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## ***Social Interaction***

### ***Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality***

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#### **Assembling nature as an art object: A single video case analysis of two landscape artists navigating social context**

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#### Abstract

*Using video data obtained from a one-day field ethnography, I utilised the ethnomethodological respecification of 'gestalt-contextures' to describe in fine detail how two artists and a social researcher haphazardly organised themselves to navigate river terrain. The art object took on many meanings within the ongoing context of the group's verbal and non-verbal, vernacular, and expert ability to observe the subject matter. Whilst organising join-attention to an array of natural objects, the participants defined pathway limitations, and rerouted, reviewed and positioned their bodies amongst the landscape. These socially acknowledged features typically remain unexposed when art sociologists discuss 'artwork'. Due to the value of understanding the production of artistic objects in, and as a variety of socially maintained endogenous orders, the reportage of 'gestalt assembly' may furnish 'the new sociology of art' with materials for pursuing an alternative style of social research: the investigation of ordinary social context as member's ongoing enacted achievement.*

**Keywords:** Ethnomethodology, gestalt contextures, the new sociology of art

## 1. Introduction

This paper demonstrates how two artists and a social researcher ‘selected subject matter’ during a *plein air* painting excursion. I describe several observable social techniques which surrounded the interactive work of organising nature into a painter’s object. Our party’s searching, navigating and orientating of the surrounding natural landscape through the reliance of, for example, haphazard pointing, talking and gazing, consequently displays, how these common communicative practices are more social than artistic, and thus, are important for understanding how art objects are accomplished in, and as part of artful constitutive social practices (see Kreplak, 2018).

Literature scarcely exists between the juncture of art sociology and art ethnomethodology. Contributing an ‘ethnomethodological respecification’ (Garfinkel, 2002) of this paper’s research object - subject selection - to a varied and small collection of existing ethnomethodological studies on artistic topics is possible, however. These topics range from playing jazz piano (Sudnow, 1978), a painter and his students (Armor, 2000), an opera’s production staff (Atkinson, 2006), gallery viewer interactions (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004), art auctions (Heath & Luff, 2007), and dance rehearsals (Bassetti, 2014). These studies describe how persons do the things they do in real-time, in naturally occurring situations, whilst the researcher remains faithful to how social actions constituted a local social order. This ethnomethodological deliberation of respecifying skilled domains of practices into ordinary renditions holds a unique, yet recurring sentiment that Armor’s polemic expresses:

Although sociologists of the arts refer to ‘artistic practices’ treating them as obvious if contested, they fail to appreciate or consider what such practices might actually look like *in situ* and thus miss the detail of such practices that are the very stuff of art as work (Armor, 2000: 64).

What do artists interactively do whilst acting in the world when creating art objects? What does that action look like? How is it organised for and by context? What impact could an ethnomethodological approach to art works have on the

sociology of art? This paper's thesis asks, how was an art object constituted in, and as a *plein air* painting activity?

The following paper is structured into four main sections. First, I briefly review a fading discussion about the contextually indeterminate production of meaningful art objects that occurred at the turn of the century. This caused a flurry of researchers to investigate sites of artwork production over the course of the last decade. Of these studies, few ethnomethodological demonstrations were produced. By answering DeNora's call to research how artworks are formed by 'artful social accomplishments' (DeNora, 2014:7), ethnomethodology may renew interest as we move into the current decade. Second, I discuss the analytical mentality used in the subsequent analysis; specifically 'gestalt contextures'. Here, Rod Watson's recent work and articulation of a 'kaleidoscopic metaphor' (see Watson, 2008: 232) is picked up as the primary methodological approach for investigating 'context'. Third, this case study presents the reader with a series of graphic transcripts that detail the organisational talk and gesture between two artists and a social researcher. How a painting subject was selected and formed as part of this ordinary embodied conduct is the focus of the analysis. Last, I conclude this brief analysis by suggesting the sociology of art abandon the pursuit of establishing epistemological foundations, and rather, turn towards how members of living society organise their actions. Utilising single-case empirical descriptions of constitutive acts could stoke the fire and ignite a second-generational wave of studies for the new sociology of art, inspired exclusively by ethnomethodology's sensitivity toward the mundane.

