DESCRIBING NEWS:
TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with factual accounts as a form of knowledge which is mediated by organizations and institutions which inform and administer our society. This mediation is itself a practical activity of particular persons, in particular settings, in which the world of experience is transformed into the forms in which it can be known and managed. These practical activities constitute particular relations of knowing, which are taken for granted in factual accounts and thus are built into much of what we recognize as objective features of our society, e.g. crime, mental illness, ethnicity, news.

This work focusses on those organized practical activities as precisely the activities in which social phenomena are constituted and through which they are available to observation. This approach shares many aspects of the ethnomethodological concern with "Practical Reasoning in Organizational Settings" which Turner (1974) describes as the shift of attention toward "the doings" which constitute social order. (Turner 1974: 83)

Attention is focused on the production of two kinds of factual accounts: description and news. The primary focus is on description, and particularly on sociological description. The secondary focus is on news, and serves both to illustrate a method of working sociologically, and to begin the work of developing an account of news as a socially organized phenomenon.
The work begins by developing the basis for a critique of descriptive method, and the implications for sociology. The basis for the critique is found in the materialist method and Marx's view of social relations. From the work of Marx, Smith has derived a procedure for sociology, which she has called "substructing" which involves "returning to the actual social relations which generate those phenomena as they are named, the actual practices of real living individuals, which are the only basis for the existence of social phenomena." (Smith 1977b) This procedure provides an approach to sociological descriptions which focusses on description in a way that is similar to Wittgenstein's notion of a language-game, as a use of language which involves "a definite use of words, a definite way of meaning." (Smith 1977b)

The following aspects of descriptive method are examined:

a) How the descriptive method gives a determinate character to its subject;

b) How the descriptive method obscures the organized relations of knowing as part of the constitution of the phenomenon;

c) How the descriptive use of terms is dependent upon the original working setting, and how that dependence may be utilized to develop an alternative procedure for doing accounts.
Two accounts of "Sources of News" are presented. The first illustrates a conventional form of description; the second is an attempt to begin to develop an account which has the character of an explication, and which would provide an alternative to conventional description. Some observations are made about problems in learning to put together an account which avoids objectification by taking as its problematic what is already given in description: that the phenomenon is there to be described. An explicative account is described as one which must be entered from within the organization of social relations in which the phenomenon arises.

The discussion of "Sources of News" is considered as an indication of how it would be possible to work on larger aspects of news production, or on other forms of organization. The method is described as one which allows us to see how accounts are produced as part of a larger organization which gives determination to what emerges as the product.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the present work a concern with news and a concern with description are fundamentally interwoven. Both are understood as part of a specific interest in factual and documentary accounts as characteristic of how our society is known and administered. Both journalism and sociology provide occasions for the production of these accounts.

Our knowledge of the world is in various ways mediated by organizations which do the work of transforming the world of experience into factual or documentary forms in which it can be known and administered, e.g. news reports, medical records, police reports, insurance records, birth certificates, licenses, etc. Since much of our knowledge comes to us through such channels, the mediated character of our knowledge is fundamental to how we are related to the world in which we live.

A mediated knowledge is not only the mode of knowing for government, business, the professions, or social science. It is also the mode of knowing which is available to all persons as ordinary members of our society. We depend upon the production
of knowledge by others to inform us about what goes on beyond the limits of our daily experience. News is one of these forms of knowledge "by report". News is relied upon in many ways not only to inform us as private persons, but as part of the public dialogue which casts us in given ways as participants in the economic and political process. Similarly, sociological description is relied upon as a method of organizing the world so that we may know it from a position occupied by the intelligensia. It is the practices which constitute these various organized relations of knowing which are the central issue in this paper.

Factual accounts are produced in determinate organizational contexts which mediate between the world of experience, i.e. what people actually do, and the knowledge which is made available as a means to know the world. This mediation is itself a practical activity, in actual settings of work, such as governing, administrative, and educational organizations. In these settings, the work is done which transforms the world of experience into the forms in which it can be known and managed.

What is special to our kind of society is that much which we recognize as that which we know...is already worked up and produced in a process which mediates its relation to what men have actually done in the place where the process begins. That mediating process itself is a practical activity. It includes at least

1In her earlier work, Smith follows the general convention of using maculine pronouns to represent both sexes.
these: procedures for finding, selecting and ordering from, original events. The events have themselves a structure prior to and standing in an indeterminate relation to the structure of the account; the making of an account; and then the determinate sequential procedure by which that account is brought forward to the point at which it is read or heard or seen. (Smith, 1974a:54)

This paper is concerned with these practical activities. It examines the production of factual accounts as a practical activity of particular persons, in particular settings, and with particular purposes in mind. They are produced as part of a particular enterprise, and the methods that are used to do them in order to meet the requirements of the enterprise give determination to what emerges as the product.

