

# Observing the Doing of Social Work (with Homeless People)

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Reflecting on a just finished and yet unpublished project by Stax (2004) this paper discusses 1) aspects of the use of the qualitative method of observation and the notion of case studies 2) analyses of social work and 3) does so from an ethnomethodological perspective.

## ***An analysis of the doing of social work***

The project, entitled *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet – et interaktionelt perspektiv på samtaler mellem hjemløse og socialarbejdere* [Duets from the Castle's third floor – an interactional perspective on encounters between homeless and social workers], that I will use as a base in the discussions of this paper looks at interaction between tenants living in a shelter in Copenhagen and social workers employed at a couple of welfare offices. The welfare offices where I observed focused encounters – which “occurs when people effectively agree to sustain for a time a single focus of cognitive and visual attention, as in a conversation, a board game, or a joint task sustained by a close face-to-face circle of contributors” (Goffman, 1961:7) – were so called *lokalcentre*<sup>1</sup> and *rådgivningscentre*.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of the project *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* is to shed light on how the parties engaging in meetings interactionally negotiate the situated and ongoing performance of enacted roles, and to analyse how this process orients to both an institutional and an interactional order (see e.g. Goffman, 1964; 1967b; 1983). I take the term roles from Goffman who defines it as “the activity the incumbent would engage in were he to act solely in terms of the normative demands upon someone in his position” (1961:85). A role is to be understood

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<sup>1</sup> Welfare offices are where most people apply for social services. These are all citizens' gate to the social sector, except when it comes to the most universal measures like kindergarten and ordinary retirement pension. Below, I will sometimes refer to these centres as 'ordinary welfare offices'.

<sup>2</sup> These centres provide social services to one of the few groups not using the ordinary welfare office: the people who are enrolled in treatment for the use of illegal drugs. Below, I shall sometimes refer to these centres as 'welfare offices for substance abusers'.

as normative expectations associated with positions, and needs to be distinguished from *role performance* "which is the actual conduct of a particular individual while on duty in his position." (1961:85). Goffman clarifies this relations between role and role performance when he writes about roles as "the *typical* response of individuals in a particular position. Typical role must of course be distinguished from the actual role performance of a concrete individual in a given position. Between typical response and actual response we can usually expect some difference, if only because the position of an individual, in the terms now used, will depend somewhat on the varying fact of how he perceives and defines his situation." (1961:93). By associating roles with position Goffman connects to an institutional order. This can, for example, be seen in *The Presentation of Self* where he writes that "a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name... When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it." (Goffman, 1959:37-8) This means, in the formulation of Giddens that "roles specify generalized expectations to which an individual has more or less closely to conform when in a particular situated context." But Giddens continues: "However all roles can be performed in a manner giving them a particular personal stamp, and allowing the individual to utilize particular means of self-expression." (Giddens, 2000:158) For Goffman it is, thus, not only the influence of a institutional order on actual face-to-face-interaction which is in focus. There is more that needs to be reflected upon. Some of this 'more' is an interactional order, i.e. the regularities in conduct between people meeting face to face (see e.g. Goffman, 1964; 1967b). In *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* I try to look at an institutional order and an interactional order for shedding lights upon the actual ongoing and situated interaction that takes place between social workers and their clients (or at least their homeless clients).

## **The data**

The empirical data analysed in the project is primarily gathered through fieldwork at, and in the organisational vicinities of, a shelter in Copenhagen and through observations of actual meetings between tenants of the shelter and social workers in the above mentioned welfare offices.

During two periods I spent a total of five months at the shelter, where I attempted to tag along with any tenant going to a meeting in any organisation outside the shelter. When I first began my fieldwork I had no limitations as to what kind of organisation within which I wanted to observe meetings. I would join the tenants for whatever meeting they would bring me along for. However, as the field work progressed I found the number of different organisations where I observed meetings to exceed the number suited for doing in depth analysis of the encounters – especially as my theoretical focus shifted towards microanalysis.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence I limited my focus to encounters taking place in one of the two above mentioned types of welfare organisations – *lokalcentre* and *rådgivningscentre*. The primary data for the analysis became the observations of actual meetings between the tenants<sup>4</sup> and their social workers. The observations of events outside these meetings and the many conversations / interviews that I had with the tenants during my stay at the shelter became of importance in focusing the analysis of the meetings and in providing background knowledge useful for interpreting some of the findings obtained by looking at the meetings.

