses, Alec McHoul and colleagues (2008: 43) refer to (and depart from) Capone's gloss:

"The understanding of a stretch of talk is not always available from the literality of the transcript ... It can be just as much or equally in the scene, its history, or how the participants stand with respect to each other, and so forth, through a long list of possible contextual – perhaps even biographical – specifics."

From this gloss, they discuss 'context' in terms of public displays of shared 'supra-local' knowledge that members of a common 'cultural order' may possess (and 'do'). This is, of course, pertinent to the analytic treatment of COVID-19 as a context because, notably, the virus itself is invisible and therefore not *visually* available in the local scene; of course, however, the virus is still being oriented to as an always-potentially-present central trouble here. It may be its constitution as shared 'supra-local' knowledge that accounts for it as context. Their argument is, quite rightly, that "if context is hearable in the talk as such, then it cannot be ignored by analysts" (McHoul, et al. 2008: 42). What I am concerned with here is not so much how I, as an analyst, can know that this stretch of talk is about COVID-19, but rather how it can be shown that members themselves are organising and ongoingly accomplishing their local actions around COVID-19 as a *context*. How context is itself a member's phenomenon, and not just an analyst's formulation built around members' categories. In this way it may be said, perhaps, that the Park Rangers' local activities and interactions co-produce COVID-19 as a *local* trouble, and that members' 'supra-local knowledge' of the virus is made available as locally consequential. To trace how this may be seeable, I follow Hester and Francis (2003: 41) in arguing that this is broadly organised through a mutually constitutive 'gestalt contexture': that "category, context and activity stand in a relational configuration to each other; they thereby compose a mutually elaborated whole." In many of the examples in this thesis, context can be (and often is, in a way) configured spatially, as a 'public park' context, but an overarching omni-consequential context in this 'new normal' way of doing things, is clearly that of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic adds an organisational layer to the configuration of public park space; the 'context' is routinely produced as being in public, being in a park,

during a global pandemic. These contextual devices compound each other and permeate the organisation of face-to-face interaction in the pandemic park.

In order to see this from a participants' perspective, focus should then be on how members make available – and 'do' – what Harvey Sacks (1995: 516) called the 'settinged' character of their activities, so that these activities are seeable as specific features of 'settinged' events. To begin to demonstrate the inferential machinery at play, I borrow a further concept from Sacks (p. 517): 'indicator terms' – referential terms such as 'here', 'now', 'this', 'soon', and so on – are a source of stability in invoking 'setting' in interaction. Such indicators, maintaining an element of abstractness, are often temporal or spatial but, as Sacks points out, "the distinction between temporal and spatial indicators is weak" and that "there are ways in which the spatial indicators invoke time and the temporal indicators invoke space as well" (p. 519). This will be remembered from the example of 'locking up' in Chapter 5, when the park schedule was recognisably built into the activity, and the 'setting' of the park was recovered as a spatiotemporal production.

In the above example of the ballgames incident, the 'indicator terms' at play are few and far between, but still present: in addition to the temporal relevancies already mentioned "a difficult time" and "new rules", the Park Ranger who steps in says "We've had full-on football matches *here*..." and continues with "...we just can't have people playing *here*; you have to keep moving I'm afraid" (my emphasis both times). The temporal indicator terms are indexical and do not provide any inherent, directly formulable measure; it is the participants who "choose an order of temporal terms" (Sacks, 1995: 518) in which "difficult time" invokes the temporal space of the

pandemic, arguably as a comparative to previously 'easier' times. In these 'easier' times, such an activity would not be seeable as problematic or requiring intervention by enforcement agents. Again returning to Sacks' point above, "difficult time" – and more so "new rules" – is spatial too, in the way that the invoked temporal changes have consequences for tacit spatial norms in the park. Of course it will be noted that the PCSO has a broader jurisdiction than just the park, and he does not provide *directly* spatial references; it is the Park Ranger who locates the "new rules" spatially and in terms of the local trouble of ballgames as something that has happened 'here' in the park. It could be posited that the PCSO's mention of the "new rules" has a broader spatial application in terms of his own responsibility for public space more generally, however the Ranger's locative specification as well as the PCSO's own mention of "any other exercise" being hypothetically "fine" displays park-specific competences in terms of referring to a collection of category-bound activities that predicate park space. Parks are places where people do "any other exercise" (including relatively stationary exercises such as bodyweight resistance training and aerobics); other public spaces, like streets and pavements, are not recognisably appropriate for most exercise activities beyond jogging and cycling.

Now, so far the analysis has demonstrated the multi-layered organisation of context along the lines of the temporal changes to the occasioning of normal, legitimate park activities that the pandemic has instigated. Nevertheless, the incumbency of the PCSO as a police operative provides another dimension, which is the legal predicates of *public* space. The reference to the fines that he has 'already issued' to other people who 'break the new rules' is possibly the clearest rendition of the duplicative organisation of park space as both a 'settinged' category device under which exercise

practices (including ballplaying) are recognisably legitimate and ordinary, and itself a category of legal public space, specifically policeable under the new legislation. Issuing fines to adjacent members of the 'rulebreaker' category invokes an explicit contingency on which park space is a proxy of the wider realm of legally public space. The 'new rules' are hearable not as new *park* rules, but as the new all-encompassing emergency civil contingencies legislation, the 'Coronavirus Act 2020'. This is due to the ongoing procedural relevancies of the COVID-19 pandemic; the context which homogenises 'rules' and legalises public space. It is only in the mutual elaboration of legal 'rules' seen through the specific device of the pandemic that the park becomes an acute category of legal public space whereby enforcement might be handled by normative custodians of mainstream public space (the police), along the same organisational contingencies that they would handle any other public space. Put simply, police operatives conducting police enforcement activities with recourse to general public space legislation (rather than the parks-specific bylaws) practically accomplishes the park as a category of public space. Park space thus aligns with the legalistic framework of broad public space in the pandemic, as local membership is relationally and consequentially embedded in that legalistic framework. The way it is formulated in terms of homogenous legal 'rules' is hearably specific to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to remain with the locative phenomena of the multi-layered organisation of park space, and demonstrate some of the naturally occurring and stably produced tactics of enforcement encounters. Consider how in the statement "We've had full-on football matches here" the Ranger invokes the 'irresponsible other' in a concrete specification. The hypothetical consequence of

issuing fines that is floated by the PCSO is reified in the Ranger's interjection. As far as any member is aware, this is not just a thing that *may* happen, it is a thing that *has* happened, and this goes some way to justify and legitimise reprimanding them for playing ballgames. Invoking the irresponsible or problematic (and, importantly, *non-present*) 'other' is a relatively stable feature of park enforcement, both during COVID-19 times and before. The formulation of the hyperlocal trouble is often deferred and mediated to unspecified 'others', who can be attributed the blame instead of the co-present incumbents, and the Rangers can then leverage the incumbents as 'helpers' in co-producing the enforcement of public park order. To demonstrate this more plainly, I turn to further instances from another patrol a few days later in which different Rangers make use of this tactic.

Couple on the grass

It's a sunny Friday afternoon in the park. There are quite a few groups of people sitting, relaxing, playing, picnicking, and so on. The field is quite busy considering the state-imposed stay at home order, but not nearly as busy as it can get on, say, a sunny weekend in the midst of summer. It would appear on first inspection that no groups are remotely close to each other; at an estimate the closest groups are approximately 30 metres from each other while they are often as far as 50 to 100 metres apart. The Rangers are aware that the UK press has just today reported that there may be some changes to, and easing of, lockdown measures. The Prime Minister will make a statement on Monday. The Rangers lament the difficulties this poses for their job, as their instruction for enforcement comes from the police and the City Council, which ultimately falls under the measures put in place by the devolved Welsh Government, not the British Government. Even if the UK Prime Minister gave the go-ahead to ease

lockdown measures in England, these would not necessarily apply to Wales unless the Welsh First Minister proposed simultaneous changes. The Rangers are certain that many park users may be ignorant to this fact.

Moving over to our first group – a man and a woman lying on the grass with nobody else around them for a good fifty metres – one of the Rangers takes the lead and extends his arms out gesturing as if presenting them as an exemplary example: “Great social distancing!”

The couple laugh reservedly, and we join in.

He continues in a more serious tone: “Sorry to bring this to you... but our rate of infection has not gone down that much, although the new announcements have come in. What we’re asking people to do is not to congregate in one place for too long because of the domino effect of people seeing you and thinking ‘it’s fine, so let’s go as well...’.”

They nod, with the man agreeing: “Of course...”

“You guys are fine people, but we’ll have other people who’ll protest and not move on, so if you guys could please start moving on. So that way we can have people circulating more,” the Ranger gestures cyclically.

The woman agrees, “Yeah, no problem–”

“We alright for another ten minutes...?” the man interjects in a similarly friendly tone.

“By all means!” the first Ranger says,

“Yeah, no problem!” the second Ranger follows.

“Thank you!” the woman says, nodding the conversation to closure.

“Thank you both, cheers!” begins the second Ranger, moving away in the direction of the next group.

“Buh-bye guys, stay safe... and don’t... get it!” continues the first, muddling his words slightly and bringing his hands together in a faux-pleading gesture.

We all laugh as we walk away.

Occasioning an explicitly local-referential explanation

Like the ‘full-on football matches’ from the previous extract, the Ranger in this situation draws on a hypothetical situation of “people seeing you [the couple sitting on the grass] and thinking ‘it’s fine, so let’s go as well...’.” It is made relationally relevant to the local scene by reifying the abstract concept of the ‘domino effect’ implying that the current situation, despite not being problematic as a standalone action, may have unintended consequences for the collaborative ‘doing’ of mundane civics. The hypothetical consequences are made clear by the Ranger as being unintentional through his postulative statement that “You guys are fine people”. In this way, it is made clear that the couple, as members of the category of “fine people”, would not intentionally cause a public safety issue, but may indeed be the type of person who may accidentally and unwittingly become part of that problem (and moreover, the type of person who would definitely not want to cause such an issue, even accidentally). Local qualification of the “fine people” category comes from the Ranger’s prior and immediate exemplification of their current activity as “Great social distancing!”

Importantly, the activity of mutually elaborating the settinged character of the park as an enforceable rule-governed space in a pandemic context involves, firstly, specifying the hyperlocal trouble of sitting on the grass; secondly, invoking a hypothetical villain (“other people who’ll protest and not move on”); and finally, an invitation to share the seeing of the park in terms of a macro-level work domain (most notable in the

formulation of a positive outcome being “hav[ing] people circulating more”). The park is collaboratively accomplished here in terms of a continuous visual contexture, in which the concrete hyperlocal realm of the encounter, the imagined domain of the hypothetical villain, and the overarching work consequences for the Park Rangers form the macro-social ‘collectivity’ of the park (Coulter, 2001). This latter step of inviting incumbents of a ‘problem’ activity to see the positive outcome in terms of their work practice is a crucial step in the co-production of the mundane civics that the Rangers operate. The couple on the grass are proffered as lay-colleagues or assistants; their contested and varying categorisation ranging initially from unintentional interlopers, and finally to helpful cooperative agents.