A very general account of the process under examination might go like this: first there is something "out there" that actually happened. This out there-ness can be characterized as that which happens as embedded in the temporal flow of experience, action, becoming, which is the world as it is lived; then there is a work (which also, of course takes place in this same mode) which produces a written account of that which actually happened. In doing so it draws a boundary around it (in the original it may not have been bounded). It transforms it into an "it". It constitutes it as a distinct "what actually happened", as an event or state. This process of making an account in documentary form is socially organized. We can call it the social organization of the production of a factual account. (Smith, 1976b:1)

I would like to focus briefly on the term "social organization" as used by Smith above and throughout this paper. This term is often a source of confusion and misunderstanding of work of the
kind that is to be presented here, in that the term is being used in a way which departs in important, if not altogether obvious, ways from its conventional use in sociology and anthropology. The problem has to do with how the objects of study are constituted.

In the present work the term "social organization" or "socially organized" is used to identify a realm of organized practical activities in which social phenomena come into being with the appearance of objective features of the social world; it identifies an "ontological" status of social phenomena. That is, these terms identify a domain in which 'objects' come into existence by being assembled, organized as phenomena, socially. They 'exist' as social phenomena only in the activities of people in which these forms are produced as appearances. They are fundamentally a social construction, and have no other existence than in their ongoing, social accomplishment.

This way of working proceeds from the understanding that there are only people and peoples' activities, and whatever 'exists' comes into being and is maintained in and by those activities. This is a materialist position, but not, I would argue, a positivist one. Rather, work of this kind focusses on objects as essentially intersubjective - as arising and being constituted intersubjectively. This work presumes that such objects are available to observation only in so far as the organization of social acts which brings them into being as social objects is available to observation. This understanding
is the basis for an approach to most of what we recognize as 'objective' features of our society: order, status, ethnicity, deviance, news, culture, gifts, etc.

Take the example of a gift (cf. Smith 1976c). A gift is a phenomenon which is brought into being as a particular social organization. A gift does not exist as such other than as it arises in the relations between people which it mediates. That is, a box of candy is a box of candy, but it may be organized as a gift in a particular relation of exchange between people.

Similarly, an occasion such as a meeting only exists as a social organization. That is, a group of people sitting in a room do not constitute a meeting; they may be waiting for a movie to start, waiting to catch a train, etc. It is a particular relation among those people which brings the meeting-ness of an occasion into being, assembles or organizes the occasion as a meeting. The meeting-ness is socially organized, brought into being as a social organization. It is not that a meeting is produced by a given set of activities or relations, but that it is constituted precisely in those activities. Without those activities the 'meeting' has no existence whatsoever.

Thus the term social organization points to a domain in which the objects of study are constituted. It begins to identify an
epistemological realm within which this work is located. It is a realm which is established in the work of ethnomethodology. What ethnomethodology has begun to do is work back from the familiar forms in which the social process is ordinarily known and described, to an account of the "practical reasoning", including organized practical activities, in which these forms are constituted.

One key area into which work of this kind has taken ethnomethodologists is into organizational settings. Heap (1975) refers to work of this kind as "non-reified" accounts of organization (see Garfinkel, 1967; Cicourel, 1968; Zimmerman, 1970). For example, in Turner's collection of readings entitled Ethnomethodology, there is a section of eight articles which deal in various ways with "Practical Reasoning in Organizational Settings". The settings include the work of juvenile officers, a hospital ward, a welfare agency, a crisis center, and a halfway house for convicts. Turner directs us in these articles to "the shift of attention...towards investigating the production practices, the 'doings' which constitute social order, and away from the products (e.g. records) conceived of as independent of these practices". (Turner, 1974:83)

Zimmerman (1969) provides an excellent illustration of this kind of work in his article "Record Keeping and the Intake Process in a Public Welfare Agency", where he examines the taken for granted
use of documents in a welfare intake process.² He is concerned
to show how records achieve their status as official, authoritative
accounts in the setting of their production and use. He
demonstrates that the "factuality, objectivity, and impersonality
of the information contained in those records is an everyday,
practical concern, and an everyday, practical accomplishment."
(Zimmerman, 1969:321)

Turner summarizes this ethnomethodological focus on practical
reasoning and practical activities as that which "makes problematic
(which is to say, a topic for investigation and analysis) the
character of members' activities in producing the action scenes
and the talk embedded in and integral to those scenes..."
(Turner, 1974:10) He characterizes the work as that which takes
the social world to be "a constant doing and achieving", and
sees this "doing" as "topically available to the social
scientist". (Turner, 1974:10)

One point which needs to be made clear is the relation of
work of this kind to the "natural attitude" (Schutz). Ethno-
methodological work does not make the claim to produce a members'
point of view, though the work begins with the landmarks of
the members' experience: language, and social objects, e.g.
clients, cases, suicides, stories, phone tips, etc. The ethno-

²This article appears in abridged form in Turner (1974), under
the title, "Fact as Practical Accomplishment".
Zimmerman, for example, points out that for personnel in the welfare agency he studied, "...documents often had an obvious character. They were seen by personnel as obviously factual reports about a variety of circumstances relevant to the determination of eligibility..." (1969:354). Zimmerman's work was concerned with how this facticity was an accomplishment of the activities of the workers themselves. However this was never a problem from the worker's point of view. "When simply taken for granted, the features of these ordered domains are matters of mere recognition for which no accounts are called for or given. Indeed, such routine recognition, and the action and inference proceeding from it, is the mark of the competent worker". (Zimmerman, 1969:354)

Similarly, Garfinkel points out the discrepancy, between the work he and his colleagues were engaged in at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, and the perspective of the personnel they were studying.