I shall like here to touch upon an issue regarding an eventual skewedness concerning the people included as objects in the study, as this seems to be one of the interesting methodological issues to be thought about in doing a qualitative analysis (of homeless people). When I initiated the project I did not have any limitations concerning which tenants of the shelter that I would like to tag along with as they went to meetings in welfare offices, but it does indeed seem that some of the clients did have certain reservations towards me. There were some people living at the shelter with whom I never was able to establish rapport. Some of these people politely told me they would like to be left alone, other informed me so less politely, and then there were some with whom I just never got to speak. There were other people that I did establish a degree of rapport with, but who did not take me along to any of their meetings with social workers. Some of these people did – from the very beginning – inform me that they would tell me about their encounters with social workers but not take me come along to any meetings. One guy told me that he wouldn't cut down the branch upon which he himself was sitting, implying that it would damage his case should he bring along someone to a meeting. Others among those with whom I talked but who never brought me along for a meeting just never seemed to make it to any meetings at all. Often they had a meeting scheduled, but they never made it there. Thirdly there were people who took me

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<sup>3</sup> As I initiated my work I thought of it as a combination of a bourdieusian field analysis and a goffmanian institutional analysis. Gradually, however, I became more and more interested in the interactional processes that took place within meetings between clients and their social workers.

<sup>4</sup> I refer to the tenants as clients, when they are within the welfare organisations.

along to their meetings in the welfare organisations. Among this third group of people some were very eager to have me join them – and very eager at finding out whom I was when I entered the shelter. Others were more reluctant towards establishing contact initially but gradually came to see me as someone they could talk to as I spend my time at the shelter, and then took me along after we had talked for a couple of times.

That I have talked to and observed only a segment of the tenants of the people staying at a shelter does indeed point to one of the difficult aspects of the qualitative inquiries (into homelessness): Might not the skewedness of the population used for generating data – independent of the method used for generating these data, e.g. through interviews, observations, social journals – be a significant factor in steering the conclusions drawn? I will briefly argue yes and no. On the one hand it is evident that the sample indeed sets the limits for the possibilities of generalizing through representation – or through correspondence between the sample and the population. But then again, the qualitative inquiry is not intended for such types of generalisation (which is not to say that such types of generalization are not attempted once in a while). This brings me to the answer ‘no’ to the above question. The argument for the no that I shall outline here draws upon reflections on the method of case studies (e.g. Becker, 1958; 1968; Blumer, 1969; Flyvbjerg, 1991; Mitchell, 1999; Ragin, 1992; Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994). By e.g. Flyvbjerg it is argued that the selection of the case studied in the case study is of central importance in regard to what knowledge one might obtain from a case. He lists different types of cases (1991:149pp) where the differences are related to the reasons for the choosing of the specific cases. One possible type of case is ‘the critical’. Such case is, Flyvbjerg argues, chosen because it prior to the actual analysis is judged as fit for verifying or falsifying hypotheses like ‘if A goes in case 1 it goes in every case’ or ‘if B does not go in case 2 it does not go anywhere’. The point important to notice here is the fact that 1) cases need to be selected strategically – i.e. with an explicit thinking of how the case is to be used – 2) that cases need to be selected strategically in accordance with theoretical expectations, or in accordance with formulations of theoretical hypotheses, and 3) that cases become cases (or at least cases in a case study) through a theoretical understanding (see also Mitchell, 1999; Walton, 1992). It is through theoretical understandings that we are able to understand similarities and differences, and not until such are constructed does it make sense to talk about a case of something (Flyvbjerg, 1991; Mitchell, 1999; Stake, 2000; Walton, 1992; Yin, 1994). Another type of case – or in this instance of cases – used for a case study is what Flyvbjerg (1991:149pp) calls ‘maximum variation’ cases. In such design cases are – according to Flyvbjerg – chosen because they are as different as possible from each other

on a single (or few) central variable(s). The chosen cases are thus taken to illustrate the span of outcomes possible. The type of generalisations that might be obtained from case studies designed as e.g. Flyvbjerg encourages does indeed relates to the theoretically constructed population, but he does not attempt to generalise findings from the studied cases to the population on an assumed representational similarity – or based on correspondence between the population and the case. The generalisation to the population does depend in the strategic selection of the cases and on the hypotheses formulated – and thus on the theoretical framework.