It is noted that on this occasion, the couple are arguably treated significantly better than the lads on the bench were in the first extract, and are afforded an explanation of the local trouble and their involvement in it, without accusing them of doing anything wrong (of their own accord). Of course, the rules remained the same as in the previous instances, and the individuals concerned were breaking them by not actively and accountably using the park for exercise. However, while there was some misgiving levelled at the lads on the bench as being in direct contradiction of the rules, in this instance the couple are invited to *cooperate* as “fine people” in order to prevent other people breaking the rules. Now, it may very well be that certain interlopers display particular identity features that will facilitate a simpler ‘just because’ (non)explanation. For example, a group of young lads or teenagers may be ‘treated like kids’ due to their age and disciplined in a way in which Rangers might impose their unquestioning and indisputable authority in their instructions (like a teacher or a parent might do). In this analysis, however, I look to the occasioning of locally-referential explanations: what

does an explanation look like and when is one provided? As conversation analyst Charles Antaki (1988: 2) argues:

“Explanations ... reveal or claim to reveal what is ‘really’ the case. The speaker might have been asked to make the revelation ... or may choose to unveil it unilaterally... In either case, the explanatory context offers information about the episode which, unlike information exchanged in other, more neutral contexts, promises to reorient the framing of the event and the participants’ place within it.”

My concern herein is the practical ‘work’ that a specifically local-referential explanation – as situated ‘reason-giving’ (Antaki and Leudar, 1990) – does in asking park users to move on, when such an explanation is occasioned, and, increasingly, how interaction is organised through other devices in place of local reason-giving.

Going back to the family walking the dog/playing ballgames, they were provided an explanation in terms of a hypothetical “full-on football match” akin to the “domino effect” explanation to the couple above, but only after the mother showed some resistance in her facetious responses to the PCSO’s dithering monologue. In that case the Ranger added the explanation as to how their actions were similar – and conducive – to particularly bad hypothetical actions at a moment when the balance of power began shifting away from the PCSO. In two other instances engaging with picnicking families (on the same day as the couple), the Rangers led with similar “domino effect” explanations:

1. Ranger: “Sorry to bring this to you... but, we still have a high level of new infections. And, although you’re doing fine and there’s no problem – you’ll possibly

go home and never come close to anyone – but it’s the *idea* that people will think that it’s okay to come and congregate. So, from one small group we’ll start to have more and more big groups. So, after you’ve rested a little bit, if you could keep exercising– keep moving...”

Park user: “Ohh... yeah, alright– yeah, no problem.”

2. Ranger: “Listen, we’re here today checking in on people and making sure they are okay, and we’re asking them to please keep things moving on... So it doesn’t give ideas to other people – who’re possibly not as careful as you are – to congregate... and then we’ll end up with a new level of infection...” He signals in an upward rising, wafting gesture, before theatrically bringing his hands downwards on the exhale with a lowering gesture “We want it to go dooown, and to hopefully enjoy summer–”

Park user: “Ah, yes, yes, sorry–”

In both of the above instances, leading with a locally-accountable logical explanation of a hypothetical domino/ripple/butterfly consequence of their own actions, followed by the request to “keep moving” achieves an immediate response of agreement. Both times the request is accomplished as reasonable or understandable by the interlocutors. Nevertheless, while the temptation may be to account for this phenomenon through an explanatory model, it should be noted that, while this seems to work as a tactic for the Rangers (in these instances at least), it does not account for the occasioning of the provision of an explanation in the first place. Consider the following instance in which an explanation is not provided to another picnicking couple:

Now that the police backup has arrived to help us deal with the particularly busy area by the weir, we took direction from the two horseback officers to go down the bank and onto the concrete pavilion and begin engaging park users down there (as their horses would struggle to get down). It was mostly kids paddling, but there was a couple sat stretched out on a picnic blanket, holding wine glasses (made of actual glass), with finished melamine plates and metal cutlery sat next to them. A portable speaker was playing music loudly. We moved to them first.

“Hiya guys, alright? Can’t have a picnic here I’m afraid...”

They look up at us, squinting as the sun is in their eyes. The woman asks in a surprised tone, “Not even here?!”

“No... I’m afraid not.” the Ranger says, nodding up towards the horseback police in the vicinity.

“Oh we’re not hurting anyone down here are we?”

“We’re in a lockdown you see, so we’re asking people not to congregate in one place for too long because you’re only meant to be out for exercise.”

“Oh okay,”

“Yeah sorry guys, lovely weather for it I know, but we’re asking people to move on when they’re ready. Take a couple of minutes, by all means, but then we really need you to keep moving, alright?”

“Yeah alright,”

“Cheers guys, stay safe...” replies the Ranger as he begins moving back up the bank.

Invoking authority in lieu of explanation

On this occasion the Ranger began (following a polite opening) with direct reference to the couple's breaching of the rules. Without reference to a valid explanation, they resist by asking "Not even here?!" (hearable as a reference to being the only picnickers on the concrete pavilion). The Ranger then accountably uses the horseback police as a visual prop, pointing out their presence in lieu of giving an account as to *why* they "can't have a picnic here". Police horses are not common features of the street scene in the city (except for match days and other big events), and they are particularly uncommon in park space. They were made starkly available as a constitutive feature of the participation framework at that moment, as an incongruous 'elephant in the room' (or 'police horses in the park'), and by nodding to them, the Ranger made a recognisable attempt to invoke an authoritative categorial adjacency between the police and himself. This borrowed authority is not symbolic, but rather it is practically occasioned in the attempted equivalation between the separate *but categorially related* simultaneously occurring interactions between the police and nearby picnickers, and the Ranger and this picnicking couple. Indeed, authority is perhaps not *borrowed* (as interactions in which Rangers engage park users are often shown to be contingent on some form of situated authority) but rather corroborated and ensured. The Rangers' agenda for moving people on involves invoking and exercising *deontic* authority (Stevanovic and Peräylä, 2012; Stevanovic, 2013); that is to persuade certain park users deemed to be interloping or engaging in problematic conduct to alter their behaviour. In this case negotiating deontic authority involved building a live categorial relationship with the police officers.

By engaging in recognisably similar interactional work to the horseback police officers, in an observably continuous (or at the very least *contiguous*) spatial domain, with interlocutors who are partaking in the same practical activities (picnicking), the Ranger's (category-bound) activity of engaging the picnickers and reprimanding them is hearable *qua* their position as authoritative enforcement officer, as per Sacks' (1995) viewer's maxim. The relevance of authority as a device is duplicatively organised through the Ranger's category incumbency as 'rule-enforcer' in an asymmetrical standardised relational pair with the 'wrongdoers' which, itself, is made available to members present by categorial adjacencies with the police officers (who are established members of that 'rule-enforcer' category). By extension, the activity of picnicking is accomplished as 'wrongdoing' by virtue of the police officers' accountably professional categorisation practices, and therefore the members in question who are partaking in that same activity should be seen as members of that same 'wrongdoers' category.

So, the nod was demonstrably tacit affirmation of the Rangers' and police officers' professional relationship in this operation. Such an action invoked a specific formulation of authority by proxy to be used as a backup in case of situated categorial 'disjuncture' (an established potential concern in which the Rangers may not be recognised as having, or fail to achieve, authority in a given situation) (see Pollner, 1975; Fitzgerald and Evans, 2019). The police officers' situated (and more broadly recognisable) incumbency as 'rule-enforcers' paired with the picnickers as 'wrongdoers' was used by the Ranger as referential evidence of the couple's own implied wrongdoing, still without specifying a local explanation. As the woman probes further by asking a rhetorical question "...we're not hurting anyone down here are we?"

this can be heard with her original question as understanding that the Ranger's request is regarding anti-COVID-19 measures. The place reference category "here" both times accomplishes the couple's understanding of their relational locality as being conceivably and credibly appropriate in terms of physical distancing from other people. The resistance comes via the disjunctive spatial referential category of 'here', in which its appropriateness is made available and negotiated through the category device of COVID-19. 'Here' implies 'at a safe physical distance'.

Rather than get caught up in the couple's preference of framing the local trouble as specifically the potential spread of disease (to which they have already begun making an argument for their spatial appropriateness), the Ranger formulates the pandemic context directly by invoking lockdown rules: "We're in a lockdown you see, so we're asking people not to congregate in one place for too long because you're only meant to be out for exercise." In this way the Ranger couches the trouble in terms of broader lockdown rules regarding only being "out for exercise" rather than simply local park rules. Framing it this way interactionally encourages members' primary reasoning to come from the perceptibly self-evident utilitarian 'greater good' of the national lockdown rules (the Coronavirus Act 2020), assuming some authority from that national category device (as the Rangers' local work is predicated in the national anti-COVID-19 effort), and, importantly, relinquishing the requirement to provide a local-referential explanation for why picnics are not allowed.

So, authority is invoked as a resource and itself duplicatively organised through a categorial relationship with the police and tacit references to broader lockdown measures. In this instance, despite some initial resistance, the job of getting the

picnickers to agree to move on was accomplished without having to provide a direct explanation as to why their own actions were *locally* troublesome in the way that it was being typified by the couple themselves. The local trouble was re-specified as a problem of broader political significance, (i.e. “We’re in a lockdown”), and not of the tacit rules of order in park space of “not hurting anyone”. These are national, political rules being interpreted and exercised in some hyperlocal formulation in which the Rangers are required – by some accountable bureaucratic association – to act as formal enforcement agents. By providing some temporal leeway in their application (“Take a couple of minutes”) and indications of a shared epistemic stance (“lovely weather for it I know”), the Ranger eschews his personal endorsement of the appropriateness of applying these rules on this occasion, but makes it known that he is asking for cooperation from them *qua* his role as a Park Ranger. The omnirelevance of the Park Ranger–park user organisational device is thus momentarily challenged but ultimately accomplished in this empathetic separation or ‘break’ from the Ranger role. As it goes, Rangers have to ask park users to stick to the rules as part of their job, and that job is the end in itself.

Mitigating the ‘singling out’ of individual park users

While this has been addressed to some extent previously, it is worth exploring the categorial positioning of individuals as members of the collective public. Their ‘singling out’ as wrongdoers, interlopers, or deviants in terms of the ‘new normal’ rules of the times of COVID-19 (but also, in previous, ‘normal’ times) often manifests as a moment of reportable affective tension. It is an uncomfortable experience in which the discomfort is publicly available on behalf of the park users *and* the Park Rangers (see Ablitt, 2020). For a recognisable enforcement agent to approach someone in the public

place for which they are accountable, particularly (but not exclusively) when there are other potential perpetrators either in the vicinity or likely to be similarly culpable, can be seen as visibly singling them out. Such a framing can be used as a counterclaim against the Rangers as unfair treatment on their behalf. In situations which require separate enforcement of the same rules against a number of individuals or groups bound to some equivalent activity category (for example, as above, asking people who are sat down to move on), there are demonstrable (and sometimes pre-emptive or anticipatory) efforts against the accusation of ‘singling out’ or ‘picking on’ individuals. In the broadest, and most stable way across the examples, it is the categorisation of the individual park user as a ‘member of the public’. With this categorisation comes certain role expectations and responsibility pertaining to that collective identity. As the data show, this is demonstrated not in the way of ‘not letting the side down’, but rather as being categorially positioned – in each individual encounter – as a co-opted ‘double-agent’ of consummate attitude whose cooperation is necessary for the maintenance of collective public order. I will discuss this further in Chapter 7 as I consider how ‘citizenship’ is displayed, deployed, and collaboratively accomplished in situations like this one; the practical contingencies of this public ‘talking up’ work rely on visibility in public space as a resource for occasioning certain public virtues. Virtuous citizenship is seeable as an accomplishment of the haecceities of public space.

