

# For sociology: Reflections on Wes Sharrock's discipline-specific Learning and Teaching corpus<sup>1</sup>

Andrew P. Carlin

*Department of Portuguese, University of Macau*

## ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a corpus of Learning and Teaching materials by Wes Sharrock, which attend to the specificities of sociology as a distinctive academic pursuit. This paper argues that these materials are attempts to raise the level of sociological sophistication among students and academic sociologists, and thereby to raise the profile of sociology within British academia. It was precisely his struggle to understand, to come to grips with, and to resolve the methodological problems which underlie the academic discipline that led to his adoption of the thoroughly sociological discipline of ethnomethodology. A key purpose of this paper is to remind readers that Wes Sharrock is not limited to the horizons of Ethnomethodology or Philosophy of Mind, and that he produced a valuable corpus of writing that is regrettably passed over by attending to his singular achievements in Ethnomethodology.

## 1. 'REFLECTING ON' LEARNING AND TEACHING: SOCIOLOGY

In asking the question 'Can we learn from the insights of highly effective teachers?' Ken Bain notes that yes we can, but this involves 'recognizing that teaching is not

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements: I was introduced to Wes Sharrock's work at school, during A Level Sociology, by the late Monica James. Some of my teachers at the University of Manchester assigned readings of Sharrock's work to their students, including Rod Watson, Liz Stanley, Pete Martin, John Lee, and Ken Brown. My debt to them all continues. Watson, like Sharrock, a fellow alumnus of the University of Leicester, has provided me with detailed background of the sociological training he and Sharrock shared, and that they brought to Manchester. John Lee provided me with much more than factual clarification of half-remembered incidents: I have incorporated Lee's many comments on an earlier draft of this paper, for which I am truly grateful. Charles Neame encouraged me to detail, in concrete terms, why I consider Sharrock to be a highly effective teacher; Sheena Murdoch gave valuable feedback, on organization and the appropriateness of formulations; and I have been guided by considerations on the teaching of ethnomethodology by Shing Hung Au-Yeung and Sandro Brincher.

just delivering lectures but anything we might do that helps and encourages students to learn. [...] That demands a fundamental conceptual shift in what we mean by teaching' (Bain 2004: 173). In this account of Learning and Teaching I move from the general (Learning and Teaching) to specifics—the teaching of sociology, its local manifestations at the University of Manchester, and to Wes Sharrock in particular. Readers of Sharrock's writings recognize the discrete yet mutually informing corpora to which he has contributed, which could be glossed as Ethnomethodology, Conversation Analysis, the practices of doing sociological work, ordinary language philosophy, Philosophy of Mind, CSCW/HCI, etc.<sup>2</sup> These hide the valuable enhancements of students' sociology training in which he has been continuously engaged. In this contribution to a tribute for Sharrock I shall rephrase Ken Bain's question to ask, 'Can we learn from the *activities* of highly effective teachers', using reflections not from my own teaching practice but my experiences as a student.

Sociology is a distinctive academic pursuit. One aspect of sociology's distinctiveness is not addressed by textbook encomiums or advocacy for its advancement but is observable-reportable in its relation with its subject matter, and how its subject matter is presented as bona fide sociology:

*pending* the (perpetually postponed) systematic adoption of technically adequate symbolisms, [sociology speaks] of social life in the 'ordinary language' the theorist shares with other members of society. The extensive and unselfconscious employment of natural language to state the substance of sociological thought contrasts with the marginalised status of reflective examination of the natural language expression of social order. (Sharrock and Button 1991: 168, original emphasis)<sup>3</sup>

In producing 'sociological' work, practitioners of sociology are necessarily asking a generic question—'for whom are they writing' (Woodward and Jenkins 2018)? Both teaching and writing about sociology make particular demands upon its practitioners, and their readers (Becker 1986; Mills 1959). Since the early days of its development, sociology has been engaged in producing a corpus of work on and about itself; where the producers of this corpus have attended to the requirements of both fellow sociologists and students of sociology (glossed, variously, as members of the student cohort and as 'interested readers'). In this paper, I shall address a corpus of Learning and Teaching materials by Sharrock, which attend

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<sup>2</sup> This is certainly not a taxonomy: indeed, some of Sharrock's concerns, if placed within such a categorization of his works, are made available through his 'studies of work' publications (e.g. Button and Sharrock 1995a, 2000, 2002; Sharrock and Button 1997, 2007) as perspicuous sites exhibiting subfields of his corpus as categorized above.