One problem with the approach encouraged by Flyvbjerg (and Yin, e.g. 1994) is that it demands a significant knowledge of the case prior to the actual research being carried out. Choosing, for example, two cases that are as different as possible on one or few (and only on one or few) variable prior to the actual analysis does indeed demand a significant amount of knowledge. And focusing so much on testing hypotheses limits the possibilities for grasping the unforeseen and unexpected within a case – which is a strength highlighted by other people touching upon the method of case studies (e.g. Becker, 1958; 1968; Blumer, 1969; Eisenhardt, 1999; Stake, 2000). An immediate possible compromise – a Becker meets Flyvbjerg – might be to see the recommendations of Flyvbjerg (and Yin) as something to be thought about continuously while the study gets underway instead of making it initial choices of the research. From the very outset we might not know the type of case that we are working with, but continuously reflecting upon what type of cases are emerging, and continually adapting the questions asked will enhance the possibilities for making sound generalisations from the study conducted.

A second path available works with a different understanding of what type of knowledge one gains from a case study – or from a qualitative study more generally (e.g. Becker, 1958; 1968; Blumer, 1969; Stake, 2000). With this approach one is less concerned with the relations between the case and the population of cases, or with the actual rationales for choosing the specific cases chosen. Here the focus is more upon generating an analytical understanding of social orders identifiable in given environments and in generating useful concepts for further analysis. One could call this kind of generalisation for theoretical generalisation where “[t]he validity of the extrapolation depends not on the typicality or representativeness of the case but upon cogency of the theoretical reasoning. In terms of this argument case studies may be used analytically – as against ethnographically – ... if they are embedded in an appropriate theoretical framework.” (Mitchell, 1999:197) With this type of generalisation one focuses upon what might logically be extrapolated from the specific case in a given theoretical

understanding with a development of the theoretical understanding in mind, where the "logical inference is the process by which the analyst draws conclusions about the essential linkage between two or more characteristics in terms of some systematic explanatory schema – some set of theoretical propositions." (Mitchell, 1999:191) Let me illustrate the point with a quotation from White's *Street Corner Society*: "In this exploration of Cornerville we shall be little concerned with people in general. We shall encounter particular people and observe the particular things they do... If we can get to know these people intimately and understand the relations between little guy and little guy, big shot and little guy, and big shot and big shot, then we know how Cornerville society is organized." (1981:xx) One might as well see larger part of Bourdieu's thinking as an illustration of this point. From observing in Kabylia he develops an understanding of social order, and a coherent theoretical framework – a framework afterwards used and developed in many ways by himself and others (Bourdieu 1977; 1984; 1992; 2000).

Having touched upon aspects of what might be learned from looking in depth at the specific – and argued that such analysis might be more than just a pilot study for a following quantitative analysis – I shall return to, first, the theoretical approach applied in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* and, then, to the topic of social work.

## **Theoretical perspectives**

The theoretical approaches applied in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* are perspectives seeing interaction as something that takes place within both an institutional order and an interactional order. The theoretical perspectives can be divided into three groups. First, I have taken an ethnomethodological outset. Ethnomethodology is the theoretical perspective through which I approach the analysis. Quoted by Francis, D. Boden has described the ethnomethodological approach as "quite simply, the study of rational action, or, to hone the point, the actual occasions of rationality-in-action. It has much to offer (...) apparently larger approaches in its ability to uncover the local logic of the world as it happens. (...) That logic is, in turn, nested within and reflexively tied to past events and future outcomes, but it is irredeemably and unavoidably local in that any and all larger 'goals', or 'rules' or even 'laws' must be tailored to particular conditions, particular actors, specific times, definite places. (...) This is not to say that the world is up for grabs at each succeeding moment but rather that it must, most elaborately, be brought off as a reasonable affair in the present, in the light of the