For now, the spatial incorporation of this categorisation is significant, particularly in the above instances in which analogous formulations of the domino/ripple/butterfly effect were used. On a busy day in the park, such a notion can be realised in the local contexture as not just hypothetical or imaginary, but as a concept whose logic is available to members present in its tangible implications for the incumbents in that

local gestalt contexture (Gurwitsch, 1964; Coulter, 1994). This may go some way to explain the resistance by the mother whose sons' ballgames in an empty park were positioned as precursory to "full-on football matches." The conceptual device is made real by its plausibility and local measurability in the lived course of that moment in the park. In interaction, co-participants' transient, situated identities are occasioned in and by the park space. This work is principally contingent on the interaction being between individuals not personally known to each other, but whose approach of one by the other is available as congruent or appropriate. Park Rangers are tacitly permitted to approach park users, and vice-versa. As mentioned in Chapter 5, a Ranger's action of approaching someone *in park space* is observable as a required work activity, and thus deemed normal *in park space*. Such engagement between otherwise strangers is reciprocally legitimised by and occasioned through the actioning of spatial categories. The standardised relational pair of Park Ranger and park user are only seeable through the common denominator, the category device of 'public park space'. In interaction these default identity categories are a product of the collaborative, mutual intelligibility of the park space, but, crucially, 'park users' are heard as a non-personal category through which any number of incumbents in the space can be categorised.

The category 'park user' is not explicitly referred to in interaction but is made available in and through the aforementioned contexture; Park Rangers do not engage people for reasons other than those pertaining to their situated incumbency as park users. In this way their routine public engagements are operationalised through this categorial framing, and their situated methods for mitigating the 'singling out' of individual park users often utilise the affordances of such a category-incumbency being multi-

referential. For example, in the previous example of the picnicking couple, "...so we're asking people not to congregate in one place for too long because you're only meant to be out for exercise" the broad, general, non-specified category 'people' is used alongside the collective 'you're' (made available as collective by its tying to the applicable-to-all rules of only being "out for exercise"). The depersonalisation of the Ranger's category-use makes it clear that his request is not targeting them specifically, but is directed at the currently widely observable action ("congregat[ing] in one place for too long") that is being done by 'people' (a category which they are incumbent members). Further, this does work to build an adjacency between individual agents and the collective whole of the local park scene. Depersonalised, broadly applicable categories alongside specific reference to observable actions lays bare the connection between the collective whole and the individual agency on which it is inextricably contingent.

Through juxtaposition with the irresponsible other (as previously mentioned), the Rangers routinely and observably work to position the individual they are engaging with as an incumbent of a widely-applicable and spatially-relevant category of 'park user' or 'member of the public' while also treating them as an exceptional case, granting them some kind of special status or benefit of the doubt. In the case of the 'ballgames' case, the Ranger said, "We know you're a sensible lot"; with the first couple on the grass there was "You guys are fine people"; further instances included "And, although you're doing fine and there's no problem – you'll possibly go home and never come close to anyone..." and "So it doesn't give ideas to other people – who're possibly not as careful as you are..." Each of these is an example of 'credentialing' (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975) in which the Ranger's statement of criticism is prefaced with

a disclaimer manifesting as a positive assumption of the person's character or intentions. In this way their 'singling out' is mitigated by the following interactional methods: (1) Depersonalised and non-specified references to troubles; (2) Credentialed the interlocutor as being of good character. Their positioning as exemplary representatives of the collective public sets up compliance with the Rangers' requests as cooperation that is necessary for the upholding of public order, not because they were directly complicit in the wrongdoing themselves, but because their actions could launch a domino effect that could lead to wrongdoing by other members of the public.

Conclusion: The mundanely recognisable orderliness of the pandemic park

As my colleagues and I have argued more broadly in a recent article, describing the COVID-19 pandemic as constituting 'unprecedented' changes to public norms and behaviours serves to "misplace the work of members in producing this 'novel' social order" (Smith, et al. 2020: 198). The truth is that there is, and continues to be, "order at all points" (Sacks, 1984: 22); this is recognisable in members' ability to acknowledge the strangeness of – and produce as accountably 'abnormal' – the so called 'new normal'. Supermarket queues, for example, may be spaced at two-metre intervals, but they are still recognisable as queues, and the ongoing methods which members use to organise, produce, and make sense of these queues are still the same as those which they would have employed previously. This is because the method of queuing is built into the action, as the locally-produced witnessably ordered phenomenon of the queue is "an *in situ* accomplishment of its constituents" (Ball and Smith, 1986: 27).

Certainly what has become increasingly apparent is that the multi-layered organisation of the parks in the times of COVID-19 requires some navigation, and the civic engagements between the Park Rangers and members of the public invoke multi-layered orders of 'normal' park space, legalistic public space, and the mutually intelligible pandemic context. The legalistic notions of public space have been foregrounded but still do not necessarily always supplant existing configurations of spatial categories without protest. Members still orient to park space in their practical, park-specific activities, and the 'normal' relevancies of park space remains an organisational device for membership: people still sunbathe, picnic, and play with balls in parks, and not, say, on pavements or street corners. The 'doing' of these activities is still constitutive of the normal park scene, and even now that they may be reasons for the Rangers to ask people to move on, their persistent normalcy permeates the enforcement encounters and it is often the context of the pandemic which is treated as not normal. Importantly, while the substance of the rules may be treated as not normal, the norms of the rule-governed character of public space remains. Indeed, it is perhaps the very contingencies of the pandemic that make available what is (and has always been) 'normal' and 'remarkable' in park scenes. What I mean here is that the 'normal'/'remarkable' device has always been a standard component of an incongruity procedure (see the example of the dogwalker in the bushes in Chapter 5), and from an analyst's perspective we can no doubt observe many things which are normal or remarkable in park space, however, it is the pandemic itself which has afforded us the opportunity to see 'normality' and 'remarkability' *in terms of the participants' orientation* as people account for 'normality' as a centrally relevant category now more than ever. In this way the pandemic has made 'normality' visible as a collaborative production in park space.

That being said, public space is and has always been policeable, and while the parks in particular have also always been policeable (for some people and some practices more than others), the changing rules in light of the pandemic are recognisably indeterminate enough for typically nondeviant activities to be caught in the crosshairs of this policing. Nevertheless, members of the public have been shown to be 'fluent' in the categories and devices that COVID-19 makes relevant, sometimes holding their own and 'playing' with those categories (see the example of the lads sitting on the bench and formulating as 'ordinary' their status as a student household, or the example of the woman who glibly invokes the 'normality' of her sons kicking a football about). Furthermore, the bureaucratic machinery of public enforcement agents is recognisably 'normal' and certainly not new (Lipsky, 2010). The contingencies through which this enforcement operates in the times of COVID-19 may be unique to the 'new normal', but the actual cases that display the ongoing practices and accomplishments of doing this enforcement observably hinge on recognisably reproduced stable properties "each next first time" (Garfinkel, 2002). Notably, in every instance in this chapter and in previous chapters, the Rangers do not introduce themselves as Rangers, but rather – most of the time – they simply begin saying what they are doing. The visual order remains stable, as seen *inter alia* in Roy Turner's (1972) group therapy study and in Peter Eglin's (2009) university lecture study, the Rangers are something of an 'authorised starter' in the sense that they are sanctioned and obligated to legitimately engage members of the public in conversation in the parks. Moreover, being uniformed, they are not required to provide credentialing statements as to their identities as responsible agents in the parks. The autochthonous order

properties of the standardised relational pair of 'responsible agent' and 'park user' are quite stable in the first instance based on the visual order alone.

To conclude, returning to Hester and Francis' (2003) relational configuration of category, context, and activity; the gestalt contexture of the public park remains stably produced. This is not to say that COVID-19 is somehow inconsequential to the park, of course, as it has been demonstrated herein it has amplified the Park Rangers' job of enforcement significantly, and the broader context of the pandemic is organisationally and procedurally relevant in every single encounter observed and documented. Crucially, however, it has provided a perspicuous setting for recovering procedurally relevant 'context' as a member's phenomenon, and displays the endogenously produced order of the setting of the park. For all the discourses of apparent 'unprecedented' changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has made to public conduct, to the point that it has been ontologically dubbed the 'new normal', publicly available 'troubles' can be seen through the same 'incongruity procedure' (Sacks, 1972b: 283). Such a procedure requires "having knowledge of the 'normal appearances' of the park" (Ablitt, 2020: 6) and indeed an understanding of the norms of public behaviour built into the 'natural attitude' (Schutz, 1962). So, while it may be appealing to lean into treating the times of COVID-19 as a 'breach' of social order (Rawls, 2020; Scambler, 2020), the data would suggest that interactional negotiations in public space treat as stable the lasting contingencies of 'normality'. Normality remains the stable item against which idiosyncrasy and incongruity are made available, and indeed it remains, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there is order at all points.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MUNDANE CIVICS, DISCRETION, AND CITIZENSHIP

Thus far, this thesis has looked into everyday actions and showcased how mundane public service encounters are achieved between Park Rangers and members of the public in public park space. It has traced these ordinary park activities in their minutiae and shown them to be expertly and artfully handled; their ‘settinged’ particulars constructing, sustaining, and reproducing the park. Such encounters have been treated as emergent, collaborative phenomena in their own right, as observable social facts that are witnessably recognisable to all constituent parties. In attending to the participants’ orientation in the production of these collaborative activities, analyses have demonstrated their orderly mechanics; incumbent categories displayed in relatively stable organisational participatory frameworks. Most fundamentally, this has been the orderly mechanics of ground-level bureaucracy and mundane civic encounters.

In this chapter, I will be taking a step out to outline what the Park Rangers’ practice can tell us about public bureaucratic and civic relations, and why the findings of these microanalyses matter sociologically and more broadly. My enquiry has, so far, been conducted exclusively at the local level. Nevertheless – returning to the words of James Joyce, “In the particular is contained the universal” – it is argued that the findings from this local level enquiry inevitably have broader sociological and practical applications. This analytical step out to the ‘bigger picture’ is entirely informed by the implications of the Rangers’ ground-level practice, which has demonstrably

constitutive consequences for the quotidian making and remaking of the parks, the city, and society at large. Indeed, matters of 'structural' importance are contingently organised as emergent properties of social life at the local level, and they are reciprocally, simultaneously and collaboratively produced and invoked.

I will begin by talking through these ground-level practices as a recognisable collection of routine phenomena that I have described throughout as 'mundane civics'. The mundane practical encounters that comprise the Park Rangers' work are fundamentally civic encounters; urban citizenship is bound up in their public engagements. This explication of a central conceptual assumption serves as a contribution to the field of public administration research, showing how urban citizenship is occasioned in mundane public encounters. Further I discuss the related and broadly applicable finding: that 'discretion' is central to the professional public practitioner's quotidian role and experience, is displayed in a number of ordinary ways, and is not simply a contingency plan. My contribution seeks to inform the ever-growing body of literature on studies of public work, and promote practice-led understanding over theoretical frameworks. Foremost, however, this study is a contribution to the sociological literature on urban public interaction and behaviour.