## **2. Literature**

Social scholars have covered only some of the ways artists constitute art objects. Yael Kreplak's research on 'praxeological objects' (Garfinkel & Weider, 1992; Kreplak 2015), 'docile documents' (Kreplak, 2017), 'record keeping' (Kreplak, 2018a: 710), and her latest suggestion of seeing, '*Art in and as a variety of practices*' (Kreplak, 2018b), could be a pioneering ethnomethodological contribution to contemporary debates within the sociology of art. This is because

many art sociologists sought to resist the field's 'macro-orientated' orthodoxies of the period (Inglis & Hughson, 2005). Namely, the objectivist frameworks (Bourdieu, 1984) and social-structural theories (Becker, 1982), which commanded the direction of art sociology during the last century (Hennion & Grenier, 1999; Zolberg, 1990). They did so by evaluating an edited collection of papers: *Art from Start to Finish* (Becker, Faulkner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). When this book's authors collectively explored how 'artworks themselves' came to be 'finished', they identified that the sociology of art could benefit from taking an epistemological *posteriori* approach to study how artworks gained this sense of completion through context-dependent social action.

The issue of the epistemic status of social facts is ripe within art sociology's recent history. Paradigmatically, the 'New Sociology of Art' (De La Fuente, 2007; 2011), has generated fresh studies of 'artistic practices' (Zembyalas, 2014) with varying success. These now tiring studies explored the cultural production of 'socio-material engagements' (Rubio, 2012), how noise artists used 'indeterminacy as a social resource' (Gerber & Klett, 2014), and the non-human materiality of 'creative assemblages' (Fox, 2015). Describing how artistic practices enforce 'artworks themselves' was a challenging affair which consequently caused the production of a range of loosely related empirical studies.

These related studies were tethered to Becker's 'principle of fundamental indeterminacy of the artwork itself' (Becker, 2006: 23), where further criticism towards *a priori* paradigms for cheapening context-dependent studies of art with *structural* sociological explanations were voiced (Alexander, 2004; DeNora, 2000; Hennion, 2004; see Tanner, 2010; Zolberg, 2015: 901). And although traction was given to Becker's principle through its own provisions (artworlds, agency, and process) (see Becker *et al.*, 2006), the *posteriori* epistemological positioning remained confined to the conceptual apparatus. By remaining in perpetual dialogue of how best to approach the studies, the 'new sociology of art' has failed to organise as a coherent body and program of research (as evident in De La Fuente's (2019) recent suggestion for a 'new turn') and these studies have yet to amalgamate beyond the chapters of the edited book. Consequently, the

new sociology of art may not be that fruitful for exploring the meanings and productions of how art objects form through member's work, a promising insight awaiting a response from potential candidates.

When discussing art objects, ethnomethodology is perhaps, at least at the beginning, absent from mind. Yet Garfinkel's writings have inspired a small number of scholars in art sociology (Acord & DeNora, 2007; Acord 2010; Hennion, 2007; 2019). Some had previously taken Garfinkel's perspectives to domains of artistic practices themselves and produced contrasting results. Art scholars shared their desire to see how artworks were made in real time. As tension developed around how art objects featured as part of a local interacting party's ordinary work. Moreover, the articulation of how artworks were treated as 'artful social accomplishments' (DeNora, 2014: 7) still remains unanswered. The 'primacy of social facts' (see Livingston, 1987; 2016) as a researchable, witnessable phenomenon of practical action and reasoning may release the confines of conceptual discussion towards observing how in the world artworks are formed by artful social *in vivo* action.

Consequently, this paper focuses on how participants (an interacting party of three) 'worked' at determining what was to become constitutively relevant to their task-at-hand: how a natural landscape was organised into a subject to be painted. I argue these secondary activities can be taken seriously, and the sociological study of artistic practice may be more ordinary, and more social than commonly thought possible.