<sup>3</sup> I have selected this extract carefully. Regular readers of Sharrock's work will recognize this quotation as an encapsulation of writings by Egon Bittner, Harold Garfinkel, John Lee, Edward Rose, Harvey Sacks—and Sharrock himself.

to the specificities of sociology as a distinctive pursuit. My intention here is to remind readers that Sharrock's writing horizons always moved beyond Ethno-methodology, and that he produced a valuable body of writing—glossed in this paper as a discipline-specific Learning and Teaching corpus—that has remained undeservedly ignored.

Despite the presence of the journal *Teaching Sociology*, discussions of teaching sociology *as sociology* are rare (Watson 1971). 'The literature' on teaching sociology is concerned with materials rather than practices (Maus 1962); fails to treat sociologically materials that are routinely used for teaching sociology (Carlin 2010); and is suffused with cognitive orientations, which are unfortunately preserved, reproduced and reinforced in a recent dispiriting, rather than inspirational, edited collection (Matthews, Edington and Channon 2018). A praxeological take on teaching (Roth, Lawless and Tobin 2000) turns out to be reliant on Bourdieu's notion of praxis, conflating a praxiological orientation in studies cited as support for their position with a theoretical orientation, which provides organizing devices for its own study.

In what follows, this paper looks at various Learning and Teaching moments as reflections on the teaching of sociology. An honest, rigorous, methodological analysis is an absolutely necessary feature of the discipline and as such is a requirement in the teaching as a precursor to teaching any so called 'findings'. The problem of sociology is that what it calls 'findings' are manufactured for the want of such a specific analysis in each and every study. What teachers of sociology should be doing is telling their students exactly that and not limiting their learning to a body of 'findings'—no matter how interesting these 'findings' may be. The issue here is not just what we teach; following the lead of Wes Sharrock, rigorous sociology teaching implicates being thoroughly self-critical not only in a 'reflective' sense but also providing the critical analytic platforms that undergird how studies come about as sociological studies in the first place.

Teacher training programmes include processes of reflection, as methodological instruments (Bolton 2010; Boud et al. 2005; Moon 2005; Schön 1983), yet it is argued that such a form of reflexivity, as a constituent of teacher training programmes, has become a moral requirement, beyond conceptual or methodological adequacy (Macbeth 2001).<sup>4</sup> What have been referred to as the 'canons of scientific objectivity' (Bittner 1973: 114) are exhibited through this Learning and Teaching version of reflexivity in which problems of reliability, selectivity, subjectivity, and validity characterize and are immanent to the writing up of incidents as critical reflections. The discernment and assembly of 'critical incidents' as incidents upon which plausible reflections can be made is driven through by reflexivity as methodological requirement and exogenous theoretical imposition:

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<sup>4</sup> See Kim and Silva (2016) for further references on teacher reflection and, importantly, what 'reflection' could look like within professional teacher training settings.

the pattern and the collection of instances are ‘worked up’ together, the theorist having to explicate the instance in order to show how it can be conceived as a case of the kind of thing the theory talks about, and, at the same time, the nature of the theory is clarified by showing how it re-describes ordinarily recognisable events and activities. Further, to achieve the definite identification of those ‘ordinarily recognisable events’ it will be necessary to appeal to the presupposed patterns of mundane social order which are not, themselves, explicitly included in the theorising. (Sharrock and Button 1991, p. 162)

An oddity about reflecting upon mundane occasions as ‘teaching episodes’ is that these remain bound by the natural language practices of witnessing and reporting. As such, any reflection on teaching episodes are members’ accounts; still, it must be a plausible account to readers whilst, at the same time, holding some novelty for them (Bittner 1973).<sup>5</sup> Characteristic is an appeal to authorization procedures, e.g. ‘I was there’, as found in the literature about local educational settings (Psathas 2008), and from which this paper is no exception.