Mundane civics and the co-production of mundane urban citizenship

Fundamentally, all of the observed public encounters demonstrate the recognisable practice of 'doing' mundane civic engagement, and a routinely achieved by-product of such encounters is the co-production of urban citizenship. The term 'mundane civics' is borrowed from William Housley (2021a: 52–65) who coined the term to refer to 'mundane civic culture-in-action': a collection of collaboratively-produced interactional

practices that constitute, quite directly, the public, civilian politics of democratic society as participants navigate and co-produce those cultural institutions through which western democracy perpetually emerges. Examples of this in Housley's own work include analysis of members' media engagement such as newspaper headlines, letters to the editor, and radio phone-in programmes (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002, 2009), and more recently, social media interactions around instances of racist formulations and their public responses on Twitter (Housley, 2021a, 2021b). In tracing the situated mechanisms through which members observably enact membership categorisation work, Housley demonstrates that members' own demonstration of analytical knowledge in these interactions characterises civilian democratic engagement on the 'digital street'. In this way, civic orders are reciprocally produced by and made available as cultural resources to members as they negotiate their civic and moral roles while they engage with each other on Twitter. Importantly, people are not setting out to 'do' civic behaviour online; this comes as a by-product of their interactions and manifest as "routinely encountered" roles such as "the celebrity antagonist, political pundit and anonymous troll" (Housley, 2021a: 55).

Either way, democratic and civic action is something that occurs when people get together, whether through collaboration or conflict, in 'broadcasting' communications and on the 'interactive' web. Interesting here is Housley's metaphor of the 'digital street' being a spatialising expression to denote telecopresence (see Zhao, 2005, 2015); copresence of some sort is typically a requirement of situated collaborative action and, indeed, mundane urban citizenship (which arguably moves in lockstep with mundane civics) can sometimes rely rather more strongly on a shared

accomplishment of space and place. Citizenship practices – or ‘doing being’ a citizen – are variously available in observations of everyday urban encounters. It would be unhelpful here for me to rigidly define ‘citizenship’; it has and will be displayed as a membership category herein, and the interactional apparatus of mundane citizenship encounters laid bare. However, for the purpose of clarification in this discussion, ‘citizenship’ is a broadly recognisable, publicly available set of relational, participatory practices that situate individuals politically in the local environment.¹⁷ Ultimately, ‘citizenship’ occurs any time an individual is accountable to the state. It is a mode of accountability that is inherently political in its production: not everyone is a citizen. For example, homeless people (of no fixed abode, and often no photographic identification documents, bank accounts, and so on) are, as Bittner had it: “persons of *radically reduced visibility*” (1967: 706). Such individuals and their movements are not traceable through the state or city’s structures and systems of accountability (c.f. Hall and Smith, 2017) and are therefore not handleable as ‘citizens’ in any bureaucratic sense.

That being said, it is rare for Park Rangers to request personal details or identification from members of the public, and accordingly, the accountability requirement intrinsic to the mundane ‘politics’ of urban public citizenship is arguably seeable in ordinary displays of civic participation. It is certainly not being argued that citizenship is simply having proof of personal identification; mundane citizenship, as it is publicly available,

¹⁷ W.B. Gallie (1956: 185) similarly noted in his acclaimed paper ‘Essentially contested concepts’ that ‘democracy’ can be defined as “primarily the continuous active participation of citizens in political life at all levels”. Wilfred Carr (1991: 374) describes ‘citizenship’ as an ‘essentially contested concept’, while Jeremy Waldron (2002: 149) notes that Westlaw also defines it as such, alongside ‘civil rights’, ‘community’, ‘culture’, ‘freedom’, ‘privacy’, ‘public interest’, to mention but a few relevant essentially contested concepts. That being said, as noted herein, many of these glosses can be recovered by examining their witnessable recognisability in ordinary activity.

involves, inter alia, participating in the democratic orders of the city by: having and displaying 'rights' in and to shared public space, respecting fellow citizens' rights, demonstrating stakeholderhood of the urban fabric, appropriately navigating (e.g. challenging or respecting) authority in relation to one's rights and stakeholderhood, and thus demonstrating a 'localness' or 'belonging' to the city. Notably, in the example below, the man refuses to provide his personal details, however it is arguably through this request and refusal that citizenship is accomplished as an ordinary practical phenomenon.

So, taking inspiration from Housley's analyses demonstrating the pervasion of mundane civic culture in the naturally-occurring discursive *public* proceedings of interactive media and online communication networks, I have taken a step back to 'analogue' configurations of mundane civics and showcased how public interactions between two unacquainted parties are also observably civic interactions. The mundane civics enacted in encounters between Park Rangers and members of the public coproduce and characterise public citizenship roles in an equally mundane way. Notably and demonstrably, a shared rationality of citizenship and local attachment pervades all of these public encounters. As Lipsky (2010 [1980]: 4) had it: "...in a sense street-level bureaucrats implicitly mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state. In short, they hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship." More radically, perhaps, citizenship is *only* ever available as a relational production. Again, following Housley (2021), I am arguing that mundane civic engagements are the only mode through which citizenship is truly realisable, actionable, visible, and so on. Mundane citizenship becomes a property of the situation, and its haecceities are recovered in the local, practical organisation of

mundane civics with recourse to spatialised practices of patrolling, approaching, questioning, 'checking up on', and so on. Practices that produce territories, that invoke local attachments and connections, and that rely fundamentally on displaying locally-relevant competencies.

It is here then that I would like to propose an adjacently observable 'analogue' organisation of mundane civic culture which perhaps more bluntly ruminates with the increasingly politicised notions of place and borders, and their consequences (identity, belonging, legitimacy, and so on) by virtue of their immediate copresence and constitutive urban civic context. Of course, it should be noted that these notions and their consequences are already centrally displayed in the online mundane civic discourse that Housley discusses, but are more so recognisable as coarsely *spatialised* productions in the 'analogue' context where the street, or the park, is not a metaphor but an immediate and constitutive site of practical activities through which civic culture is achieved as a mundane by-product. For example, in collaborative pursuits of a missing cat around a suburb, through which 'neighbouring' and 'neighbourhood' are occasioned (Laurier, et al. 2002); or in the property-oriented 'boundary-work' involved in appropriately and non-invasively engaging with neighbours (Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003). The spatially situated aspect of urban citizenship activities – whereby the shared environment is routinely invoked and produced as procedurally relevant – is also available in other everyday city interactions, such as approaching strangers for directions and acknowledging their uninformed position as tourists in the first instance (De Stefani and Mondada, 2018); or when street cleaners do 'othering' category-work in their claims about 'non-neighbourly' and sometimes 'foreign' fly-tippers based on the types of litter and refuse

they find (Ablitt and Smith, 2019); or when rough sleepers recount their (territorial) troubles with the police and propose that the city *should* 'belong' to everyone equally (Smith, 2011: 372). Notions of citizenship emerge in tandem with the production of the space as categorially relevant in all of these situations.

However, the spatialised setting of the Park Rangers' everyday work, and consequently the spatialised setting of the interactions which produce mundane civic activity is just one central feature which makes these instances available as pertaining to citizenship and civic engagement. The social mechanisms for coproducing this *spatialised* mundane civic activity can be traced back, for example, to conversations that construct trees and plants as objects whose existence and upkeep is intended to be for the shared benefit of 'the local community'. The routine production of public parks and green spaces as being democratic, egalitarian spaces for whom it is a citizen's *right* to use and 'enjoy' demonstrates a mundane public politics. Clearly, mundane civics are achieved in the taken-for-granted but artfully accomplished convivial negotiations showcased throughout this thesis; negotiations that produce legitimate park practice, which generate as a by-product certain legitimate 'types' of park users (volunteers, cyclists, dogwalkers) and, consequently, others as illegitimate (trespassers, cottagers, drug users, youth gangs, loiterers, etc.). More obviously, perhaps: the fact that the Park Rangers are uniformed officials who patrol the parks is what produces any engagement with them as a recognisable civic engagement inasmuch as they are seen to represent municipal authority. In a similar configuration to how a 'citizen' might write a letter to the editor (and that the action of writing such a letter to the editor might produce the writer as a 'citizen' in the first instance), a 'citizen' is also a character who might question a Park Ranger on, or audit, their actions.

Questioning a Park Ranger is also a citizenship activity, not least by virtue of the construction of the Rangers as public institutional operatives, much like how the editor of a newspaper is a figurehead of institutional structure. In their own ways, Park Rangers and newspaper editors are public representatives and engaging with them is an inherently civic activity.

In some cases, members themselves formulate these encounters as civic activities *in situ*. Consider these excerpts from an altercation with a man who took exception at the Park Rangers' enforcement practices during the first COVID-19 'Lockdown' of 2020. As stated in Chapter 6, the Rangers were tasked with moving people who were congregating in the parks on, as part of a broader multi-organisation (and national) strategy to enforce the new legislation regarding use of public space during the pandemic. During a routine engagement with a (compliant) couple who were sat on a bench, an irate passer-by challenged us, while recording the exchange on his mobile phone.

The man comes over, holding his phone out at arm's length in a 'landscape' orientation, and interrupts: "Is it illegal to sit down? Is it illegal to sit down at the moment?!"

The second Ranger pauses and replies carefully, "No– not *illegal*..."

The man repeats: "Is it *illegal* to sit down in public at the moment?"

The lead Ranger has his hands on his hips. He looks toward the man and calmly asks, "Are you filming, sir?" Looking down at his phone, the man nods, "Yes."

"Okay– I won't be responding to you if you're filming, okay?" replies the Ranger.

The man asserts that it is his right to film us, insisting: "You're acting unlawfully."

Firstly, here, the man immediately deploys a legal orientation, demonstrating a first-instance understanding of the Park Rangers' action of engaging with the couple on the bench as pertaining to alleged legal infractions. This framing continues with his allegation that the Rangers are 'acting unlawfully' and that it is his 'right' to continue recording the public interaction. All of this contributes to a participatory framework in which the Rangers are categorially produced as (purportedly improper) law enforcement agents, while both the man and the couple on the bench are enacting their individual rights as citizens, to film the encounter and to 'legally' sit down on a bench, respectively. Invoking the device of citizenship 'rights', by recording and questioning the Rangers, the encounter is organised through the standardised relational pair of interrogator-interrogee, demonstrating the civic power of the locally-ordered citizenship model. Mere strangers do not typically enter into relational configurations whereby one party can interrupt, interrogate and publicly audit the other, unless, of course, some injustice is being committed. 'Injustice' is inevitably situated and relative to the occasion, and the categorial incumbencies of the person committing that injustice. Perhaps we can envisage an intervention like the man's on a stranger if he was to be challenging a violent or racist attack, however, in this case the reason provided is the Rangers' so-called 'unlawful' action of (politely) asking the young couple to move on. In this way, what is considered 'unlawful' is occasioned by the fact of their recognisability as representatives of municipal authority.¹⁸ Further on in the altercation (which continued for some five or so minutes), the man made direct reference to 'citizens':

¹⁸ As shown in Chapter 6, many deemed the authorities' response to COVID-19 to be excessive and intrusive, and this is also clearly at play here in this configuration of perceived injustice. That being said, it remains that this kind of injustice can only be organised along these lines if one party is recognisably in an enforcement/authority position.

“They’re going out to exercise, get some Vitamin D, get some mental exercise as well as physical exercise! And they’ve got three fucking planks from the Council telling these *law-abiding* citizens what to do!”