### **3. Analytic mentality**

I had a social analytical style in mind when describing, viewing, and reporting on art objects being 'constituted' in and as *plein air* painting. In my view, ethnomethodology wants to hold no imperative or prohibited set of research procedures or methods so long as the data obtained is adequate for the phenomena under investigation (see Lynch, 2015 on 'ethnomethodological indifference'). Collecting, observing and framing data to design, ask and answer

a research question, however, does require process. In the following study I draw my analytic mentality from Watson's recent discussions on ethnomethodology's 'gestalt contextures' (Watson, 2008: 232):

The point about a gestalt contexture is its distinctiveness: each specific phenomenal field is composed of a distinctively-identifying array of phenomenological detail, much in the way that a kaleidoscope furnishes a new, distinctive pattern after each shake. To lift an item of talk-in-interaction from such a distinctively-identifying phenomenal field is to remove it from what Garfinkel and Gurwitsch might term its very specific functional signification.

Is Watson's decade-long discussion and 'kaleidoscopic metaphor' (Watson, 2008: 232) an untapped resource full of unexplored ideas waiting to be picked up at the intersection of art sociology and ethnomethodological thinking? Could his writings be a congregational transformation of ethnomethodology's many classical developments? (see Watson, 2016: 31-39). If a 'renovation' of methods were to occur, then it would place gestalt contextures as a primary methodological approach: *"It has become, perhaps, the locus classicus of the concepts of 'reflexivity' and particularly 'indexicality' for later ethnomethodology."* (Watson, 2017: 15). Gestalt contextures bring *"...into play considerations that change our 'analytic mentality', that heighten our analytic awareness of the distinctively identifying aspects."* (Watson, 2016: 35); moreover, *"...this sense emerges, develops, and transforms over a texture-specific durée as endogenously appreciated by participants."* (Watson, 2008: 230). Explicit effort was maintained throughout the analysis to repeatedly return to the video data to draw out the 'salient objects' as they were woven with and detached from their constituted phenomenal fields.

#### **4. Case study**

Last year I travelled to Napier, a small sea-side city positioned on the East coast of New Zealand's North Island, to visit Freeman White, a professional landscape

and oil painter, in his studio, to discuss his artistic process. He insisted we converse about how painting on location is one of the oldest ways of working in a realist fashion. The French impressionists, Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro popularised the practice and effectively coined the term *en plein air* (painting in the open air). Freeman explained the difficulty in practicing the craft:

“It’s really hard because when you’re working from [*sic*] nature, everything is constantly in flux, everything’s changing, you don’t have — you have this multiplicity, and slight variation and change, you know, which is when you’re trying to distil something down into a single image, you know — it’s difficult! So, it’s a different working method.”

Distilling something down to a ‘single image’ gives us an appreciation of the *in vivo*, the dynamic, the variance, the change, the multiplicity, the ‘flux’ of Nature that a *plein air* artist typically pursues: clouds move, the earth rotates, winds pick up, rain falls, but ideally, yet not in all cases, the point of this activity is to walk away with a small painting known as a ‘study’, in principle, a study of nature, of light’s effects seen from a single and static viewing point. As our discussion headed to a close, he asked if I would like to see him and his friend capture such “*An honest interpretation of a moment in time.*” Therefore, I brought my small go-pro action camera and video-recorded our painting excursion the following day.

### ***Narrowing down nature***

We arrived at the scene as a local cohort of three. Freeman led us down a long dirt track and intermittently provided verbal and non-verbal cues. These directed our party’s production of a common navigational goal.