...personnel at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center found it altogether incongruous to consider seriously that they be so engaged in the work of certifying mode of death [of] a person seeking to commit suicide, and they could concert their efforts to assure the unequivocal recognition of "what really happened". (Garfinkel 1967:7-8)
The interest in factual accounts in the present paper is similar to these ethnomethodological concerns. It focuses on selected aspects of organized practical activities both in the production of sociological descriptions and in the production of news accounts. The aim is to explore how the character of descriptive accounts and the character of news accounts arise as practical accomplishments in the organized practical activities of their production and use. In neither case, however, is the work an explication of a members' point of view. The work on descriptions will focus on aspects of descriptive method which are taken for granted in the work of the sociologist. The work on news production will focus on features of the work which are seen as having an unproblematic character by newspeople themselves.

The primary focus is on the sociological enterprise: on the production of descriptions in sociology, and on developing an adequate procedure for sociological enquiry. The secondary focus on the production of news then serves both to illustrate a method of working sociologically, and to begin the work of developing an account of the social organization of the production of news. Neither of these tasks can be completed in this paper, of course, but some aspects of each of them can be developed.
ON DESCRIPTION

Considerable attention will be given to establishing the basis for a critique of descriptive method which is at the centre of this work. The critique follows from some aspects of the work of Marx and Wittgenstein, largely as they are developed in the work of Smith. Chapter 2 will begin by examining this work.

The discussion will then turn to several aspects of the descriptive method which are brought to our attention by Smith's critique. The work of description will be discussed as a particular enterprise that is done in definite settings and has definite methods of getting it done, and which lends a determinate character to its subject.

The concern is to begin to make visible these aspects of descriptive work as part of what the sociologists makes use of at a level which she takes for granted in her work. Cicourel poses a problem of this kind in his work The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice (1968). He is concerned with the problem of tacit knowledge as a resource in the doing of description. He describes the problem of adequately "bottling" the phenomenon under study as a complicated one.

The complications arise because we must attend to the problem of how the observer...utilizes tacit knowledge (background information or what anyone "knows") in identifying and selecting materials...
and recommending interpretations (as straight descriptions or coded shorthand accounts) or "what happened". ...What sorts of agreements must both the researcher and reader achieve as conditions for deciding the various meanings being rendered? Assuming both the researcher and the reader are members of the same society, it might be easy to agree on the meaning of physical items like chairs and tables...but I am interested in how we assign unequivocal meaning to a juvenile's tone of voice when a police officer or a probation officer or judge labels such behaviour "in defiance of authority" or an indication of a "bad attitude". Other problems include agreement on the meaning of gestures, jokes, anxiety, and the like. The complications are enormous. (Cicourel, 1968:2-3)

The argument will be developed that description can be seen as a particular kind of language game (Wittgenstein) which builds into descriptive accounts a number of taken-for-granted aspects. This paper will examine how the descriptive method depends upon a knowledge of the socially organized practices in which phenomena arise, and which are taken for granted by representing the objects as existing independently of these practices. It will also examine how the method takes for granted the organized social relation in which a phenomenon is constituted as what it is for the observer, by eliminating the presence of a knower from the account of the object of knowledge. These aspects of the descriptive method will be discussed as part of what needs to be explicated in order to provide an adequate grounding of descriptive accounts.
There are two related questions which underlie the concern with descriptions which is expressed here. One of these is what kind of work it is expected that descriptions should do for us. It seems that conventionally description has been expected to provide an adequately objective "summary or expression" (Smith) of the object, the setting, the phenomenon that it claims to represent. The present work begins from the conviction that this is not enough; that it is necessary to do accounts of phenomena which display the objects of description in such a way that we know something about how they are constituted in practice as the result of the descriptions we have done of them. Accounts of this kind begin to do the work of explicating, rather than "summarizing", how the social world is put together.

If the task of description is to be this explicative work, then as Smith points out, sociology has not made much progress.

...the totality of the social process...awaits description, and awaits description in the first place, prior to the theoretical interests that we may have as sociologists. I think in the first place we don't really know how to describe it properly. And I think this is the social phenomenon; this is the subject matter of sociology...precisely this social process which brings into being a world in the context of social relations as actual practices... (Smith 1976c:10)

The other question, which is suggested by Smith above, has to do with how one understands the social world to exist. That is, if one assumes that features of the social world exist
objectively and are concretely available to observation and
description, then the kind of account which one would do is
one that represents the features of the social world in the
most 'objective' possible light. On the other hand, if one
begins from the understanding that the features of the social
world are fundamentally a social construction, then one would
want to do accounts which explicate how the features of the
social world are put together in this way. The present
work clearly subscribes to this latter version of social
reality and the explicative form of accounts which it
requires.