It will be recalled that (restricted) exercise was one of the only legitimate reasons to be out in public during the UK COVID-19 ‘lockdown’, and the man formulates the couple’s reasoning along these lines. Noting that they are sat down on a bench, he initiates a repair to bring ‘mental exercise’ under the umbrella of appropriate, lawful behaviour even in the circumstances of the ‘new normal’ of the restrictions in response to the global pandemic. This is of local organisational import because he continues invoking the citizens’ rights device to clarify the couple’s *legitimate* position as ‘*law-abiding* citizens’. Enforcing certain legal rules on ‘law-abiding citizens’ is – for the man – an illegitimate practice that ‘fucking planks from the Council’ would do. ‘Law-abiding’ is a predicate of ‘citizen’ which is already built-in to its popular and situated meaning, but it does serve to reiterate the categorial boundaries of citizenship *in situ*: as the man would have it, this couple belongs here, it is their right to sit on this bench, and they are ultimately doing nothing wrong. Consequently, he is enlisting his citizenship rights to audit the Rangers’ practice and ‘hold truth to power’.

The second Ranger asks the man, “Okay, what’s your name, sir?”

“What? I’m not going to give you mine... I’m not–” the man replies, in a bewildered tone.

“Oh! Okay, you’re fine to ask my colleague for his name, but–” says the Ranger.

“Um, I’m not a public servant mate!” replies the man.

“But you’re making such a scene here...” the Ranger gestures to the surroundings.

The man reiterates: “I’m not obliged to give you my details, *you* are.”

Above, in the final excerpt near the end of the encounter, a Ranger is requesting the man’s name. This comes after the man requested their names first, to which the lead Ranger obliged and the second Ranger refused. Technically, as they do not have collar numbers or carry Council ID cards, individual Rangers are under no obligation to provide their personal details. However, to demonstrate innocence in the face of accusations of ‘unlawful’ actions, the first Ranger provided his name. Rangers may also ask members of the public for their details as part of their routine enforcement of environmental or parks-specific by-laws. In this case, the man refuses to give his name and justifies the discrepancy in standards because he is ‘not a public servant’. The categorial ramifications of the formulation of ‘public servant’ operationalises notions of subordination to the citizen; in other words, Rangers do not share the same rights to personal privacy in park space as other park users do. The man uses ‘name’ and ‘details’ synonymously, framing the request as a legalistic fact-finding mission. Such an encounter is recognisably politically charged, and invokes an asymmetrical power relationship through categorial inferences organised with recourse to the local reality of citizen’s rights. In this collaborative activity, citizenship is both a resource and an accomplishment, and sits opposite the Ranger as a public institutional operative in a standardised relational pairing.

So, to take a step out again, the Park Rangers’ ground-level bureaucratic maintenance and management occasions urban ‘citizenship’ inasmuch as practices of ‘doing being’ a citizen permeate and organise their public encounters. Their collaborative work of

maintaining park space produces situations of mundane civic behaviour insofar as the situation's accountable categorial incumbencies are relatively stably produced with recourse to the Rangers' institutional assertions and assumptions. In turn, the incumbent park user or member of the public is categorially produced in numerous situated ways as a political stakeholder: a citizen whose engagement is not random or arbitrary, but is typically observably legitimate in their rights and intentions, and therefore sanctioned. Whether or not a citizen's displayed intentions are fair (the irate man who argued with and filmed the Rangers did not 'pass' as a concerned citizen as much as he did a gratuitous antagonist) is less important to the analysis; what is demonstrable is that there are attempts at producing a narrative organised around the category device of rights-based citizenship, and the practical orientations of the local interaction order give credence to the citizen as someone with a political voice, who is eligible to critique and audit a Park Ranger's practice at any time in park space. In this way, the irate man did display incumbency of the category of (public, political) 'citizen' and contributed to the reflexive constitution of the assembled scene and park setting as a site of public citizenship.

Like Housley's antiracist tweeter who invokes moral sense-making to challenge violence on the digital street, the park user generally occupies a valid public position in engaging with a Park Ranger, enquiring about their work or questioning decisions made in and for park space. Each exhibits recognisable moral category incumbencies to demonstrate their ordinary legitimacy, their belonging, their citizenship. Further, they participate in the cultural frameworks through which such ordinary democratic action gets done. The encounters I have described throughout this thesis are identifiable as purposive work activities by council operatives; when the Park Rangers approach (or

are approached by) members of the public, they are doing so in their capacity as public workers, and as part of their practical work role. This is largely obvious to everyone present and participating in these encounters, but the fact that it is taken for granted should not discount it from analysis. On the contrary, the mundanity of public civic encounters is analytically interesting by virtue of its tacit, unassuming co-production. Considering that much of the relationship between the local government and the residents and users of the city – as it pertains to the territory of which both of these parties may be considered stakeholders – is achieved through these incidental, ordinary, mobile fora, should make them sites of interest for scholars of government, bureaucracy, and public administration.

Such engagements are organised through this omnirelevant device of public worker-public citizen, which is seeable as ordinary and unproblematic in the first instance; co-participants handle these interactional moments in terms of their recognisability as civic encounters, and certainly not as mere instances of strangers approaching other strangers in public. This demonstrates the mundanity of civic activities as ordinarily experienced and competently handled. The citizenship role is achieved relationally by knowledgeable social actors. What I have called ‘mundane civics’ throughout this thesis has broader observability and recognisable application as a members’ phenomenon in numerous settings. Indeed, these public service encounters are arguably autochthonous settings in their own right. Studying encounters as a setting in which public service contexts and relations are available as collaboratively produced observable facts *to the participants of these encounters themselves* is, at the very least, helpful for realising the produced reality of these settings, and more radically, the *only* way we can observably ‘know’ mundane civic operations.

Centring 'discretion' as routine, observable, bureaucratic practice

The type of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010 [1980]) that keeps the city ticking over, that makes and remakes the urban fabric on a daily basis, is such an omnipresent phenomenon that it is concealed by its very mundanity. Practitioners in high visibility tabards are everywhere, and their quotidian work essential to the (re)production of order, yet they and their work are routinely overlooked. They are all too often treated by scholars and citizens alike as vessels for an organisational agenda, parrots of the state, purveyors of structure. Whether they are Park Rangers, or police officers, or street pastors, or civic enforcement agents such as litter wardens or traffic wardens, these practitioners share a recognisable practice structure of patrolling and engaging in focused interactional encounters with members of the public. However, all of these practitioners, notwithstanding the remits of their operational agendas are afforded some form of flexibility (usually articulated as their 'discretion') to engage in public encounters as they see fit. Irrespective of their practical training in terms of the particulars of their roles and the agencies they come to represent, each individual practitioner will be required at some point in the course of their daily shift to engage with members of the public, and in doing so will inevitably rely – to some extent – on unscripted interactional tactics, social grammars, and vocabulary. This is an inevitability that, in being described as 'discretion', is treated somewhat duplicitously as 'exceptions' to appropriate practice, as though veering away from textbook examples, bullet point briefings, or roleplay training that many practitioners are provided (to varying extents)¹⁹ is not advisable (Ashforth and Fried,

¹⁹ The Park Rangers are not trained in a 'formal' classroom setting, but their own public engagement skills are recognised by other public-facing organisations. In fact, the Rangers have been invited to train other ground-level operatives in public engagement.

1988; Tansik and Smith, 1991; Chase and Stewart, 1994; McCarthy, et al. 2010). Even with 'customer service' training, ground-level practitioners must routinely 'think on their feet' in public encounters; discretionary, situated tactical practice is the norm, not an exception.

The argument put forward here is two-pronged: firstly, that bureaucratic 'discretion' broadly includes and involves flexible interactional tactics (Park Rangers will talk to people without following scripts or guidance documents, and they demonstrate situational expertise in doing so); and secondly, that discretion in decision-making that pertains to or implicates members of the public is tied in with the categorial production of citizenship.²⁰ It should be noted that these two types of bureaucratic practice described as 'discretion' are related but distinct: the first denotes the situated, artful, creative, vernacular flexibility afforded in mundane communicative practices on the ground. Of course, in this way, discretion is an ordinary thing that we all do all the time, and it is perhaps not surprising that it also occurs in public work situations. Nevertheless, this first practice overlaps somewhat with the Park Rangers' institutional practice of 'Ranger's Discretion' which will be introduced shortly. The second is a more 'applied' rendition of bureaucratic discretion *as a routinely recognisable practice itself*. This emerges as a constitutive method in an occasion in which rules, policies, guidelines, or laws are invoked, and in which a member of the public is 'let off' as an 'exception'. The rub, here, for the Rangers' practice (and indeed for street-level bureaucrats generally) is that while 'making an exception' is actually a routine, regular, ordinary practice that is central to their ability to do their job of managing and

²⁰ Keith Carrington (2005) similarly acknowledged that 'discretion' involves both the freedom of the practitioner to choose a course of action in terms of decision-making, and whether to act or not in the first place.

maintaining vast expanses of park space, they must always treat discretionary decisions and 'making an exception' as an irregular, anomalous (and secretive) event of giving the recipient special, privileged treatment. This is nevertheless a fairly open secret, and this is displayed in the ways that situated encounters are organised as sequential negotiations. In this way what is interesting is not so much just that exceptions are not really exceptional, but rather that the observable method of 'doing' 'an exception to the rule' is centrally important to maintaining the categorial balance of ground-level authority, and that these categorial relations generate the sequence of the negotiations. Co-participants continue to regularly produce events of discretion as a rare privilege, with Rangers showing reticence and park users accomplishing it with displays of appreciation. Overall, the argument proposed is that 'discretion' is normal and central to the Park Rangers' quotidian work, and as such is a routine exercise of mundane vernacular agency. Furthermore, in 'enforcement' encounters with members of the public, discretion is shown to be a witnessably recognisable, relational production and a collaborative accomplishment.

Bernardo Zacka (2017) made the point that discretion is built into the frontline bureaucrat's role through the plurality and vagueness of the demands of their role, as well as the conflicting directions of their accountability (to clients, to line managers, to public representatives, to the 'public purse', and so on). Navigating their discretionary power is central to the role of the street-level bureaucrat. However, he ultimately puts this down to their moral dispositions, and proposes a pathological framework of these dispositions ('indifference', 'caregiving', and 'enforcement'). Unfortunately, explaining away ground-level decision-making as dependent on intrinsically-held personality traits (whether or not these traits derive from the bureaucratic structures of the job)

does a disservice to the skilled and knowledgeable social actors who constitute the client-base. Members of the public are complicit in the co-production of public service (Whitaker, 1980), and ignoring their input in public service encounters neglects the emergent reality of the situation. The problem with challenging the fallacy of bureaucratic technical rationality by invoking individual psycho-ethical dispositions is that this misses the situated and emergent organisational properties of the situation itself. Of course, the individual Rangers have their own 'personality' (read: communicative) traits – mild-mannered, hot-headed, whimsical, wise – but these are not inherently or essentially relevant in analyses that consider their interactions as observable facts.²¹ None of these isolated idiosyncrasies can deductively account for the outcomes of discretionary practice in public encounters, because, firstly, interaction is constituted between two or more parties (all with their own agency and situated expertise), and moreover, because most interactional practice involves some immeasurable degree of flexibility.

As previously mentioned, the Park Rangers have an official term – 'Ranger's Discretion' – which refers to a very specific safety practice which they employ in instances of perceived potential danger. Of course, at a managerial level (on the ground) this is taken very seriously, as it gives Rangers the right to 'opt out' of engaging in certain situations so as not to put themselves in undue danger for their job. Between team members, it has become somewhat of a joke as they recount moments when they have 'stood down' from engaging with certain characters (typically

²¹ Communicative peculiarities do patently matter in interaction, but for the purposes of analysis based exclusively on observable phenomena, these should be understood as properties of the interaction itself, rather than of any one participant. It is not helpful to consider pathological traits in interactional analyses unless they become procedurally relevant in that situation.

homeless people, gangs of youths, or people who they suspect might not behave 'rationally' or who might turn to violence). The subjective judgment involved in 'standing down' is the butt of the joke; implying that some individual Rangers might invoke Ranger's Discretion unnecessarily in order to evade responsibility, or because they are excessively fearful of a particular situation or individual. Nevertheless, what is interesting about Ranger's Discretion is that it is, again, treated as an exception to the rule of appropriate practice – as a safety clause – and as something separate to the 'normal' practice of Rangering. Relatedly, it has been noted throughout that Rangers are practically bound to park-related troubles and maintenance issues, and that uniformed Rangers cannot do such simple things as walk past litter without picking it up, at risk of public audit or judgment for not doing their job.