### **Figure 1. Transcript**

Freeman: We need to get over this fence line

Buck: yeah

Freeman: And get up here but

Freeman: I dunno, we gotta get down, down the river

**Figure 1.**



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2



Figure 1.3

As illustrated above, Freeman turned his head and raised his hand to form an index-finger point. Speech accompanied this gesture as he circled the air with his finger: *“We need to get over this fence line.”* (Figure 1.1). Buck confirmed: *“Yeah”*. I remained silent. We walked only but a few steps further as Freeman appended onto his previous doings with another finger-point and utterance: *“...and get up here, but...”* (Figure 1.2). These directions immediately circumscribed the likelihood of other spatial orientations featuring within our future trajectory and unfolding field. Thus, assembling the contexture for our future actions required us to narrow down the physical space of our surrounding landscape’s local, spatial, and contextual field. That is, our party suspended the sense of these



current directional doings until we worked out how to get, find, and search for the as-of-now-invisible-object of our destination 'waiting beyond the fence line'.

### ***Stabilising the ordinary***

As we walked ahead through thick grass, we passed inconspicuous natural objects as the river appeared upon our party's horizon. We emerged out of this temporary moment and discovered a feature of the landscape worthy of assessment. Our contextual field adapted to the growing constituents that lay ahead as our local work made sense of the unfolding situation. Consider Figure 2 below:

### **Figure 2. Transcript**

*[approaching the riverbank]*

Freeman: It looks like the river is quite close to the bank now

Buck: Obviously had some floods

Freeman: Wow

Freeman: Yeah, I think we're gonna - right up here sometimes it's way over there

Freeman: Nah that's cool, we can just come along here;

*[walking a little]*

Freeman: Do you see that?

Freeman: That's the island

Researcher: Yep

Freeman: Over in the distance there

### **Figure 2.**



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4

As is evident in the above figures, Freeman assessed the proximity of the river's water to its bank (Figures 2.1 & 2.2) then announced to our party a visible pathway *"Nah that's cool, we can just come along here."* (Figure, 2.3). He led the way whilst looking ahead and uttered: *"Do you see that?" – "That's the island over there."* (Figure 2.4). The contexture avoided potential disruption and remained stable enough for a new addition: the island. This object appeared to our group for the first time, as evident by my reply *"Yep"*. Retrospectively, Freeman's earlier utterance 'over the fence line' confirmed the 'correct direction all along'; and

prospectively, ‘the island’ adapted as a concrete object which was ‘meant all along’. That is, our narrowing down of the environmental field – other trees, hills, rocks, etc., became a natural part of *plein air* painting, *as ordinary navigational activity*. We pointed, moved, talked, and thus identified concrete objects, as we, as a travelling party, worked together and organised the landscape into relevant features for painting. For the here and now, things were running smoothly and stable enough. Our work continued to unfold, adapt, and assemble the painting object out of an awesome number of potential others amongst their natural surroundings.

### ***From past talk, to a now-visible field***

We incorporated relevant objects from the entire visual field into our developing contexture. We talked, gestured, and anticipated what the future trajectory of our previous actions entailed as we narrowed down and entered these objects into our social, endogenous reality. The island was organised by our cohort and constituted our first *painter’s object*.

### **Figure 3. Transcript**

Freeman: It’s cool ay.

*[points to the island]*.

Freeman: How it’s got the little cabbage tree on top

Buck: Oh yeah

*[walking in motion toward the island]*

*[inaudible concern]*

Freeman: Yeah we will, we will go up there

**Figure 3.**



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

As we followed Freeman's instructions, 'the island' appeared within our party's visual field. Freeman raised his head and uttered, "*It's cool ay, how it's got that little cabbage tree on top.*" (Figure 3.1). We then looked at the island as Buck responded: "*Oh yeah.*" (Figure 3.2). The two artists stopped walking once they hit a small sandbank that lay up ahead (Figure 3.3). With this pause, they withdrew their cameras and pictures were taken of both the island to the left of our party, and the visual field as it lay upon the horizon. The contexture introduced the island into its fold as the 'true' location had appeared before our visual field

for the very first time since arriving in the terrain. It was a found object, worked out over previous organisational activities. The 'fence line', 'the island', 'the cabbage tree', and lastly, 'we will go up here', continued to contribute to planned local actions. Consequently, the contexture continued to be our party's responsibility as we progressed. The painter's object awaited further assessment as we negotiated naturally constituted features of our local environment.