Thus the present paper is involved in recommending an
alternative to conventional description. We have called these
explications, or explicative accounts, to call attention to
their character as accounts which address the problem of how
it is that the phenomena are there to be described. That is
we are concerned with developing and recommending a form of
account which explicates the socially organized character of
phenomena.

ON NEWS

The interest in description which is expressed here has
arisen as a central concern out of ongoing research into the
social organization of the production of news. This research
is focussed on the practices which bring news into being as an
ordinary feature of the social world that can be bought and sold in a paper, and is understood to represent what happens in the world each day.

In the course of this research it has become increasingly clear that the methods and the problems of the production of news accounts are intimately connected to our own enterprise in the research, which is the production of sociological accounts. Both are occasions of the production of factual accounts. Both involve a set of determinate practices which mediate between what people actually do and the account of that activity which is produced.

The concern in the ongoing research on news has been to examine the organized practical activities of news production which mediate between what goes on in the world and that which we know of it as news, and to find the ways in which those mediating practices give determination to what emerges as the product.

In the present paper, some preliminary accounts of aspects of news production will be introduced which are intended to begin to explicate these organized practices. The discussion will focus on the activities which constitute ordinary features of the work of news production, such as sources of news and phone tips, and will indicate how more general aspects of news production which arise as a socially organized practice may also be explored. It will be suggested that the language of
journalists themselves may be used to organize an inquiry into these practices.

SOME BACKGROUND

The research on news has a rather long history. It began in 1973 with a graduate seminar on the sociology of knowledge. The focus of that seminar was on the social construction of documentary forms of knowledge. News was studied by the group as an example of a documentary form of knowledge which is produced as an ongoing, daily occurrence, and is particularly available to study. Students did field work on various aspects of news: television news, labour news reporting for a newspaper, city hall beat reporting for newspaper, alternative newspapers.

One outgrowth from that seminar was a summer project funded by the provincial Department of Labour under the Professions for Tomorrow program. The project was called the B. C. Community News Project. The summer's work focussed on the issues of ownership and control of newspapers in the lower mainland of B.C. This research called into question the widely accepted formulations of concentration of ownership as a source of bias in the news, such as the work of Porter (1965), Clement (1975), and the Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media (1970).
Following from the seminar and summer project, several of the students involved have done Masters theses on the topic of news, using in various ways the basic framework which was developed in the earlier activities. Marilee Paulson (1975) did work on labour news reporting in a major daily paper, focussing on the definition of labour news as it is constructed by the socially organized practices of newswork. Sylvia Webster (1977) studied reporting practices on the city hall beat of a daily paper, and focussed on the relation between reporting practices and ethnographic methods. Kevin Busswood 'forthcoming) has done work on the practical organization of the production of television news.

In addition to these papers which are in various ways related to one another in their approach to news, there is some literature in communication studies and sociology which we have found particularly interesting and helpful, even though for the most part it does not share precisely the perspective which we have been attempting to develop. For example, we were interested in the work of J. Tunstall, (1971); E.J. Epstein, (1973); Elliott, Halloran & Murdock, (1970); H. Molotch and M. Lester, (1973, 1974); R. Darnton, (1975); M. Fishman (1976) and in particular the recent work of G. Tuchman, (1976). While these works will be seen to differ quite widely among themselves, and while none represents exactly the approach that will be developed here, what they do share with one another and with the present work is a concern with the practical aspects of newswork
as significant in the determination of the character of news.

The work represented in the present paper began in the fall of 1975 under the sponsorship of a Canada Council Grant. The funds were granted to Dorothy Smith to study "The Social Organization of News". The stated aims of the research project were to "investigate the socially organized practices which transform an original actual event into the form of an item of news in a newspaper", and to develop "concepts and methods capable of analyzing and examining the relations between the social organization of the production of news and the news story as a representation of an actual event". (Canada Council Grant Proposal.) Both of these aims are represented in the work which is presented in this paper, although it is far from exhaustive of the work that has been done in either of these areas in the course of the research.

The field work for this project was done between January and July, 1976. Arrangements were made to have access to the newsroom of a major daily newspaper to do observations and interviews. During the months of January, February and March, I spent approximately a dozen periods of observation in the newsroom, a total of roughly 50 hours. In the months April to July a number of additional interviews were conducted jointly with Dorothy Smith, and much time was given to the serious methodological considerations which had been highlighted by the field experience.
The goal of our observational work was to produce what we called a "focussed ethnography", i.e. one aimed at a description of definite aspects of the organizational process. Our focus was restricted to the production of local news. We were interested in observing and describing the practical activities and working relations of general reporters and city editors and assistants at the city desk. We were not, therefore, concerned with news which is produced by wire services or on beats which operate primarily outside the newsroom. This focus resulted in attention to the assignment process, the work of the rewrite desk, sources of local news, and the developing of news stories by phone. The aims of our work also required that we give our attention to the ordering of the relation of ourselves as observers to the setting and to people in the newsroom as informants.