As such, it is understandable why Ranger's Discretion (as an institutional tool to allow Rangers to disattend a situation) is saved for exceptional circumstances. To a passer-by, exercising Ranger's Discretion may look like an evasion of duty, as its observability is produced as contravention of categorial relations between the Rangers and park troubles. The practical circumstances and categorial networks of the park impact the decision to 'stand down', and it cannot be said that such a decision is truly made exclusively and purely through the Ranger's agency. Simply put, it is not a decision taken lightly, and in my time with the Park Rangers it was only 'officially' invoked once when there was a verbal threat to life, and arguably informally in the instance outlined in Chapter 5 when the dogwalker-cum-possible voyeur issued us with a veiled threat that his dog was "just warning [us]".²² Attending or disattending a situation is thus a

²² 'Official' invocation of 'Ranger's Discretion' involves radioing a superior to state that they have stood down due to safety concerns. The decision on how to proceed (contacting the police, or the homeless outreach team, etc.) is then made by the

rather more rigid practical rule, and discretion (in terms of flexibility) is not so easily navigated here. As public workers who work in public view, this might have something to do with the accomplishment of an ideal type of 'generalised other' in unfocused interaction. The broad and general categorial relations that hold Park Rangers to their job of attending park troubles reciprocally position park users as potential auditors (see the example of the man with the camera in Chapter 4). This points to 'discretion' as something that must be achieved between parties with some stock in the situation.

So far, the precise practice referred to as 'Ranger's Discretion' has been established as a bureaucratic 'opt out' clause that exercised in extreme circumstances; at least, its *intentions* are as an 'opt out' clause. Owing to the Park Rangers' public accountability in and to park space, it is shown that 'opting out' of engagement entirely is difficult and not common, and instead it obliges them to 'stand down' from a potentially dangerous situation which they are already engaged in. However, in the majority of reported instances in this thesis, and in what follows, discretion is observably routinely and ordinarily displayed in more typical, mundane (and benign) face-to-face encounters. Arguably, bureaucratic 'discretion' can operate in interaction as mundanely as the choice to use informal greetings to initiate engagement, e.g. "Hiya, guys!" or "Alright, lads?" Again, there is no script to follow when it comes to addressing members of the public, and therefore the Rangers have the discretion to engage as formally or informally as they deem appropriate. Of course, as a collaborative accomplishment, the local organisation of the situation displays that appropriateness, and there are inevitable situated boundaries to what is appropriate.

superior officer. In the instance of the dogwalker's threat, we retreated and reported the case of public indecency to the police later in the day when we returned to headquarters.

What I mean here is that categorially-relevant language is an emergent achievement, and this is inexorably discretionary practice.

An example of 'discretion' more exclusive to street-level bureaucratic enforcement practice is seen in the way in which Rangers approach potential 'wrongdoers' sensitively or indirectly, sometimes invoking a hypothetical, unspecified 'other' (e.g. "Just making sure 'cause people do unfortunately come down here a lot to take cuttings." when confronting people who may be picking roses), or formulating local troubles in terms of peripheral issues (e.g. orienting to the growling dog instead of the potential voyeur/cottager), or punctuating enforcement encounters with empathetic or 'personable' disclaimers (e.g. dropping in the sympathetic caveat "lovely weather for it I know" when asking sunbathers to move on during COVID-19 lockdown). None of these formulations or invocations pertain to direct civic enforcement policies, but they are routine, actually-occurring 'softeners' that individual Rangers use to make their job easier. They are discretionary practices, but moreover are observable *practices of discretion*. Discretion is not a deviation from bureaucratic practice, but a significant bureaucratic practice itself. So, discretion is an *accomplishment* that the situation facilitates; it is a property of the situation. In this way it is centrally generative of the co-production of public services and administration; indeed I want to emphasise that 'discretion' is an observable practice in its own right. If, as Gordon Whitaker (1980) would have it, citizens co-produce services in terms of their involvement in 'reciprocal modification of expectations', then the collaborative practice of displaying publicly available 'discretion' is undoubtedly an essential part of this. 'Citizens' will often expect a degree of discretion from public officials and workers – this much is evident from the ways that people will treat 'rule enforcement' statements as negotiable – and the

achievement of discretionary treatment demonstrably relies on the emergent logics of citizenship as a resource. 'Good' or 'exemplary' citizens need not be concerned that rigid rules might apply to them, because such citizens will be treated diplomatically, and this is what makes them available as good citizens in the first place. Rigid rules are for interlopers; discretion is for good citizens.²³ Public service encounters are routinely organised around this categorial device. As an example, consider the following encounter between a Park Ranger and a group of young people having a barbeque:

“Hello, how are you all? Wow, that smells good!” calls the Ranger, clapping his hands together. Some of the group look up sheepishly, and a young man (who is already stood up) steps in defensively, but politely:

“We’re allowed to have a barbeque here aren’t we? It’s just a little disposable.”

“Well, technically there are by-laws to say no barbeques allowed on park land—” starts the Ranger before being cut off.

“Oh, okay, but there’s loads of ‘em today, look. We’re not doing any harm, it’s just a little one...”

“Yes of course, everyone wants to have a barbeque in this weather. We’re just checking on people to make sure they’re safe, but it’s true you’re doing yours fine: I can see you have it resting on a stone, so—”

“Yeah exactly, keeping it off the grass—” nods the young man.

²³ It has been noted that not everyone can be a ‘citizen’, and that the situated affordance for someone to ‘do’ citizenship is highly political. The different contingencies that produce either an enforcement situation or an exception situation is but one mode through which we can see the political character of ordinary citizenship production.

“Exactly, that’s perfect! As you can see someone has had a barbeque here before, and look what happens: the earth is scorched completely. The grass won’t grow back!”

The Ranger kicks at a scorched brown rectangle of dirt with the heel of his boot. The young man looks down at it.

“Oh yeah... Don’t worry, we’re not about vandalism here. We’ll be careful.”

“Yes I can see that; I can see you are good, sensible people. I was only coming to see because it smells so good– to see if there was any food for me...!” says the Ranger, loud enough for some of the rest of the group to hear. They laugh.

“Anyway enjoy, bon appétit, and please take all your rubbish away with you, guys, okay?”

Above is a scenario of an ‘enforcement’ encounter regarding the technical transgression of lighting a barbeque on park land, but one which demonstrates the collaborative ritual of ‘doing’ making an exception. Notably, the scene is immediately accomplished as an ‘enforcement’ situation in response to the Ranger’s first orientation to the barbeque; indeed it could be said that the practice of approaching is already inherently organised through the omnirelevant device of public authority, and that a Park Ranger approaching a group of people already displays a local trouble (see Chapter 5). Already accountable in these same turns, however, is the emergent organisation of the encounter to establish a trajectory of discretion, towards a conclusion which will favour the young group. The Ranger’s light-hearted, complimentary method of referring to the ‘good smell’ arguably sets a relaxed tone that will be sequentially difficult to backpedal from. Nevertheless, the young man handles the Ranger’s opening, categorially, as an authoritative challenge to the

barbeque activity, and puts forward a statement of perceived fact couched in a question, with the additional disclaimer that “It’s just a little disposable.” When the Ranger replies, invoking by-laws which prohibit barbequing, the word “technically” does the categorial work of positioning the stated rule as bureaucratic or impractical, and further sets himself (through his relaxed demeanour) apart as comparatively unbureaucratic. This analyst’s observation may be privileged, however, because the young man continues to morally account for his group’s practice as harmless, and moreover, as just one instance of a category of activity which is observably prevalent in the current scene, “Oh, okay, but there’s loads of ‘em today, look.”

Like in Chapter 6, the tacit accusation floated is that the Ranger’s practice is inconsistent in its potential ‘singling out’ of the group, and the young man demonstrates the recognisable method of turning himself (and his group) from individuals into a category of equally culpable but harmless barbeque-ers. This line is corroborated by the Ranger who again displays discretionary intentions, formulating his action of engaging them in terms of the bureaucratic work category of safety precautions: the Ranger does not want to ruin their fun, but it is his job to check that they are having fun safely. This is competently managed collaboratively, as the Ranger categorises the group’s barbeque as good practice (due to the barbeque being placed on a stone), and the young man accomplishing his barbequing proficiency by acknowledging his comprehension of the Ranger’s ‘good practice’ proffer: the local trouble is not the barbeque in itself, but the damage that a hot barbeque can do to the grass. Following a pedagogic demonstration of the damage that bad barbequing practice can do, the young man invokes the category of ‘vandalism’ and positions his group as careful people who are specifically “not about vandalism.”

Discretion, here, is emergent throughout and displayed regularly in embodied, multimodal actions, but is ultimately handled through negotiated categorial proffers which accomplish the young group as good citizens. The Ranger communicated the potential for discretionary practice throughout, but for the discretion to be enacted it had to be accomplished by willing recipients. While the Ranger did his best to distance himself from the category of 'bureaucrat' which may become that of 'jobsworth', its omnirelevance in park space meant that he was still required to 'go through the motions' of doing the bureaucratic work of checking that their barbeque was 'safe'. This reflexive constitution of member and setting occasioned the further demonstrations from the young man as to his practical knowledge and competencies in safe barbequing practice. In proving this, the young group achieved the verbalised categorial status of "good, sensible people," in other words, *good citizens*. In closing, the Ranger (jokingly) re-explicates his reason for approaching ("because it smells so good– to see if there was any food for me...!") and demonstrates his final position on their activity by wishing them well with a "bon appétit" while immediately reorienting to his practical bureaucratic role in the request to "please take all your rubbish with you".

Concluding remarks: Discretion as a property of the public park work situation, mundane citizenship as a practical resource and by-product of civic relations

The above is just one example of how discretionary practice is relationally configured and accomplished *in situ*. There are undoubtedly other hypothetical ways in which an illegal barbeque situation could 'technically' be handled: on one extreme, a Park Ranger could stamp it out, and on another, they could simply ignore it. Of course,

neither is appropriate or conducive to their broader job of managing and maintaining the parks, and the bureaucratic ritual of approaching, greeting, chatting, discussing technicalities, and ultimately performing 'making an exception' is entirely necessary. Again, Park Rangers are not able to simply disattend local park troubles. It should not be forgotten that they are significantly understaffed due to successive budget cuts, and the practicalities of doing Rangering hinge profoundly on the requirement to manage situations like this alone or with one other colleague. Their sheer workload means that the Rangers are unable to actually enforce the barbeque ban in a situation when there are many barbequing groups in the same visual contexture.