## 2. WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS IN MANCHESTER

My registration at the University of Manchester spanned the late 1980s–early 1990s, as undergraduate then masters student, a time when the Department of Sociology was located in the condemned Coupland Street II Building. I remember the first time I joined the ‘Wednesday Reading Group’<sup>6</sup>—this was an entirely informal group discussing conceptual issues in sociology, led by Wes Sharrock and attended by John Lee, which was held not in the Department but in the University’s Senior Common Room (SCR). (I would learn over time that this was where the ‘real’ sociology went on.) No academic activities were scheduled for Wednesday afternoons so that students could participate in sports and other activities; hence, these Reading Group seminars were held in non-contact time, when students would be exempt from timetabled obligations. I was told that these seminars began, years before I reached Manchester, in order to help postgraduate students who did not have the opportunity to use ‘qualitative’ research methods in a Department that was at the time overwhelmingly hostile to non-quantitative forms of sociology. Over the years, these seminars also provided space for data-sessions, for Ethnomethodology students and visiting scholars. Forums such as the Mind

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<sup>5</sup> Egon Bittner’s ‘Objectivity and realism in sociology’ is a crucial source for ethnography and ethnomethodology, but is notoriously difficult. For explication, see Anderson and Sharrock (2013); Sharrock and Anderson (1991).

<sup>6</sup> The ‘Reading Group’ designation of the seminars was a temporal matter: John Lee (personal communication) explains that the Wednesday seminars ‘evolved’ into a reading group because one of the participants, Wil Coleman, ‘usually carried an armful of books’ when he arrived at the seminar, which Sharrock would ask him about each week.

and Society seminars and meetings of the Manchester Ethnography Group were opportunities to attend lectures and papers presented by international stars in Ethnomethodology, such as David Bogen, Jeff Coulter, Peter Eglin, and Mike Lynch. But while these gatherings were annual, Sharrock's seminar went ahead every Wednesday afternoon.

Although I arrived just on time at this 'first' meeting I attended, Sharrock was talking already, so I slid silently into one of the yellow-ish coloured seats in case I disturbed the meeting.<sup>7</sup> I looked around the faces of various Ph.D. students, all focused on Sharrock. Sharrock was discussing developments in Internet technology, and attempting to explain a rather strange concept (to his listeners), a network of computers, which he called a web. Sharrock was telling the assembled students that a bloke called Tim Berners-Lee had described this form of network as a 'World Wide Web'. Some of the students started to giggle, but Sharrock persisted: it would change the way we did 'things' (incredulous laughter); and it would change sociology's problems and the ways sociology tried to address its problems (gales of laughter).<sup>8</sup>

The above is a report as recollected and therefore constituted as 'a fat moment' (to borrow Garfinkel's phrase) in my intellectual development: I was unsure whether the meeting had actually begun. As a recent graduate, I should have discerned clues from the empirical studies of meetings, written by Manchester sociologists (Atkinson, Cuff and Lee 1978; Cuff and Sharrock 1985), that we'd been assigned in class; but, with this being the first time I'd been at a meeting of the Reading Group, and not looking at such ordinary occasions as a possible topic of inquiry, I wasn't looking out for a marker, an official start. As I recall this particular meeting, Sharrock said something like, 'Okay'. John Lee began speaking, accompanied by a flurry of frantic note-taking. I couldn't say precisely when it happened but the meeting, as a meeting of the Reading Group, had already started.

Naturally, this meeting is memorable for me in that it was the first meeting I attended. Otherwise, this recollection of my first encounter with the Wednesday Afternoon Seminar is a bland report of an ordinary series of activities; there is nothing particularly noteworthy about it. Except, of course, the proceedings were conducted in a language that all the participants understood—it was, through and through, a natural language activity. However, there are matters which, as I took on teaching roles in various institutions, would obtain significance for me, beyond this being a subjective, highly personal memory. For instance, I remember that first meeting in contrast with the second meeting I attended, which was held in the middle of the SCR rather than at the more comfortable seating area against the

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<sup>7</sup> While I go on to say that such memories are unreliable, I am quite definite that the seat coverings may have been described as yellow once upon a time, but when I was there 'yellow-ish' would be more accurate.

<sup>8</sup> I am always reminded of this incident, and how Sharrock would have had the 'last laugh', when reading particular sources (Anderson and Sharrock 2014; Harper, Randall and Sharrock 2014).

window. In that second meeting, after some preliminary remarks by Sharrock, it was straight into a reading. The first meeting was memorable because it was highly collaborative: not just Sharrock and Lee engaged in team teaching, but an interaction between Sharrock, Lee, and (most of) the assembled participants.