Our observations focussed on the practices of individuals as they were related to one another in the total organization of work by which news is socially produced. We did not look for the construction of news as a practical activity within an individual's practice, but rather as a process which is fundamentally social; as something which arises between people in the way that their activities depend upon one another and compliment one another in an organization of work. This organization became available to us by attending to the language which is integral to that work.
The Observational Setting

Observations were made in the newsroom during various periods of the day. The greatest portion were made during the evening shift, as it was found that at this time of day it was possible to learn a great deal about the organization of the newsroom without my presence there being greatly disruptive. The afternoons were visited after I had a preliminary understanding of the setting, and finally the morning shift was visited a few times only, as it was the busiest period of the day in the newsroom and the time when my presence there was least convenient.

The city desk, which supervises the writing of local news, sits in the center of the large, busy newsroom, adjacent to the cluster of reporters desks (about 20) and the rewrite desk. The activities which we observed were all within a few paces of one another, easily within view or speaking distance from one desk to any other. This grouping of desks forms a recognizable "node" or circulation area in a room which otherwise, at first glance, looks like a chaotic array of desks.

Because of the 24 hour nature of news work, these desks are occupied by different people at different hours of the day. The city desk is occupied during most of the day by the city editor and two assistants; during the evening there is a night city editor and usually one assistant. During days, the rewrite
desk is staffed by one man and usually four women; at night there is usually one man and one woman. During the mornings there are anywhere from 9 to 14 general reporters at their desks; the evenings are highly variable, ranging from 2 to 10. During the time that I was observing, I can recall 5 women on the general reporting staff of 27 and no women in positions at the city desk.

Organization of The Research

I would like to comment on the organization of working relations in the course of this research.

The foundation and sense of direction for the enterprise were provided by Dorothy Smith, in part by the work which is discussed earlier in this chapter. The observational work which is represented here was done by me. There were some joint interviews in the later months of field work.

During the period of field observation we met only twice to discuss the progress of the work. However, immediately upon ending the period of observation in the newsroom, we began to work regularly together. We began to have weekly, intensive working sessions to bring together the theoretical and methodological premises from which we began, the field work experience, and the questions that arose in the course of the work. We worked with the problems that arose both as they had
implications for our understanding of the processes of news production, and also increasingly as they contributed to our understanding of observation and description as methods of working in sociology. We gave a great deal of time to considerations of language and the problem of using talk as data.

It is these intensive working sessions which have to a great extent produced the thinking which is present in this paper. These sessions have been part of the development of some of the recent, unpublished work of Dorothy Smith which is referred to in this paper, part of my understanding of that work, and part of the development of my own thinking which is presented here. It has been in various ways a joint work, in as much as that is possible between teacher and student, and has progressed as a dialogue. It is in regard for this dialogue that I have found it necessary to refer in portions of this paper to "we" instead of "I".

It will be clear that in essential ways this work has only been possible by taking the work of Dorothy Smith as the place to begin my own work. I have as well made extensive use of the work of other scholars who provide the community of scholarship within which Smith's work belongs. However, the procedure for doing sociology which I have been interested in learning does depend upon Smith's rather innovative use of these other works. Thus Smith's work is the primary point of reference for my work.
The work of doing sociology and the work of discovering how to do it have been inseparable in this research enterprise. The present paper will demonstrate this; it is at the same time an effort to learn and participate in developing a procedure for doing sociology, and an effort to begin to use that method to understand the social world.

In what follows, Chapter 2 will discuss the procedure for enquiry which is used in this work and its origins, and will explore some aspects of descriptive method. Chapter 3 will introduce examples of the type of accounts which are recommended as an alternative to description.
I would like to introduce very briefly the way in which this work will proceed and then discuss the various works which establish the basis for this procedure.

The work is most strongly characterized by beginning with the forms in which the world ordinarily appears to us, in terms of which it is known by us, and which appear to exist as the forms by which the world is organized independently of our individual activities. It proceeds toward developing an account of those forms which shows, to the contrary, how they come about precisely in the practical activities of people. It is the work of returning the standard sociological categories - power, authority, communications, crime, mental illness, etc. - to the practical activities in which they are constituted; to make observable actual people doing the activities which bring into being what is named by these terms.

This way of working in sociology is developed in the work of Dorothy Smith. It is initially presented in a paper entitled, "The Ideological Practice of Sociology" (1974a) which is both
a critique of sociology and the beginnings of a different method of working. Smith begins to set out a procedure for doing sociology which will begin to make visible how it comes about that in our kind of society there is the appearance of "acts and events without doers,...facts and information without knowers". (Smith, 1974a:28) She defines the essential work of sociology as that of describing the social process in terms of the activities which bring it into being. She directs us to:

...the practical activities of actual living individuals as the social reality with which the social scientist is concerned... It is the practical activity of actual living individuals which both is and produces the phenomena with which the social scientist is concerned;...whatever becomes observable to the social scientist: under whatever form of thought has no existence other than as it is constituted by what men do. (Smith, 1974a:7)

Smith points out, however, that she is "not recommending a simple return to the experienced world via a return to observational procedures as a way of doing sociology". (Smith, 1974a:25) On the contrary, she begins with the understanding that much of what determines our everyday experience is not available to us within the bounds of ordinary experience. Rather, it is to be found in the processes of organization and administration which transform the experiences of individuals into forms in which they can be known and managed from within the bureaucratic mode of organization which is characteristic of our society, and in which the 'doers' and the 'knowers' disappear. These mediating processes are the focus of the kind of sociology Smith is
recommending. These processes of transforming are themselves a practical activity of real people in actual settings of work, though in the ordinary relation of observing the everyday world, they are rendered invisible as a condition to what we see.