Indeed, as the young man says, "there are loads of 'em [barbeques] today, look." The Rangers are hardly able to challenge every single group and extinguish each barbeque, and so their discretion is a property of the situation. Equally, members of the public are skilled in achieving the discretion tacitly offered, and this demonstrates competency in both civic communication and the related practice of 'doing being' a citizen. As such, the process of discretionary decision-making is not based on an internalised disposition, as Zacka (2017) suggests, but instead is a collaborative achievement. The decision is not really made exclusively by the Ranger; the potential offer of leniency is tacitly communicated and subsequently accomplished by the 'good citizen', whose citizenship role hinges on acknowledging and appreciating this open secret of discretion. As previously mentioned, citizenship is demonstrable any time one is accountable to the state, and it is both a resource and a by-product of the situation in which their (illegal) practice is overlooked and they are made an exception to the rule.

Inevitably, too, at a fundamental level, bureaucratic 'discretion' in this regard is something that can only be offered by an operative with some level of authority in the first place; in this way discretionary decision-making emerges as a collaborative production contingent on the aforementioned omnirelevant categorial device of public worker-public citizen. Another co-present park user (not known to the barbequing group) cannot approach them to chastise them and 'let them off the hook' in the same way, because, of course, park users are not routinely visible as custodians of the parks and their rules. Equally, the barbequing group's 'citizenship' would not come into play in the same way, because they are not required to demonstrate that same accountability to a fellow park user. We might, however, imagine a situation in which a fellow park user adopts a 'neighbourhood watch'-style vigilante role to challenge them; in such a situation, citizenship would similarly be invoked with recourse to structures of law enforcement and state accountability. Hypotheticals aside, in showcasing how the competent collaboration involved in mundane civic culture-in-action can be categorially organised through the permeations of citizenship in ground-level bureaucratic relations, we can recover the mechanisms that knit these grand concepts together *in situ* and as an emergent production. In this particular situation, discretion and citizenship are reflexively constituted with recourse to the practical troubles of doing the job of Rangering in a climate of budget cuts and resource deficiencies. The discussion of Park Rangers' practice is therefore applicable to ground-level bureaucratic practice more broadly.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has reported on an ethnographic study of the Park Rangers' everyday work practices and public encounters, paying close attention to membership categories in use. The aim of this study has primarily been to advance the understanding of the situated implications of working in public view, and has done so with recourse to the participants' orientations in face-to-face interaction. In taking the Urban Park Rangers' quotidian work activities as a perspicuous setting, I have attempted to demonstrate the practical contingencies through which public work gets done. In recovering the orderly mechanisms of public work encounters, the local organisation of park space is a practical accomplishment and is also made available as a resource for incumbent members to produce their shared contextual reality.

As a study of public work, its main substantive, academic contributions are broadly twofold: firstly, it contributes to the scholarly conversations regarding the multi-layered organisation and assemblage of public space as visible in everyday actions. This is most notably shown in the exploration of 'context' as a multi-layered, constitutive, orderly, and publicly available membership phenomenon which is reflexively assembled in and through the 'settinged' properties of the scene. And secondly, it contributes to the currently underweight body of literature on *public* work practices. This latter contribution comes in the form of the observational examination of actually-occurring work practices *as they are carried out in public view and with a certain accountability to members of the public*. It has therefore been argued that the Park

Rangers' encounters with members of the public are essential work activities, and these encounters are (for the most part) analysed as autochthonously ordered events, not as a proxy for grand theoretical sociological concepts, but as phenomena in their own right. While this is not the first social study of Park Rangers (c.f. Lewis, 1989; Wong and Higgins, 2010; Pendleton, 1998; Poppe, 2012; Howard, 2013; Usui, et al. 2014; Mendoza, 2016; Day, 2020), it is, to my knowledge, the only one (save, perhaps, Pendleton, 1998) that reports on their actual interactional work engagements and practical orientations *in terms of the local organisation of their actions*, rather than relying on or constructing conceptual frameworks to tell us what practices *ought to be* deployed, or studies which discuss their roles in terms of what culturalist notions they might represent or 'stand for'. Michael Pendleton's (1998) interactionist ethnographic study of park wardens shares some of the ideals and orientations of my own research, and indeed notes some similar observations regarding the visual character of 'soft enforcement' tactics. While I do not wish to enter into a nit-picking methodological debate between sympathetic interactionist approaches, a key contribution of my study is the methodological synthesis of ethnographic and ethnomethodological sensibilities, and the partial analytical respecification to consider the collaborative sensemaking mechanisms of the face-to-face encounters which produce the situated conditions for those 'soft enforcement' tactics. Therefore, where my study differs most fundamentally is in the level of detail of engaging at the categorial level, and the insistence on the collaborative character of emergent practical accomplishments. The tactics and methods employed by the Rangers in my study are specifically considered in terms of their constitutive productivity and mutual elaboration of the scene. I argue, perhaps more radically, that the park is *produced* through these quotidian interactions.

The methodological considerations argued for ethnographic observation as a mundane members' method comprising unremarkable embodied practices and sensibilities, and therefore "the most human of approaches to studying the social" (Smith, et al. 2020: 195). An attempt was made to offset the criticism leveraged against ethnographic approaches, and qualitative research more broadly, that it is weakened by its reliance on interpretation. My argument has been very simple: if interpretation is inevitable, then we should look at it as a member's phenomenon and practice. After all, people regularly 'do' practices of observation as part of their routine (lay) methods for knowing the world, and therefore *everyone* is an enquirer into their own cultural setting (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982). The Park Rangers have to make enquiries about people and their practices, their intentions, their whereabouts, and so on, all the time in the course of their day's work. They are routinely required to interpret information and make sense of situations themselves, and so paying close attention to their practical orientations in this respect goes some way to alleviate the problems of relying too heavily on the analyst's own interpretative faculties. This was achieved by staying true to members' categories in analysis and acknowledging the ethnographer's position as member-in-the-field. The resulting fieldnotes were handled as ordinary accounts and 'good enough' resources for seeing the situated production and accomplishment of practical phenomena. These fieldnotes formed part of the ethnographic field themselves, and analysis was exclusively limited to what was readable on the page. In this respect, the methodological contribution was to reconsider how we, as ethnographers, can know 'the field' on its own terms, and how our engagement with it does not cease after we physically leave. I have attempted to rethink ethnographic practice as inherently mundane, and reconsider the status of ethnographic accounts, not in terms of traditional notions of ethnographic authority,

but in a way that positions the observer and the observations as a constitutive feature of the scene.

In approaching the arrangement of the ethnographic data excerpts with an anthropological sensibility, the analyses herein have traced the practical organisation of day-to-day Rangering activities, staying true to the local participation orders and frames. Taking as a starting point two related but distinct practically-oriented interactional occurrences of (1) being approached by members of the public (Chapter 4), and (2) approaching members of the public (Chapter 5), it has been established how co-participants of interactional encounters, as competent members, categorially organise and produce the demonstrable and accountable orders that make and remake the park as an emergently orderly social phenomenon. In challenging the formal analytic dichotomy of 'structure' and 'agency', the analyses have attempted to display the ways in which park users and public workers orient to and account for park space, park behaviours, park responsibilities, park 'systems', and so on. By looking exclusively at situated mundane talk-in-interaction (typically around Rangers' work practices), the endogenous contingencies on which the reality of the park is accomplished as a shared, ordinary phenomenon are made visible. The park is produced as a gestalt contexture whose local order properties create the ordinary interactional conditions and agendas of 'normal' park behaviour. Reciprocally, it is these normal behaviours which accomplish the 'normal scene' of the public park. Even in instances of apparent 'disorder' or disagreement, the categorial mechanisms which organise the encounters continue to stably orient to and invoke the shared reality of the park, staking situated claims to the space and to roles and responsibilities which are demonstrably collaboratively produced.

Keeping analyses at the local level was methodologically imperative for two fundamental reasons: firstly, to recover the 'black box' of public service co-production and break the feedback loop of tautological conceptual frameworks advising policy development; and secondly (and relatedly), to promote this kind of sociological enquiry that pays close attention to phenomena of order, that takes seriously the expertise of the informants and interactional coparticipants, treating their actual observable actions as established facts and showcasing the methods they use to produce them – in turn recovering 'the things themselves' – rather than doing them the disservice of using contrived sociological concepts as an explanatory framework for their social behaviour. As has been demonstrated, ordinary public interactional behaviour is a useful resource for studying society; indeed it is in the particulars that the 'social' is most plainly visible. It has therefore been the aim of this thesis to recover the ever-present order of public practices and to provide an insight into the organisational *social* work that is collaboratively achieved between people in these overlooked interactional moments of copresence. When it comes to the study of public work, describing how people's own sensemaking practices are displayed can be applied to positive analytical ends.

As such, the interactionist approach taken herein may also be helpful to the scholarly field of public administration studies, and to public policymakers, and prompt them to re-examine their treatment of the role of the 'member of the public' or 'citizen' in public administrative encounters and the co-production of public services. When Michael Lipsky (2010 [1980]) wrote the seminal and still-principal text on 'street-level bureaucracy', he went some way to explain how 'client' is a socially constructed

concept, and touched upon its categorial production. Nevertheless there is some imagination involved in this and it is ultimately treated as an intentional activity of categorisation done by the bureaucrats themselves. Consequently, Lipsky's analysis does not grant the 'client' the same agency that is afforded the bureaucrat, and indeed clients are remarkably absent. 'Clients' and 'citizens' are imagined in Lipsky's analysis in terms of logical typologies dependent on functional outcomes of bureaucratic processes. My own approach, which considers the interaction *prima facie* and treats its co-participants as reflexively constituted in and through the assembled scene, recovers the agency of the 'member of the public' by situating them as equal co-producers of the situation. While I agree that citizenship is relational production (as stated in Chapter 7), it is equally the case that 'street-level bureaucracy' must be categorially accomplished *in situ*. This is exemplary of the radically reconsidered model of public service co-production put forward in this thesis. Rather than ponder how park users or 'clients' or 'citizens' ought to act in public bureaucratic encounters, I have chosen to recover and present what they actually do and say, and further, how they are reflexively constituted as park users or citizens through the contingencies of that situated encounter. How do members of the public actually contribute to public work in urban parks?

Firstly, as argued in Chapter 4, which traced the Rangers' local 'trouble' of being approached by members of the public, co-production is established by mere virtue of the normalcy of their approaches and enquiries. In being treated, practically, as 'approachables' (individuals who display an affordance to being approached) we are able to see just how it is that the Park Rangers handle these approaches, questions, criticisms, requests, and so on. Consequently, we can acknowledge how the situation

of these encounters produces a kind of public work practice in which park users are considered legitimate participatory stakeholders. The ways that their enquiries about the Rangers' work are treated as normal is demonstrable of this. Reciprocally, we can see how, as public workers, the Rangers are expected and required to establish a routine, no-time-out orientation to 'the public'. Their methods for displaying 'professionalism', 'strategy', and 'system' are recognisable in their mundane work activities, and moreover, it is demonstrably an organisational *requirement* for their actions and practices to invoke these contingencies. A key finding of Chapter 4 was that accounting practices around legitimate work strategies (for example, in clearing the weir of 'lucky pennies') are organised as locating that action within an activity of an ongoing project. Such a project is communicated as having: (1) a cause (a large amount of 'out of place' coins that were beginning to make the weir look messy); (2) a consequence (the threat to the safety of park users who might be tempted to climb into the weir to collect the coins themselves); and (3) an expressed next action (handing the money to charity). This shows them to be indisputably work strategies, and demonstrates what is involved in displaying the competences of a public worker. Notably, impression management (Goffman, 1959) is available to be seen in their practice, but an important point in the thesis argument is that this does not transform the Rangers' role into that of 'impression managers'. On the contrary, what Goffman would call 'impression management' is in fact built into the practical contingencies of the Rangers' public work practice; it is a by-product of competent public work. The constituent mechanisms of the local visual and moral orders accomplish the Rangers' work practices as professional and legitimate, and it is these same orders which produce them as public workers in the first instance.