### ***Uncertain features in the field ahead***

As the island's salience increased upon our visual horizon, the surrounding conditions called for the evaluation of the quality of the hitherto unseen painting location. Freeman's desire to lead our travelling party to our destination was called into question as a result. The river may not be high enough. Its local state impacted our contexture's organisation, requiring work to keep it stable with the new possibility that the river was too difficult to cross.

### **Figure 4. Transcript**

*[loud footsteps due to pebble stones]*

Freeman: Surely, we would get a nice little painting from that place there

Buck: yeah

Freeman: I think this would make a nice little painting

Freeman: This one here

Buck: Coming through now?

Freeman: Well the water is pretty low

*[looks to the left at the dry riverbed]*

Freeman: Whereas last time I was here, the river was a lot bigger

Buck: Yep

Freeman: And you got that reflection

**Figure 4.**



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4

Visible in the figures above, as we walked further towards the island, Freeman uttered whilst he pointed to the visual setting *“Surely we would get a nice little painting from that place there.”* (Figure 4.1). As we continued to move forward, he uttered again: *“I think this would make a nice little painting, this one here.”* (Figure 4.2). Buck responded: *“Coming through now?”* As we continued marching

towards the river, Freeman assessed the scene. The water was low. He reminded us of how it was much higher when he was here last, which caused a larger reflection of the island upon the river's surface (Figure 4.3; 4.4). Moreover, as we continued to approach the river, we made several assessments. These, I argue, kept the contexture stable enough for the next few moments. Although we had an idea of what to paint, when we arrived at our planned destination, we discovered adjustments were needed. Our contexture was bound to change. Seemingly insignificant aspects, such as being unable to account for the water level, altered our work. Consequently, as we narrowed down the landscape into relevant painterly features, the contexture awaited our arrival.

### ***Ad hoc plans towards a concrete destination***

We viewed the island from the river's edge, and it agitated the salience of our journey. We were unable to continue any further without walking through the water to reach the other side. Having arrived from our organised path and trajectory's anticipated location, we had to shift the contexture. Remedies needed to be made. Freeman caused tension in our group as he suggested we back-track.

### **Figure 5. Transcript**

Freeman: Coz I just wanna get some shots of

Freeman: Down this way

Buck: Why don't we go back around the hill?

Freeman: No we gotta go back around here and drop

### **Figure 5.**



Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3



Figure 5.4

In Figure 5.1 we can see how the water meets the riverbank to form a body of water that is difficult to cross. Freeman interjected: “Coz I just wanna get some shots of – down this way.” (Figure, 5.2). Buck suggested we attempt an alternative route, yet Freeman persisted: “No, we gotta go back around here and drop.” (Figure 5.3; 5.4). In this last move, Freeman communicated that he wanted a precise viewing angle of the island: one which faced south bound. An *ad hoc* plan resulted. We now had a visible concrete destination and order for the environment; thus, we shifted our party’s task and took stock of both this destination and of the viewpoint that we were to be painting from. The landscape not only played a role beyond our wayfinding anticipations, but it also affected the entire contexture that I, as one of the three, thought we had been working towards



establishing. That is, the idea of 'reflection' itself, was transformed into the painting subject. This 'analytical discovery' not only distorted the immediate contexture to provide a local plan for our traveling party, it also, in doing so, contorted the entire meaning of what the subject matter could have meant all along. As painters are aware, it was less to do with the physical object, and more to do with the relationship between how the viewer's body was located in the space, and how the sun's rays illuminated the object in question. Our painterly activity was now one of organising our group to reach a static viewing station for which the limestone in the water – the island - would be best painted.