past and with the horizon of the future.” (Francis, 1995:39) From this quotation I will highlight two points that informs about the analysis in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet*. On the one hand, studying action as rationality-in-action implies that actors are assumed to act accountable (Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Heritage, 1984), meaning that actions are produced as an “ongoing, practical accomplishment” (Garfinkel, 1967:4) of an order. On the other hand, this ‘ongoing, practical accomplishment’ is tied to the situation within which the practical action takes place – it is local and situated rationality-in-action. This relates the action accomplished to the institutional order, which can be analysed by looking at the orientation to and enactment of institutional constrains in the actually unfolding action observed. Heritage describes the ethnomethodological approach as focusing on ”the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves.” (Heritage, 1984:4) This means that the approach is focused upon the concrete situation, within which meaning actually, practically, and ongoingly is created: ”[w]hat is distinctive about ethnomethodology [is it’s] orientation to ‘actual,’ ‘material,’ or ‘real-worldly’ phenomena. Contrary to the entrenched idea that science is about general patterns and not singular events, and that scientists aim to uncover orders of things that lie behind the apparent chaos of the sensual world, ethnometodologists insist that the immediate, singular details of social actions are orderly and intelligible *at their surface*.” (Lynch & Peyrot, 1992:117, see also Wieder, 1999) It is this actual, practical, and ongoing production of meaning situated within everyday life that is captured by the ethnomethodological notion of order (e.g. Garfinkel, 1991), where order ”refer[s] to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life.” (Garfinkel, 1967:11, see also Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Sacks, 1984; Silverman, 1998; Wieder, 1974) From within the ethnomethodological frame the project draws significantly bit on the perspective of Conversational Analysis.

The second theoretical frame applied in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* can be presented under a heading of researching Social Works. Currently such research in social work has gained momentum in Denmark. This theoretical approach, to a certain degree, focuses upon the institutional order as a level of analysis in itself. From this field of research I draw upon thoughts about *social problems work* (e.g. Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Holstein, 1992; Holstein & Miller, 1993; Miller, 1992). The starting point of this perspective can be traced back to Spector & Kitzuses (1987) pointing to the socially constructed nature of what is

conceived of as a social problem. With this theoretical perspective as point of departure analyses of the construction of social problems within specific organisations have been carried out (e.g. Loseke, 1992). One point in this theoretical perspective evolves around the notion of institutional identities – i.e. ”locally salient images, model, or templates for selfconstruction; they serve as resources for structuring selves.” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001:11) – and especially those institutional identities that are *troubled* (e.g. Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Loseke, 1992). The authors argue that we might fruitfully look at these identities as connected to what they call institutional settings (perhaps a more specific term – which would capture the larger part of the attempts at applying this perspective – would be organizational settings (cf. Ahrne, 1994; Røvik, 1992; 1996; Scott, 1995)): “Taken together, cultural and institutional image set the ‘conditions of possibility’ (Foucault, 1979) for who and what we might be – or are likely not to become, as the case might be. These identities establish general parameters for how the troubled self might recognizably and accountably be constructed” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001:9). The identities we can observe by ”[c]arefully attending to the social interaction and discourse of these settings [which] reveals both the variety of identities we could, or could not, be, as well as the practices by which identities are attached to the selves in question.” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001:16, see also Loseke, 2001; Spencer, 2001). The analytical insight from this approach concerns the organisational anchoring of the ongoing construction and negotiation of social problems, where emphasis is placed upon organisationally developed *formula stories* (e.g. Loseke, 1992; 2001) serving as templates for the negotiations between clients and social workers.

As the third and last – but absolutely not least important – perspective, the project *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* draws – as mentioned above – on the work of primarily Goffman, but also other sociological authors having thought about interaction (e.g. Becker, 1963; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Here I will highlight two aspects in the work of Goffman that are of centremost importance in the project: first, Goffman has thought extensively about the ordering of interaction as people meet face to face. Throughout his work he has been considering what ordering actually exists when people encounter each other, as well as how this order is continuously sustained and what happens as it occasionally breaks down (especially in Goffman, 1959; 1961; 1964; 1967b; 1983) – much of this thinking concerns the interactional order. Second, Goffman has thought about how the interactional order relates to an institutional order within which the concrete interaction takes place (especially in Goffman, 1959; 1967a; 1974). Thus Goffman throws light on the two types of orders that are in focus through the project as well as on the relationship between the two.