There were other features I was aware of, too. Sharrock's seminars tended to concentrate upon the relevance of ethnomethodology and Wittgensteinian philosophy for sociology. Although I don't remember what this meeting of the Reading Group considered that afternoon—it was over twenty five years ago, after all—I recognized the content as being pitched at a very high level. But as a recent graduate, still with an undergraduate student orientation, the very organization of the seminar troubled me. At the time I thought that the high level would be a defining difference between undergraduate and postgraduate study. But what puzzled me was the informality and the basis of attendance. Were students being credited with course attendance and, if not, why were they here? And why were Sharrock and Lee giving up their valuable time if they were not required to do so? It was some time later that I realized that every member's attendance and involvement was for their own enjoyment and because they too were using the dialogue to refine and elaborate their own thought on these matters. This is one of the most important lessons that I learned from them: that genuine education occurs in the course of just this form of Socratic dialogue, and that the learning is accomplished by all who participate accompanied by the pleasure that such a joint enterprise generates. This is a version of education at least as old as Plato but which tends to be smothered by the bureaucratic organization of contemporary educational institutions.

### 3. A LEICESTER LEGACY?

Sharrock had studied sociology at the University of Leicester, where—thanks to his own extraordinary abilities, and those of his outstanding teachers—his sociological training had been more than thorough. Students and colleagues note that Sharrock's sociological reach always extended far beyond ethnomethodology, philosophy of mind, social studies of science, or CSCW/HCI. His deep knowledge of sociology is so all-encompassing that he has no need to reposition lines of sociological argument using asymmetric, alternate analyses. In debate with what may be categorized as standard sociological arguments, Sharrock avoids using ethnomethodology to undermine other positions but explicates, by analysis, faulted reasoning in the very arguments being advanced. Sharrock is able to do this by understanding the traditionally based arguments with an analytic clarity unavailable to its proponents. Of course, such practices of argumentation relate to the observation mentioned above in regards to the requirements of teaching sociology, and of Sharrock's practice of teaching sociology as a critical enterprise—not being

limited to a patina of sociological ‘findings’ but broadening the Learning and Teaching experience through a penetrating exploration of foundational matters.

The Department of Sociology at Leicester was run by Ilya Neustadt. Neustadt’s department was a powerhouse of international sociologists, from a broad base of sociological orientations, as Neustadt recruited beyond the narrow perspectival confines of 1960s British sociology. Neustadt’s assembled faculty included such renowned sociologists as Richard Brown, Eric Dunning, Norbert Elias, Anthony Giddens, Terry Johnson, Howard Jones, Mary McIntosh, Nicos Mouzelis, Sami Zubaida; and, for Sharrock above all, Percy S. Cohen. This stellar line-up was complemented by visiting professorships, such as Ely Chinoy, Gerhard Grohs, Earl Hopper, Peter Rose, and many others.

The Learning and Teaching apparatus within the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester—particularly the breadth of coverage of sociology and the entailments of its internal positions—was so comprehensive that other institutions, and hence their students, suffered in comparison. Indeed, Sharrock would remark, in another context, that ‘extensive literatures’ were ‘characteristically superficial’ (Sharrock 2009a: 107). Many of the key books that Sharrock has written, sometimes as a co-author, can be read as an attempt to raise the level of sociological critique up to this particular standard.

Woodward and Jenkins’ (2018) questions about who are our readers, and who are we writing for, are perspicuous when asked of Sharrock’s work. There are research articles, which are discussed elsewhere in this special issue (Lynch 2019), that are addressed to specialist audiences. Comments, replies and research notes are addressed to readers of particular articles (e.g. Sharrock 2000, 2004; Sharrock and Coulter 1998, 2000). It is interesting to look at the levels at which Sharrock has pitched his work throughout his own corpus, where to borrow the notion of ‘recipient design’ (Sacks and Schegloff 1979), while some pieces are clearly written according to the requirements of a particular editorial brief (e.g. Sharrock and Anderson 1991; Sharrock and Button 1991), others are recipient designed according to the intended target readership of the collection (e.g. Sharrock and Anderson 1982, 1987), and others are evidently recipient designed for the benefit of disciplinary peers (e.g. Button and Sharrock 1993; Sharrock and Turner 1978).