Thus, what Smith is recommending, is that we insist on passing through the forms in which the world is ordinarily observable, to discover how that appearance is itself a product of peoples' activities.

This way of working arises primarily out of the use Smith has made of Marx. In the pages that follow we will examine briefly some of the aspects of Marx which she has drawn on, and begin to identify how Smith has used them to do sociology.

Smith's use of Marx is primarily focussed on method. She begins with what Marx and Engels call "the first premises of the materialist method":

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas...they are real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they already find existing, and those produced by their activity. (Marx and Engels, 1970:42)

In taking up the materialist method, Smith is focussing on an aspect of Marx which has been neglected among Marxists. It is the method which arose for Marx in the course of his work; it
first began to take shape in the *German Ideology*, and then became a fully developed method of working in *Capital*. Smith is careful to define the relation which is to be understood between her work and this method:

The method which we began to work with is a method which is derived from Marx's method...[It] can't be treated as an explication of Marx; it is derived from his work, and is derived from his work as a basis on which to proceed following a method which he innovated, but not necessarily simply replicating that method; that is, it is aimed to do the work of sociology, rather than political economy; it is aimed to do the work of sociology in this time and not in the 19th century; and therefore no effort has been made to be faithful to Marx in a pious or religious sense. (Smith, 1977b)

In the present paper, since our concern will be not primarily with Marx, but with Smith's use of Marx, I will rely heavily on Smith's work, and in particular her recent, unpublished work.

Smith begins with Marx's view of social relations. She points out that Marx's use of this term is not the same as the ordinary sociological use. That is, social relations to Marx are not contexts, not static configurations, not a background into which peoples activities are inserted. Rather Marx uses the term social relations to mean the actual practices which organize persons in relation to one another. They are the lived connections between persons that are constituted in practical
activities. Relations are practiced; their practice is an observable activity, a part of how things get done.

The way in which Marx proceeds with the understanding of social relations is really quite different. Social relations following Marx are the actual practical activities of individuals. That is, social relations are not apart from, not a means to understanding social action, not a context for social action, but are indeed the actual activities; the actual activities not understood as the activities of individuals but understood in terms of relations which they both organize and are organized by. (Smith, 1977b)

According to Smith, Marx sees that social phenomena such as labour, capital, wages, commodities, profit, etc., are social relations, though they do not appear as such. (Marx, n.d.) That is, they arise in the performance of a relation, a particular relation. The terms do not name a generalized feature of economic process; they are not forms of organization into which people are inserted; they are not objective features of the social world. The terms name social relations which are produced, exist only in the actual activities of real people. And indeed they only arise in those activities over time. There is a temporal process in which things become realized as what they are. Smith uses the examples from Marx of commodities:

In Marx's view, a commodity, ...as an actual particular event is not realized as such, is not yet completed as a commodity by virtue of being produced for a market, by virtue of being stored in a warehouse; it becomes a
commodity in the process of entering into market exchange, the exchange of monies for commodities. It is not realized...other than in this process which is described as social relations. This is how I have attempted to understand that term. (Smith, 1977a)

This view of social relations does a lot of work for Marx. It allows him to see that economic relations which appear as relations between things - money and commodities - are in fact relations between people. (Marx, n.d.) The terms - wages, labour, profit, capital, commodity - originate in the practice activities which are the performance of the relations named by these terms. In order for e.g. commodities to come into being, there have to be these practical activities. Commodities are constituted as features of the economic process precisely in and by the actual practices among people which are ordered in that way and named by that term. The appearance of economic relations as relations among things is itself produced by the organization of peoples' activities in production.

This understanding becomes the basis of Marx's critique of political economy. I will quote at length from Smith, who summarizes the critique:

The methodological critique which Marx makes of political economy...begins from terms that are taken as essential parts of the economic process, essential parts of the process which constitutes social relations. That is terms like wages, commodities, capital, profit, etc., etc. are terms which are used in the business of getting the
economy done. And they do not arise out the technical work of political economists. They are the terms that are part of the original social process. Hence their very existence as categories which are potentially part of a scientific discourse is an historical phenomenon. Political economy begins with these categories and concepts...but in losing sight of the actual social relations in which the phenomenon they name arises, political economists come to treat the particular local categories of capitalism as the forever features of economic relations. ...Thus they understand the economic process as arising from the way in which it is conceptualized rather than beginning to ground their categories and concepts in the actualities of social relations of which those categories are originally a part and which bring them into existence as phenomenon...used by the political economists in the development of that as a scientific discourse. (Smith, 1977a)

So we see that the political economists have proceeded as theorists in a manner that is fundamentally at odds with how Marx understands the phenomena to be put together. They use terms by lifting them out of the specific social relations on which they depend, and treating them as generalized categories that apply throughout history. (Marx, 1963) In this way, the categories of economic analysis come to obscure the actual practice of economic relations.