All of the theoretical perspectives drawn upon in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* orient the methodology of the project towards observations of actual ongoing interaction rather than towards, e.g., the retrospective constructions of descriptions or accounts generated through interviews or through more quantitative methods like surveys. The theoretical perspectives focus orientation towards observing practice as it unfolds rather than upon taking about this practice afterwards.

## **Analysing Social Work**

Above I have mentioned that the project *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* looks at social work, and that this focus has gained momentum during the recent years in Denmark. I shall like to briefly present the perspective here.

I Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* I find reflections upon social work. He writes that "[a] new series of professions has appeared since the end of the nineteenth century, comprising social assistants, specialized educators, and activity directors. They all assemble under a common banner: social work... Scattered throughout a multiplicity of inscription sites, they are nevertheless unified by their sphere of intervention, which follows the contours of the 'less-favored' classes." (Donzelot, 1997:96). Whereas Donzelot presents an understanding of social work that focuses upon those carrying out the social work the recent Danish – and more generally Scandinavian – research in the field has been focusing more on the *relation* between clients and worker – and more specifically upon the institutional anchoring of this relation (fx Carstens, 1998; Egelund, 1997; Fredin, 1993; Järvinen, et al. 2002; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003; Jokinen & Juhila, 1997; Jokinen et al., 1999a; Oltedal, 2000; Seltzer et. al., 2003; Sørensen, 1995; Uggerhøj, 1995). In quite a bit of the produced research the approach has – like I have done in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* – been drawing upon the *social problems work* perspective presented above. The institutions within which the social work has been analysed have been those called Human Service Organisations (e.g. Hasenfeld, 1972; Hasenfeld & English, 1974; Lipsky, 1980; Prottas, 1979). One of the important points in the previous research has been the illustrations of how organisations doing social work are rationing and rationalising their services, or how they are “structuring the context of clients’ interactions with them and their agencies; ... teaching clients how to behave as clients; and ... allocating psychological rewards and sanctions associated with clients entering into relationships with them.” (Lipsky, 1980:60) In this

process of rationing and rationalising services Lipsky points out that “[t]he highest costs are borne by potential clients who are discouraged from or forbidden access to bureaucratic involvement. While exclusion from client status is usually accomplished on the basis of legal grounds, the population of the excluded or discouraged includes many whose exclusion is a matter of discretionary judgment. [For example] welfare claimants deemed uncooperative depends not on fixed criteria alone, but also on interactions with street-level bureaucrats.” (Lipsky, 1980:88) This points to the doubled-edged sword of social work – helping and controlling – and to the process of constructing clients: “it is critical to remember that each social service is organized to assist a specific type of persons. In modern day America there are no social services organized to help *any* person to do *any* thing.” (Loseke, 1992:159) “Although social life always will be more complex, heterogeneous, and multidimensional than any image guiding a social service organization, guiding images becomes very real when they are institutionalized in the forms of organizational goals, procedures, and workers’ orientations. Hence, social service organization of all types will have disjunctures between images of client types and experiences and these disjunctures will create problems to be handled by social service workers who, as practical actors, are faced with the task of making sense of their clients and their work.” (Loseke, 1992:144) Turning again to Holstein & Miller one find arguments about how these organisationally situated rationings and rationalisations are constructed: “social problems work is interactive as well as rhetorical. Social problems designations are not unilaterally enforced, simply applied or withheld; instead they emerge from talk, interaction, and negotiation.” (Holstein & Miller, 1993:159-60) More specifically this social problems work might be analysed as a negotiation between (potential) clients and social workers as it has been done by, e.g., Jokinen and Juhila. They write that “[t]he concept of negotiation is appropriate in two senses: first of all, it describes the arbitrary (re)negotiable nature of meanings constructing social reality and secondly, it highlights the involvement of all participants in the interaction situation in the process of producing meanings (...) Because meanings are produced in a chain of interaction, we have to study how these interpretations take shape in the interaction process. This means that turns of talk in a negotiation must be examined in relation to one another. As links in the chain of interaction, each turn of talk is related to what earlier has been said or not said. Also, each turn creates the basis for what follows in the chain.” (Jokinen et al., 2003:39, see also Jokinen & Juhila, 1997; various contributions in Jokinen, et al, 1999 and various contributions in Seltzer et al., 2003). It is at this point that the focus – at least in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* – might be turned back to the ethnomethodological (or Conversational Analytical) perspective. For understanding how