The argument was taken forward in Chapter 5, this time, by looking at moments in which the Park Rangers themselves approached members of the public. It looked to the Rangers own practices of seeing, and specifically how they do such things as approach strangers, search for heroin needles and condoms, and lock up at the end of the day. In doing this, the spatial implications of their practice were examined, and park space was treated as a collaboratively assembled activity. Practical hierarchies are recognisable in this assembly, as not all participants are equally knowledgeable in and about the space. It was demonstrated how Rangers display professionalism and experience in their decision-making when it comes to forming an enquiry into the perceptibly unorthodox movements and behaviour of a dogwalker. A key finding of this chapter was how professional 'intuition' is emergently produced and displayed *in situ*. Mere curiosity does not count as professional conduct, as of course simply following people around with no good reason is not appropriate behaviour owing to the right of a member of the public to be left alone if they are doing nothing wrong. The rub for the Rangers is that they might not immediately know if someone is up to something wrong unless they observe it, or directly engage with that person and make enquiries. Of course, it is the Rangers' job to do this. Much in the same way as police officers must prove they have 'reasonable grounds for suspicion', Rangers must also demonstrate that their enquiries are based on something more substantial than pure speculation. In practice, 'professional intuition' is demonstrated through situated methods that display its connectivity over time and space to other work practices. It is further achieved, spatially, by invoking locative categories that triangulate practice and space. For example, certain areas of the park are known as antisocial behaviour hotspots because they are either known to be used for antisocial behaviour, or because they display the potential features to be exploited for use for antisocial behaviour. Hotspots

are therefore mutually and reciprocally assembled, but the vernacular category of 'hotspot' further implies it is a work domain and thus implicates the Rangers as a constitutive feature. In this way, the park's haecceities (or 'just thisness') is demonstrable in its assembly as a managed space and work domain. Ordinary activities such as this are what *socially* produce the public park as a public park, rather than simply a space made up of trees and grass and people.

Chapter 6 offered an insight into the changing contingencies of park space during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it capitalised on the unique moment in history in which a global 'context' pervaded everyday public behaviour, even at the local level. As such, it explored how the pandemic, the virus, 'the rules', and so on, were invoked and oriented to in the course of the Rangers' ground-level policing, education, and enforcement activities in the parks. Such references to COVID-19 were often seen to be tacit and assumed, and further displayed an interesting categorial interplay between local troubles and their connectedness to the global health crisis, and vice versa. A crucial contribution of this chapter is the demonstration of the collaborative accomplishment of the COVID-19 'context' as being practically consequential to the local park scene, which seeks to enhance understanding of the multi-layered organisation of public space and behaviour. COVID-19 was ordinarily accomplished as a device through which people and space could be categorised as 'policeable' in ways that they had not previously been. It may be said that COVID-19 is a feature that has been built into public space. Clearly, the virus itself is invisible, but its consequences for organising mundane collaborative activities in public space is very visible. With the pervasiveness of the new legislation, public space is more so navigated in terms of the legality of practice, and the analyses herein cast light on the

multi-layered organisation of park space as a local site in which the pandemic context can be recognised as an endogenously generated and occasioned phenomenon and constituent feature. Nevertheless, it is equally important to note that despite the changing practical configurations of public space, the omnirelevant categorial device of public park operative—member of the public was still stably produced and ordinarily displayed in face-to-face interaction. The observed interactions continued to be organised through this device. My observations therefore suggest that interactional negotiations in public space treat as stable the lasting contingencies of ‘normality’. Normality remains the stable item against which idiosyncrasy and incongruity are made available, and indeed it remains the case: even during the COVID-19 pandemic and the so called ‘new normal’, that there is order at all points (Sacks, 1984: 22). My research therefore hopes to provide empirical input into the emergent scholarly conversation in response to the crisis of the pandemic, which perhaps prematurely treated it as a ‘breach’ of norms (Rawls, 2020; Scambler, 2020). The park is still ordinarily a park, Rangers are still normatively allowed to approach people, and it is still treated as fundamentally normal that people wish to do ordinary park activities in the parks, despite ‘lockdown’ and ‘social distancing’ measures requiring adjustments to their physical configurations.

In Chapter 7, the argument takes a step out to explore, in a more traditionally sociological way, how the observations reproduced in the thesis fit into established academic conversations around ‘street-level bureaucracy’ (Lipsky, 1980), and related concepts centrally and tacitly applied more broadly in public administration literature, namely ‘citizenship’ and ‘discretion’. The issue with the literature on street-level bureaucracy is that it does not engage with the agency of the service user or member

of the public in any meaningful way; my discussion shows how citizenship is collaboratively produced in soft enforcement situations, and is itself a property of the situation. Citizens only exist as citizens in those moments when they are accountable to the state; and as mentioned, it is an inherently political construct inasmuch as it is a selectively invoked category which excludes a whole ensemble of 'street characters' and 'alternative publics'. Category proffers pertaining to 'good citizens' are communicated in situations which display a trajectory of discretionary decision-making. In demonstrating the orderly interactional mechanisms for doing 'making an exception to the rule' we can see the practical implications of discretionary practice, glossed in Pendleton's (1998) work. By showing how discretion is achieved collaboratively, we can begin to understand its pervasiveness in street-level bureaucratic practice. The public administration literature geared towards what *ought* to happen at ground-level has implied that discretionary practice is a deviation from good practice (Ashforth and Fried, 1988; Tansik and Smith, 1991; Chase and Stewart, 1994; McCarthy, et al. 2010).

My argument is that discretion does not denote a deficit in practice, but rather that it is a productive practice in its own right. The interactional rituals of 'doing' discretion together between Park Rangers and members of the public are practically necessary, firstly to maintain the relevance of the rules and to uphold the park as a rule-governed space, and secondly to maintain the visible competencies of being an effective public worker and enforcement operative, which includes not singling out individuals to be at the sharp end of rule enforcement when there are other offenders in the visual contexture. This last point is a key finding pertaining to the organisation of public enforcement work. In a climate of budget cuts, enforcement personnel and resources

are overstretched and the job of managing and maintaining order in the parks must therefore be done in such a way that it can achieve a successful outcome in the circumstances of these material conditions. It is important to note that even in situations in which ‘an exception to the rule’ is made, the parks are still produced as rule-governed spaces. The example used in Chapter 7 to illustrate this point was of an illegal barbeque on a day when many people were having barbeques in the park. The recognisable situated member’s method of distinguishing between people and *categories* of people becomes procedurally-relevant in the handling of ‘policing’ activities; the interaction plays out on categorial terms, whereby the perpetrators account for themselves as being one example of many barbequing groups. The relative ‘fairness’ of the Park Rangers’ practice is consequently incumbent on and built into the activity. Demonstrating that they are not singling anyone out when approaching them is therefore necessary for the maintenance of orderly relations. But, importantly, the activity itself is demonstrable of the fact that the enforceability of rules is a feature that has been built into park space. The park’s very coherence and collective intelligibility is constructed and recognised – by members *in situ* – in and through the seeability of a tacit code of conduct built on some type of formal charter, which is in turn made routinely available in approaches by the Park Rangers. The specifics of this charter are not necessarily important – indeed many park users are genuinely unaware that barbequing is prohibited until they are approached – what *is* important is that parks are understood to have rules, whatever they may be, and that the Park Rangers routinely surveil and monitor them for rule-breakers.

Overall, a noteworthy contribution of this thesis has been to show how the ongoing accomplishment of public work is incumbent on managing visibility. This is partly

demonstrable through the stable categorisations that underpin public work interactions. Engagements are collectively organised through the omnirelevant device of public worker–member of the public and are demonstrable of the locally assembled visual and moral orders. The modes and practices of seeing – that public work affords members *in situ* – are constitutive of the collaborative, visual production of the gestalt contexture of a particular context. The Park Rangers and their routine work of managing public park space has been a perspicuous setting for seeing the ordinary categorial assembly work that makes and remakes a public context, and indeed, public as context, as an ongoing phenomenon. To remain with that last point, I consider that ‘being in public’ is itself a context, not just to the analyst, but one that is recognisably built into everyday actions, and one that is thus displayed and oriented to by members themselves. ‘Doing being in public’ is achieved collaboratively – and practically – most notably in interactions between members of the public and some ‘stocked character’ (Goffman, 1971). This is a fairly overlooked feature of public space, whose assumptions typically rest – as far back as Simmel (1903, 1908) – on the general acceptance that it is sharing space with strangers, being co-present with strangers, and encountering strangers that is the most definitive feature of being in public.

My contribution, instead, demonstrates the clear importance of ‘stocked characters’ – like the police officer, like the street cleaner, like the fruit and veg vendor on the street corner, like the Park Ranger – on accomplishing public space as public space. When in public, it is these characters who you are most likely to engage in focused interaction with, not ‘pure’ strangers (who have been shown to be somewhat of a categorial myth). Their visibility and availability as being knowledgeable and responsible characters make them constitutive features of the urban fabric. The experience of being out in

public is ordinarily contingent on the assumption of the express availability of some public worker to ask for help, information, assistance, or who you can go to with some trouble and whose category-boundness to the space obliges them to help to the best of their ability. When a public worker assembles some scene as a practical work domain, they, too, are categorised in terms of that mutually-elaborated whole of the public work scene; the categorial associations of public work and public space are not just seen by workers themselves, but by all competent co-present members. In this way, when it is said that the ‘tinkering’ public workers make and remake the city on a daily basis, it is not just that their manual activities do that physical job of cleaning that street, or mowing that lawn, or removing that bin bag, or fixing that railing, but that the routine visibility of these tinkering jobs set them up to form a part of that normal urban public scene. The city is made and remade as a radically emergent phenomenon through the ordinary availability of public workers to be answerable to members of the public. Public work, then, is radically constitutive of public space.

In showing this, I have focused my attention on how the public park is produced as a mutually intelligible fact in the very situation of face-to-face encounters in which Park Rangers participate in during their ground-level shifts. By doing so, I was also able to shed light on some of the situated *interactional* methods for doing being a public worker. Future research may wish to explore the *embodied* aspect of the practices described herein (particularly in Chapter 4) in greater detail. While I have justified and hopefully demonstrated the adequacy of ethnographic fieldnotes in showcasing the categorial apparatuses displayed and made relevant in public park encounters, the study has been primarily a study of talk-in-action and situated accounting practices (which are, of course, *work* practices too). Research methods which may better

'preserve' the multimodal, embodied, sequential production of categories-in-action in a detailed way – be they video or image-based methods – may take future research in an interesting direction. Employment of such methods in this research setting would have likely shifted its emphasis to more directly focus on public maintenance practices, as opposed to the interactional moments in which they are accounted for in mundane vernacular practices and ground-level conversations. That being said, it has been an aim of this research to promote the primacy of interaction, and indeed the mundane methods that people use to talk about and orient to the things they do is a broadly underestimated resource for knowing about the organisation of the social world in terms of its emergently produced reality. The unremarkable modes of production of the social in and of the practical collaborative accomplishments of everyday life can perhaps be quite remarkable resources for sociological analysis. There is order at all points, and Sociology at large will benefit from paying close attention to it.

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