Yet there is another, discrete corpus of other texts, designed exclusively for students.<sup>9</sup> Sharrock’s sociological background afforded him with an appreciation that sociology is a highly distinctive discipline. While formal sociology may share commonalities with other formal disciplines such as linguistics (Lee 1991; Sharrock and Anderson 1987), there is a critical, social organizational specificity to

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<sup>9</sup> The gloss I am providing here – a ‘Learning and Teaching corpus’ – is problematic at a number of levels. For instance, *The Ethnomethodologists* (Sharrock and Anderson 1986) can be read as a response to *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (Heritage 1984); i.e. not only as an ‘introduction’ but as a counterbalance to misleading chapters and noticeably absent issues. As such, any de facto or intended target audience of *The Ethnomethodologists* was not limited to students.

sociology that it does not share with other academic pursuits. Studies of language and language practices for instance, conducted under the auspices of critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, or cultural studies, surface the distinctiveness of sociology. Part of sociology's specificity is and always has been its object of study (Sharrock and Anderson 1987), while another part of this is located within the historicity of the discipline.<sup>10</sup> This other, Learning and Teaching corpus for students of sociology can be approached as Sharrock bringing Leicester to Manchester, i.e. offering a comprehensive training in the social organizational specificities of sociology to his own Department's students and, through the practice of publication, bringing Leicester to students of sociology throughout the UK.

This Learning and Teaching corpus is distinguished by the ongoing concern that students should be apprised of lines of sociological argument in a clear fashion—'as a necessary precursor to any form of critical analysis and to an analysis of the common sense reasoning that such arguments and theorizing entail'.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. A LEARNING AND TEACHING CORPUS

I first encountered Sharrock's work at school: my A Level Sociology teacher lent me an unusual book (Cuff and Payne 1979), but I was unable to purchase a copy for myself—only the second edition, co-authored with Sharrock, was available (Cuff et al. 1984). By my second year as an undergraduate student, I had become more aware of the extent of the international reputation of the Department of Sociology at Manchester, and the international reputation of some of the academics who were teaching there, than any university marketing literature could have claimed. Further, by that time I was aware that Sharrock, then the Department's Reader in Sociology, was *the* major intellectual figure in Sociology: not just in Ethnomethodology, but a scholar who knew the workings of formal-analytic sociology better than those who espoused it.

Students noticed certain tensions and ironies within the Department of Sociology at Manchester. The management of the Department did not want to have a reputation as a 'centre for Ethnomethodology' and, as a consequence, the presence of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis within it, and field-specific success, were testament to Wes Sharrock, John Lee, and Rod Watson—the longer serving ethnomethodologists that held posts there<sup>12</sup>—rather than the Department. Members of faculty were not shy to criticize ethnomethodology—out of earshot of the ethnomethodologists—as if students did not notice that they were demeaning themselves with these sotto voce playground insults; or make snide comments

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<sup>10</sup> This is not a justification for continuing to read Marx, Durkheim, and Weber (Mouzelis 1997; Parker 1997) but an acknowledgement of the internal debates in which sociology has been engaged, the products of which have provided it with particular, discipline-specific contours.

<sup>11</sup> John Lee, personal communication.

<sup>12</sup> Other teaching colleagues in the Department included Max Atkinson and Jeff Coulter.

about certain other members of faculty, such as alerting us to their absence. Yet the student body who moved around the Coupland Street Building were fully aware that if it hadn't been for people such as Sharrock, Watson, and Lee, and their regular research trips abroad, the international reputation that the Department claimed would have withered away.

An extensive part of this international reputation was the regularity of visits by distinguished practitioners of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, from all over the world. Sharrock and Lee were responsible for arranging many visits to the Department of Sociology at Manchester by numerous high-profile participants, including Egon Bittner, Harold Garfinkel, George Psathas, Harvey Sacks, Jim Schenkein, and Roy Turner.<sup>13</sup> Students could observe a disjuncture between the marginalization of ethnomethodology as a particular field within the Department, in contrast with the excitement and vibrancy that accompanied it, such as the Mind and Society Meetings, an annual spectacle that attracted world renowned scholars interested in ethnomethodology and philosophy to the Department (some to present papers themselves, or to witness current debates), and which helped secure the Department's international standing. These learning opportunities were hugely popular. It was often difficult to find a seat in these events—the rooms would be packed with attendees: students, scholars from the Greater Manchester area, and overseas visitors.