### ***Shaping disorderly work into an orderly form***

It was a curious feature of our work, knowing what, and why, we were walking in the opposite direction of where our original painting subject was located. This increased the value of the reflection-as-subject, however, and moreover, it was not just any reflection, it was a found reflection. The circumstantial uncertainty of which was unknown: would we make it over the over side? The small details of our phenomenal field had changed as the apprehension of a narrowed landscape continued to develop. The whole contexture was exhibiting a state of disarray which was currently being worked out amongst our party.

### **Figure 6. Transcript**

Freeman: Oh. Maybe your right

Buck: How / can we get up and along there?

Freeman: No, we can get up and along there.

Freeman: Yep. That's it.

Freeman: If we can't

Freeman: Too bad

*[Freeman heads towards the hill]*

### **Figure 6.**



Figure 6.1



Figure 6.2



Figure 6.3

Above, Freeman had led us a few hundred metres before he paused, turned, and uttered: *“Oh, maybe you’re right.”* (Figure 6.1). Buck then interjected: *“Could we get up and along there?”* Freeman confirmed, then re-confirmed: *“Yep, that’s it. If we can’t, too bad.”* (Figure 6.2), As before, Freeman marched off into a small muddy walkway, determined. Each object within our then immediate surroundings formed part of our overall painting work, and our navigational plans were driving the contexture’s messy, disorderly status. Regardless, we managed to arrange our actions into order. The overall goal at large had become seemingly detached: to get to the river so as to view the island from a south-bound position.

### ***Stabilising the painting object as more than objective***

The island received yet another designation; that of a subject. What lay beyond the hilltop determined whether we would paint the original painting object (as was discovered, the reflection of the limestone upon the river) or, whether another subject was to be painted. There was freedom in the placement of our setup. Whether, for example, we would set up our easels on the top of the hill or not. In any case, I followed Freeman up the bank.

### Figure 7. Transcript

*[Freeman breaks a path leading up the hill]*

Freeman: Oh fuck.

Freeman: That's pretty nice

*[looking at the limestone in silence]*

*[withdraws camera from his satchel]*

Freeman: That's pretty cool

*[camera clicking]*

### Figure 7.



Figure 7.1



Figure 7.2



Figure 7.3



Figure 7.4

Upon my arrival I found Freeman heading towards a natural vista. He then stopped and stated: *“Oh fuck - that’s pretty nice.”* (Figure 7.2). We moved on. Dried six-foot tall reeds and thistles appeared before us. The grass, mud and shrubbery were thick and difficult to walk through, nevertheless, we pushed forward to a small clearing. Freeman paused, retrieved his camera, and started clicking: *“That’s pretty cool.”* (Figure 7.4). We slid down the side of the bank to land down on the other side. Freeman had identified the ‘reflection of the limestone in the water’ from two separate angles (Figure 7.3 and 7.4 respectfully). Our contexture, having rapidly changed from easy wayfinding, to difficult and unknown path-breaking, was stabilised against the environment’s vistas - the island, the water, the reflection upon the water, and the fact we were closing in on the constituent features of subject selection, encouraged local sense-making comradery. Consequently, we were stuck in the here-and-now task of organising our interactive work to determine, and produce, a concrete painting subject.

### ***Finding out what we were doing all along***

As we neared the destination, each previous action, its role within its contexture, and its meaning formed as a local historic record of ordinary events. These constitutive parts amounted to, upon the arrival of a static viewing point, the final art-object. Consider Figure 8 below:

### **Figure 8. Transcript**

Freeman: That. That’s lovely. See I think I’ll end up painting that.

Freeman: Look. You’ve got the reflection of the limestone in the water; got a bit of distance there.

Freeman: I think that’s lovely; I really do.