So it is to the terms themselves that Marx is directed as the place to begin in his own method of working. He proceeds by beginning from the terms which he finds in the discourse of political economists - wages, commodities, etc., - and working to rediscover the actual practices which they name. He takes
the terms and tracks back through them to the organized practical activity of getting things done in which the terms arose and in which their meaning resides. The practices, not the terms, then become the basis of his understanding of economic relations; "...real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live..." (Marx and Engels, 1970).

Smith has called this method of proceeding one of "substructing".

That is...you begin from the terms...the concepts of (e.g.) political economy, and then the social scientist proceeds by a work of returning to the actual social relations which generate those phenomena as they are named, the actual practices of real living individuals, which are the only basis for the existence of social phenomena. (Smith, 1977b)

Smith has made use of this whole critical procedure and method of work from Marx as the basis for her critique of sociology and recommendations for how to proceed differently with sociological enquiry. (See "Ideological Practice of Sociology" Smith, 1974a.) She argues that sociologists have proceeded by precisely the method which Marx identifies. They have taken terms which arise in the social process to name various aspects of experience, and lifted them out into a scientific discourse which is engaged in trying to represent the social world in conceptual form. In this use of terms they
become separated from their grounding in the practices of real people, and come to represent instead a conceptualization and generalization of those practices. Thus the individual subjects, the actors, disappear.

This is also the method that informs the present work on descriptions. The procedure provides the basis for a critique of sociological description, and the basis for an alternative method of doing accounts. The implications of this critique however, are not confined to the sociological enterprise. The critique applies equally to description as it is a feature of many aspects of academic, professional, and administrative work, as well as a feature of ordinary conversation. It is the descriptive method as a particular use of language which is common to all these, on which we shall focus.

One of the things that Marx's work does for us is to focus our attention on the use of language. His work clearly points out that terms can be seen to work quite differently in different settings of use. He locates for us two distinct settings: the original, working use of language and a secondary, derivative use of language to represent or conceptualize, such as in doing describing. Smith makes this observation about his work:

Marx's method can be seen in the first place as locating the terms in two modes: first, so that you can see terms such as wages, profit, commodities, etc., as part of the original working practices,
the working social relations in which the phenomenon has its existence and in which its naming is an actual part of that activity, a part of the work; and second, at the level where the ideologist or the social scientists works, where that language becomes incorporated into the practice of a discourse. (Smith, 1977b)

These realms of language usage are actually different as a practical matter: they are different enterprises, and they operate quite differently. In the first case, in the working setting, terms originally have meaning by naming the organized practices of which they are a part; their meaning is embedded in the action which they express. In the second case, the setting of social science terms are lifted out of that relation in which their meaning arises, and are used to reflect conceptually that organization of practices. In this usage, the term has meaning by representing activities, that is by standing in for them, replacing them.

This aspect of Marx's work points to an understanding of language which is not unlike the notion found in Wittgenstein (1953) of language games, that is, various forms of "language and the actions into which it is woven" (1953:5e) which have their own characteristic ways of proceeding.

Wittgenstein tells us that words do indeed work differently in different contexts and therefore "how" words mean is an essential part of "what" they mean. That is, the setting or
the occasion for the use of a word is part of what gives it meaning. He then uses this understanding as the basis for a method of discovering "the essence" of a word. He recommends for philosophers a method of work which is very similar to the critical procedure used by Marx with the terms of political economy. Wittgenstein calls it "bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use". In the Philosophical Investigation he writes:

> When philosophers use a word, 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name', and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? (Wittgenstein, 1953:48e)

Smith applies this approach to a critique of sociological description. What this does, again like the work of Marx, is to call attention to the manner in which words are used, as a topic in its own right which needs examining. Smith says:

> I want to take up Wittgenstein's recommendation for the sociologist...I want to look at descriptions as a language game...as things that go on in definite settings, that have definite kinds of methods of getting them done; that is, a definite use of words, a definite way of meaning....

> In descriptions, what we do is proceed in a way which creates the kinds of problems that sociologists experience in the use of categories and, in the use of concepts. What we need to do to remedy this is to begin to ask, how the word is actually used in the language game which is its original home, and how do we bring words back from their "metaphysical to their everyday use". (Smith, 1977b)
Thus the view that language has more than one kind of use and that the uses themselves are part of how words take their meaning, begins to provide the basis for a critique of description. By focussing on the characteristic features of the separate modes of language use, and exploring the relation between the two modes, we begin to have a basis for understanding how the descriptive method mediates the relation between the account and the actuality it claims to describe. In this paper we will explore:

I. How the descriptive method gives a determinate character to the actuality being described;

II. How the descriptive method obscures the organized relations of knowing as part of the constitution of the phenomenon;

III. How the descriptive use of terms is dependent upon the original working setting, and how that dependence may be utilized to develop an alternative procedure for doing accounts.
I. **How the descriptive method gives determinate character to its subject.**

A general understanding of the features of the descriptive method is part of what is beginning to emerge out of the ongoing research which is the source of this paper. While it is not yet possible to define systematically the properties of the descriptive method, some aspects of it are becoming visible.