Although Sharrock was engaged in a lot of postgraduate teaching and supervision, he was committed to teaching both undergraduates and postgraduates. This commitment addresses Ken Bain's remarks (above) on highly effective teachers and is demonstrated by writing brilliant books that students (as well as his peers) could and would want to read, too. This may be part of what we can call a 'Leicester legacy', a determination that students had access to straightforward resources that provided essential details on the background to sociological argumentation, and the philosophy of sociology, that were not available to them through university lectures.

That is, while Sharrock is internationally renowned for the gold-standard calibre of his work, constantly raising the bar for Ethnomethodology, it should be noted also that he has been instrumental in producing high-quality readable works for undergraduates, e.g. *Applied Sociological Perspectives* (Anderson and Sharrock 1984) and *Classic Disputes in Sociology* (Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock 1987); his expert stewardship of perhaps the best undergraduate sociology text available, Cuff and Payne's *Perspectives in Sociology* (Cuff et al. 1984), and steering it through its various editions;<sup>14</sup> making advanced, sophisticated arguments

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<sup>13</sup> It was John Lee who, at the recommendation of Jim Schenkein, was responsible for the extended research appointment of Gail Jefferson on his SSRC funded project, *The Analysis of Conversations in which Troubles and Anxieties are Expressed* (1978-1981).

<sup>14</sup> Sharrock took charge of the later editions due to the retirements and ailing health of others. It was reformatted for the fourth edition, published by Routledge (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis 1998), as

accessible to sociology students (Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock 1986; Hughes and Sharrock 1997, 2007); and the unparalleled exegesis of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in *Understanding Classical Sociology* (Hughes, Martin and Sharrock 1995; later complemented by *Understanding Modern Sociology*<sup>15</sup>—Sharrock, Hughes and Martin 2003). He was also concerned to address presentations, in textbook and lecture format, that were so simplified and reductive that they had become inaccurate versions of what should have been core sociological knowledge for students (Sharrock and Read 2002). The clarity and perspicacity of his writing for undergraduates as well as his peers began, as far as I was concerned as a student, with his contributions (e.g. Sharrock 1977, 1987) to Peter Worsley's famous collection *Introducing Sociology* (Worsley 1970). The readability of these texts shows his sustained commitment to passing on issues in sociology that are missed by texts marketed towards undergraduates, 'advanced' undergraduates, and post-graduates.<sup>16</sup>

Sharrock managed to do in his *Introducing Sociology* chapters what no one else had done, then or since, which was to treat sociologically the organization of sociology as expressed through its developments in 'perspectivalism' (Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock 1985; Hughes and Sharrock 2007; Sharrock 1980). *Introducing Sociology* was a collection of articles, written by faculty within the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, describing the foundations and topical interests of the discipline. The Preface to the Second Edition (Worsley 1977, pp. 13-16) exhibits what Dorothy Smith (2008) called 'the 14<sup>th</sup> floor effect', according primacy to the sociologist's interpretation over and *at the expense of* members' interpretations, which is manifest also throughout the contributions of Sharrock's colleagues within the collection and the theoretical devices he seeks to dissolve in his own Learning and Teaching corpus.

All of the items in Sharrock's 'Learning and Teaching corpus' are produced with a scholarly principle of fairness—fairness and fidelity to sociological programs under discussion (Sharrock and Anderson 1985). Furthermore, all of these texts are resources not just for students but for lecturers and researchers, from the sociological equivalent of Occam's Razor (Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock 1985); the justly famous, standard 'introductory' text on ethnomethodology (Sharrock

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Sharrock and Francis revised the presentation from chapters on sociological perspectives to a chronological ordering of developments in sociology. Sharrock further expanded these in a subsequent edition (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis 2006).

<sup>15</sup> It is plausible, in my view, that much of the work of revising *Perspectives in Sociology* (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis 1998), combined with the writing of *Understanding Modern Sociology*, were drivers of the fifth edition of *Perspectives in Sociology* (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis 2006).