*[whispers]*

*Freeman: I think that's what I'll paint*

*[Freeman starts adding oil colours to his mixing board immediately after setting up his easel]*

**Figure 8.**



Figure 8.1



Figure 8.2



Figure 8.3



Figure 8.4

Freeman assessed the journey as *“Worth it.”* (Figure 8.1). I approached him as he took photographs beneath the shade of a nearby cluster of trees. He was in awe of the scene as I said, *“It’s lit up, isn’t it? – Direct sun.”* (Figure 8.2). My own understanding of the direct sun upon the island reinforced the contexture I belonged to, and had elements that were separate from Freeman’s work. As Freeman and I walked out of the shade and turned to look back at the limestone from the angle he had envisioned from the beginning of our journey ‘up over that fence line’. He explained: *“I think I’ll end up painting that.”* – *“Look.”* – *“You’ve got the reflection of the limestone in the water.”* – *“Got a bit of distance there.”* – *“I think that’s lovely; I really do.”* – *“I think that’s what I’ll paint.”* (Figure 8.3). This gestalt shift enabled the painting subject to gain salience: the reflection upon the water. Subsequently, we set up our easels (Figure 8.4) and began to paint the subject now known in common. From an ordinary piece of nature, to an extraordinary painter’s object. How this artwork was constituted was certainly in, and as a variety of ordinary social, and navigational practices which are typical of mundane organisational activities which surround the practice of painting in the open air.

## **5. Conclusion**

Subject selection may only comprise one of the activities that are involved with *plein air* painting. I have attempted to show in this short article how little actions integrate into, and with, their larger counterparts. By re-describing the video records with a dedicated focus on the interacting party’s navigational ‘gestalt-contextures’, I demonstrated that mundane actions were necessary social features of the artist’s local painting work. For example, during the searching for the subject-to-be-painted, the cohort-at-work, naturally, at a common river setting, required a preliminary inspection of the surrounding landscape: that they were to ‘head over that fence line’. Their ongoing walking continued to produce and maintain this established contexture throughout their subsequent journey. The party entertained some objects as they increased in relevancy to their task at hand: the scoping and evaluating of the painting subject as it appeared within their visual horizon. The work continued, progressed, and their methods of

looking were bounded to a contexture inseparable from the local environment. To describe a member's method, then, was to describe the context of its local arrival, use and departure. My understanding of the direct sun upon the island reinforced a separation from Freeman's own. The group's task all along was thus to navigate around the river setting to find the most suitable viewing-angle of the initial painting subject; an aspect of our journey I remained non-privy to until the very end. Consequently, this study demonstrated how an interacting painting party individually organised nature into a socially meaningful art object(s).

These investigative descriptions of 'context' may raise concern with how the sociology of art treats *a priori* explanations of meaningful social action beyond the member's local work. Upholding the analytic mentality of Watson's 'kaleidoscopic detail' attributed to each constitutive element being observable from the recorded materials as worthy of value - each individual action contributed to the contextual field of our party. Displaying how an interacting group made up of two artists and a social researcher observing subject matter for the first time, came to realise a limitation due to the river's water level, re-routed their journey, serendipitously reviewed the subject, and lastly, became aware of the sun's relationship with the artist's position on foot, all comprised the features of a specific day's work of *painting*. Subsequently, it is my view that the sociology of art ought to abandon pursuing the theoretical development of concrete epistemological foundations, and turn instead towards how members of living society organise their actions through single-case empirical descriptions, including the investigation of 'gestalt-contextures'. These ought to be included in the move from the study of 'art structures' (Becker, 1979) towards 'artwork' (Becker, 2006) in their naturally organised, yet spectacular, art-work formations. There is more to learn about the local and meaningful organisation of social context within site-specific detail. The social praxis of art remains, in my view, to be a highly resourceful domain of research for ethnomethodological studies of primordial social order.

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1. I understand Garfinkel's sentiment was for social analysts to ethnomethodologically "leap from the coherence of line drawings to the coherence of social facts" (Garfinkel, 2007: 28). For a further detailed analysis of how ethnomethodologists may understand phenomenal fields and gestalt contextures, and the relationship between Gurwitsch (1964) and Garfinkel (2002) on functional significance see (Fele, 2008). For an understanding of Garfinkel's rigor, see Liberman (2007).