the categorisations of clients, how the rationing of services, how the rationalisations of practices are working one has to understand the micro sociological processes that goes on interactionally in the specific organisations, and this is one of the things that qualitative methods are useful for.

## **The Analysis and the findings – an appendix for those interested**

In the analysis in *Duetter fra anden sal på Slottet* I gradually turn from a focus on the interaction in organisations to a focus on the micro sequential organisation of interaction. I begin by analysing the actual layout of the counters where most encounters in the welfare offices begin. I show how clients orient themselves towards the social workers when interacting around a counter, and show how the systematics of this interaction is related to, e.g., the degree of separation between the two parties that the counter creates. I have observed that when a complete separation between the area used by the social worker and the area used by the clients exists certain byplays in the middle of interactions between social workers and clients might surface: in the middle of an interaction between a client and a social worker the social worker might suddenly engage in an encounter with a fellow social worker, and during this encounter the client is left out on the opposite side of the counter and is himself staying passively not interfering, leaving the social workers to their byplay. Suddenly, the social worker might then return to the initial encounter with the client.

A second aspect, which I analyse, is the issue of social problems work. Here I look at the workings with three subjects that I have observed the parties are talking about. First, I show how the issue of a possible substance abuse is created as *the* most significant social problem. When a client is using illegal drugs this is considered the first problem to deal with. However, I also show that only in interactions with a doctor employed at the welfare offices for substance abusers, do I find an actual orientation to the providing of a solution. In other meetings, I find that the issue receives a lot of attention in the process of making it a problem, but also that no solutions are touched on during the meetings. The second issue often brought forward during the meetings between the clients – also being tenants from a shelter – and their social workers is the client's lack of a permanent abode. This issue is often created as a social problem, but I have encountered hardly any reflections on what to do about it. It always seems to be an issue that are to be dealt with at a later point in time. This brings me to the third issue that I reflect on. It seems to me that there is an orientation towards the past as something that

must be significantly documented before action can be taken, which means that action often is something that belongs to the future. This might pose a problem especially since the people that I follow to meetings with their social workers have shown a high degree of mobility. Thus, some of the tenants have left the shelter, and thereby moved out of the jurisdiction of the specific welfare office, before the past was documented and the time for intervention reached. This is also shown in the type of meetings that I have participated in with the clients. The number of meetings where the social workers and the clients meet for the first time by far exceeds the number of meetings where the two meet for the second, third, fourth... time. In this analysis of social problems work I show how the work is carried out interactionally between the parties, and that it involves the productions of presentations of selves and accounts.

After having looked at social problems work the analysis turns towards the issue of presentations and accounts. I employ the distinction between *role* – i.e. "the activity the incumbent would engage in were he to act solely in terms of the normative demands upon someone in his position" (1961:85) – and *role performance* – "which is the actual conduct of a particular individual while on duty in his position" (1961:85) and I analyse how the actors perform their roles in ongoing practical face-to-face-interaction. For capturing this performance I additionally employ two other terms that I take from Goffman. That is *line* – which is "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which [a person] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants" (1967b:5) – and *face* which "may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share" (1967b:5). When I talk about an actor's line and face together I use the term *presentation*. By looking at the actual interaction taking place between the clients and their social workers, I find that not all the clients produce an as subdued presentation as one might have expected when reading literature on social work (e.g. Lipsky, 1980; Prottas, 1979). Some clients choose alternative lines, and some of these are very confrontational, producing as well a very indifferent face. Other clients present a subdued presentation that fits the expectation. This later presentation implies that the client follows the social worker and initiates very little or nothing himself. Another distinction that I find between the various presentations can be drawn between clients who employ a presentation where they ask for help from the social workers versus clients who employ a presentation presenting their case as rightful demands directed towards the social system. The latter of the two orients towards the social worker as someone simply