<sup>16</sup> It is significant to note that the revised edition of a criminology textbook (Hester and Eglin 2017) is aligned with the latest edition of *Perspectives in Sociology* (Cuff, Dennis, Francis and Sharrock 2016). This is more than a publishing house rationale but is for analytic purposes: Sharrock's was the only sociology textbook with which Eglin could align the grammatical perspective of *A Sociology of Crime*. See Sharrock (2009b).

and Anderson 1986); to the ‘introductory’ text for researchers engaged in the ‘studies of work program’ (Button and Sharrock 2009).<sup>17</sup> The studies of work program has afforded Sharrock with opportunities to move beyond sociology while maintaining a consistent sociological focus on the phenomenon of a particular activity (Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock 1989; Anderson and Sharrock 2018).

Manchester student cohorts were exposed to sophisticated comment on the nature of sociology and the claims that were made upon its behalf.<sup>18</sup> For instance, in a short book chapter—‘The possibility of social change’—looking at the achievements of sociology, as presented by sociologists themselves, Sharrock was able to examine the prospects and achievements of ‘applied’ sociology (Sharrock 1980); though, something that I didn’t appreciate at the time, Sharrock was careful not to exempt any form of sociology from his critique—which exemplified his fairness to sociological programs, but also foreshadowing and animadverting a ‘social problems’ orientation within conversation analysis. These were themes that he would return to later in different forms (Button and Sharrock 1995b; Sharrock and Coleman 1998).

Readers of *Ethnographic Studies* will be aware of the persistence of over-inflated claims made for sociology and its various subfields, including conversation analysis, in which commentators emphasize the real-world ‘impact’ of their concerns—for the purposes of securing research funding, perhaps—while advocating spurious, ideologically driven utilities for new analytic ‘takes’ and new applications of analyses to members’ problems. The *locus classicus* of this line of argument is Maria Wovk’s (2007) critique of agenda-setting claims that were uncomprehending of the analytic programmes of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis: the radicalness of Wovk’s paper is reaching new student audiences with its promotion in key sociological texts (Dennis, Philburn and Smith 2013; Eglin 2015). Yet, while Sharrock may have been exposed to such questioning of applied concerns during his time at Leicester, particularly through the teachings of Ilya Neustadt, it is possible to read ‘The possibility of social change’ not only as a praxeologically oriented precedent for questioning applied concerns, but also as a challenge to applied concerns in traditional sociological terms, for a student readership (Sharrock 1980).

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<sup>17</sup> Sharrock’s contributions to the studies of work program stand in contrast, and as a rebuke, to the analytic looseness of ‘applied’ sociology—see below.

<sup>18</sup> From my participation in events organized under the auspices of the British Sociological Association and the Economic and Social Research Council, and through discussions with other postgraduate students at these, I was keenly aware that such issues were not being introduced to students at other institutions. To clarify, *I am not claiming that sociology training at Manchester was better than at other institutions*; however, it was *different*, and these differences were not manifest in the coverage of substantive topics but in the background to how substantive topics came to be studied in particular ways, which came to be recognized *as sociology*. See Sormani (2016).

## 5. CONCLUSION

It was during my second year that John Lee introduced me to Wes Sharrock, on a Wednesday: I am certain of this because after Lee introduced us, the three of us walked through the Quadrangle to the restaurant building, and up the side stairs to the SCR. Sharrock walked over to a configuration of sofas at the side of the SCR, where he joined a group of postgraduate students, and Lee brought us cups of coffee from the kitchen hatch. Lee wanted to follow up with me on a seminar (from the course SY282—‘*Institutions and Social Processes*’) about an article by Dorothy Smith (1978), and was concerned that I left our meeting at the SCR with a clear understanding of what Smith had meant by ‘contrast structures’—now, I suppose, he was laying the groundwork for later discussions on ‘the documentary method of interpretation’ (Garfinkel 1967). Satisfied I had displayed a sufficient grasp of Smith’s arguments for an assessment essay, Lee joined Sharrock for the start of the Wednesday Afternoon Seminar.

It was only after graduating that I realized possible answers to the puzzle I encountered at the first meeting of the Wednesday Afternoon Reading Group that I actually attended, as recollected in Section 2 of this paper. I experienced for myself what students got out of Sharrock’s Learning and Teaching activities. With characteristic generosity, Sharrock welcomed me in to his lectures—I attended his iteration of the ‘Mind and Society’ lecture course, a unique, collaborative project between Sharrock and Lee, which focused on the relevance of philosophy (particularly Wittgensteinian philosophy) to sociology, that I had taken with John as an undergraduate while Sharrock was on sabbatical—and encouraged me to attend further meetings of the Wednesday Afternoon Reading Group, even though my formal registration at Manchester had ceased. With the benefit of hindsight, I recognize that the Wednesday meetings were not only a university-specific activity (Eglin 2009), but that these were peculiar to Manchester: it was the discipline-specificity of Sharrock’s disquisitions in these meetings that provides sense to addressing ‘Manchester Ethnomethodology’ in terms of Sormani’s (2016) questions about local organizational differences in disciplinary training. Students’ engagement with these meetings was informed by the quest, as set out by John Lee, Rod Watson, and Wes Sharrock, for us to be ‘trained up’ as Ilya Neustadt had insisted students be trained in sociology *as sociology* rather than as some species of administrative science. Awareness of the logical entailments of sociology *as sociology* is set out in a straightforward manner within what I have glossed as Sharrock’s ‘Learning and Teaching corpus’, particularly *Perspectives in Sociology, Philosophy and the Human Sciences, The Philosophy of Social Research, The Sociology Game, and Theory and Methods in Sociology*.

A large slice of Wes Sharrock’s activities, and his research output, has been geared towards Learning and Teaching of sociology as a specific discipline, for the benefit of other teachers but most especially for the benefit of students. The

purpose of this paper is not to provide notes toward a hagiography; nor to provide an ‘author bibliography’ (Harmon 1998; Krummel 1984), detailing Sharrock’s research output. Some of the references to Sharrock’s work that I include in this entry are pieces targeted towards undergraduates and postgraduates. These inclusions are concerned with the accessibility of discipline-specific concepts and are written for the Learning and Teaching of sociology.

However, in writing this contribution for this tribute issue of *Ethnographic Studies* I have glossed over what I consider to be a significant point: I was never formally registered as one of Sharrock’s students. His commitment to teaching, my recollection of his activities when I was a student at Manchester, and his impact on my own work belies the fact that I was never actually his student. While he was never one of my teachers, I learned a great deal from him; however, what he did teach me was taught from a distance, and certainly was not confined to Ethnomethodology. In addressing the reformulation of Ken Bain’s (2004) question noted in Section 1 above, Sharrock showed me that a truly great teacher does not confine teaching to the lecture theatre, or the classroom. It requires more than that: it involves having time for students, listening to them, taking their academic questions seriously and helping them to explore the logical entailments of their questions. Sharrock showed me other manifestations of being a truly great teacher. It may involve taking time to write for students in general—in Sharrock’s case, producing a discipline-specific Learning and Teaching corpus, so that students have access to a level of sociological argumentation that is not available through textbooks. It may also involve taking time for students for the sake of the discipline, without being limited to the cohort registered for that particular academic session, and without being limited to contact time—in Sharrock’s case, voluntarily giving up his own research time to coach postgraduate students in his Wednesday afternoon seminars—to discuss, in a serious, rigorous manner, aspects of the subject even when that teacher could be doing their own research, or writing for their peers, or seeking some vainglorious advancement within the race for publications.

John Lee (personal communication) insists that regarding Sharrock, there are other important aspects to his being a truly great teacher. One of these was that in providing ongoing, regular discursive space to explore connections between philosophy and sociology, Sharrock became attuned to the comprehensibility of these matters for students and academic sociologists alike. Sharrock was keen to learn from others, and how any difficulties people had with the material afforded him with opportunities to clarify and refine the discipline-specificity of sociological argument. But secondly, to reiterate a point made in Section 2, this is *serious fun*. Whether it is discussing Wittgenstein’s relevance for sociology with students, or exploring the implications of *Philosophical Investigations* for the ethnomethodological programme with Harold Garfinkel himself, Sharrock has always taken great pleasure in the activity of sociological debate.

I am honoured to write this paper in tribute to Wes Sharrock, and like many others in student cohorts over the years, I have been privileged to experience the sheer analytic force of his teaching, which stretches far beyond the confines of ethnomethodology, or sociology. In writing this piece I hope that readers are motivated to move beyond the recognized corpora of Sharrock's work in ordinary language philosophy, ethnomethodology, CSCW/HCI, and to discover his extraordinary discipline-specific Learning and Teaching corpus for themselves.

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