supposed to carry out the client's requests. The people orienting towards the social workers through a presentation where they ask for help often employ a presentation based on *account*, i.e. "statements made by social actors to free themselves of culpability and defend or restore their position as respectable human beings" (Järvinen, 2003b:217; see also Scott & Lyman, 1968; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Looking at the presentation that the social workers produce during the encounters with the clients I have found that they seem to fit well into the understanding of social work as consisting of a degree of support as well as a degree of control (e.g. Järvinen, 2002a-b; Lipsky, 1980). But it also seems as if the orientation towards the dimension of control is where two different presentations are separated. One presentation creates a distinction between the social worker carrying out the social work and the controlling dimension where the latter is inscribed into the institutional order and presented – by the social worker – as something forced upon her by external constraints. Here I find an attempt to create a difference between the institutional order – which implies coercion and constraints – and the interactional order, which implies equality between the participants. The other presentation employed does not try to separate the work that the social worker would like to carry out from the control dimension. Here the institutional order is not presented as something constraining and coercive, but rather as 'the facts of life', the neutral constraints that the social worker works within.

After having touched on the presentations among clients and social workers the analysis turns towards the issue of how these presentations are co-produced by the parties together. I show how some interactional systematics – like systematics of turn taking, pauses between speech turns, the use of response tokens, the initiation of new topics – are in use for negotiating the production of, e.g. client's and social worker's accounts. I show that these productions are not the sole responsibility of one actor or another, but on the contrary are interactionally produced and products of an interactional order. I also show that these systematics indicate some asymmetries between the participants – for example I show asymmetries between which actors are employing response tokens indicating for the other participant to continue, and which actors are initiating new topics during the meeting – which shows a relation between the interactional and the institutional orders. How a meeting progresses is thus – at least partially – an effect of how the involved participants orient towards the institutional order engulfing the meeting, how the involved participants present themselves, as well as an effect of the actual and ongoing production of interaction, which also is oriented towards an interactional order.

Summarizing the analysis of ongoing, actual and practical orientation towards an interactional and an institutional order in meetings between clients also being tenants in a shelter and their social workers at welfare offices some of the issues touch on with regard to the form of the interaction are:

- that an enactment of an institutional order – or more specifically of institutionally provided artefacts like counters and questionnaires – significantly influences the interactional order.
- that an orientation towards an institutional positioning of the participants might be enacted by any of the participants, and this as well changes the interactional order. But also that an attempt like that might be countered by any participant, thereby putting off or postponing the change in interactional order. In this way a client might oppose a social worker's enactment of her position by interactionally acting in accordance with what has been shown to be systematics in ordinary talk-in-interaction.
- that the enactment of an institutional order seems to make some asymmetrical aspects of the interaction going unnoticed, which would probably have been noticed in ordinary interaction.

Some of the issues touch on which relates more to the interaction being a meeting between a client and a social worker, where the client is a tenant at a shelter as well, are:

- that there is a lack of orientation towards helping other participants sustain the presentations in some observed encounters. In some encounters actors attempt a significant degree of deconstruction of other parties' lines and faces, and both clients and social workers attempt this. In some cases this forces the interaction to break down as one of the parties – the client – leaves rather suddenly.
- that I have observed less of a phased process running through the meetings than one might have expected from the literature on meetings between social workers and clients. Instead, clients and social workers alike seem to return to topics previously talked about.
- that there is little emphasis on the observed meetings in terms of the issue of making a situation change. There is emphasis on the co-production of what are social problems, but neither the clients nor the social workers are reflecting on the topic of how to deal with these problems in attempt to change the client's situation. At most, the issue deals with acute social problems of financial nature, e.g., how to compensate for a lost wallet or a broken tooth. I argue that it seems as if clients who also are tenants at a

shelter to some degree simply are – and have been – on hold within the social system on a kind of ‘nothing-to-do-about-it-anyway-social-assistance’.

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