Smith points out one feature of descriptive method which is characteristic of the method of treating factual descriptions in particular. That is, that we tend to use terms as though they reference the world; as though we could pass through the description to a real world which lies beyond. This first becomes visible as a method of reading.

One of the constraints of a descriptive reading, is that we take the description to be a description of something, that is that there is an actuality, and...the method of reading that we use is that we 'pass through' the description to an actuality on the other side. So that what we tend to do when reading a factual description at least, is to almost forget about the actual terminology, the kind of grammatical constructions and the relations that have been set up for us, to treat an actuality on the other side of it as if it were in some sense available to us by virtue of the description...This is a method of reading, a very definite practice of reading which we make use of in reading factual accounts. (Smith, 1977b)

This particular method, of passing through a description to an actuality on the other side, is not a universal feature of how we make meaning with words, but a definite practice of
meaning which is part of what constitutes some accounts as factual. Smith points out for example, that we do not use this procedure in reading fictions; we do not treat fictional accounts as referencing an actuality in the same way. A factual account, on the other hand, is dependent for its character on this supposition; that what is named in the description has a referent in actuality.

What happens in this process of reading through is that aspects of the method being used become transferred to the actuality as its features. It becomes impossible to distinguish features of the actuality from features of the method used to represent it. Smith has called this process one of transference.

We will focus on one outstanding characteristic that is transferred by the descriptive method, which is the sense that what lies beyond the description is a "thing". That is, the method tends to objectify - to make objects of - various features of the social process which are not originally objects at all, but rather have their existence only in the practical activities of individuals.

The foremost example of this objectification which we have been exploring is the notion of news itself. News is generally assumed to be some-thing which happens in the social world,
and is then reported in a newspaper. New-ness is assumed to be an inherent quality of certain events which can be found by those who know how to recognize it. News is thought to be available to observation; it can be found by looking for it. "Newsgathering" is a commonly used term which illustrates that this character of news is assumed; that news can be gathered like mushrooms.

It is interesting to observe that journalists and sociologists alike seem to find it extraordinarily difficult to explain exactly what this something called news actually is, except that they know it when they find it. Even how they find it seems to be difficult to explain. When reporters talk or write about their work, they use phrases like "nose for news" or "news sense" or "the juices start flowing" to identify the method which they use. Finding news is said to be an ability that evades description; it can't be communicated or taught. Some people are said to be more gifted with it than others. One reporter stated it simply: "I'm not sure what news is; I'm quite serious about this. I think I can recognize it."

(Fieldnotes, n.d.)

What is important to notice is that newsmen don't have trouble with what news is in the working context. They routinely find it and report it. The newspaper as a business enterprise depends upon reporters producing a consistent supply of news
stories, at dependable times each day. As a working practice, news is clearly not evasive.

The difficulty in defining what news is arises in the use of "news" as a term in a descriptive context, where it is treated as if it were possible to pass through it to an object in the world which conforms to that description. The problem is that the referencing procedure doesn't work; you can't find news in the world as an object which conforms to the descriptions that journalists and sociologists make of it. The reason that you can't find it is because the way in which news is described is fundamentally at odds with how the actuality is put together. This is clear if we look back to the working practices of the newsroom to understand the term as it arises there.

That news in a working context can be defined only as an actual ongoing relation between the work of the reporter and the editor, and etc. It is a term that is part of the work, that does the work, that is used in talking about the work; and in those contexts...it is not used at all as it is used to describe, when you are doing the work of description.

Immediately in the descriptive context, quite different things are done with that term. It is treated as if it names something that we can find very much as we might walk through the fields looking for a particular species of butterfly.

We take the character of the descriptive work and we supply that to the original we constitute the original; in the shape given it by the method of description... Though you can find the term, you can't find the phenomenon that corresponds to it. (Smith, 1977b)
Here is a very common and visible example of the descriptive method at work. What happens is that the term "news" is lifted out of the organized practical activities of the production of news stories and is treated as if it named an object which was a feature of the social world. The organized practical activities of news production are taken for granted, and what is substituted in their place is the product of those activities, "news", giving it the appearance that it is not socially produced but is rather an object which resides in the social world. Thus what the descriptive method does is to objectify a term which is not originally an object at all, but a working term in the practice of social relation. This is what Marx originally showed us.

Our experience in the newsroom provided us with a number of examples of this descriptive mechanism at work. It was a significant problem for us specifically because the method which organized our relation to the setting as observers whose intent was to describe, and our relation to informants who told us about their work was, in fact, the descriptive method. It was exactly this method which created the problems we experienced, over and over, of being unable to find the phenomena which we knew by their description. And it was because the way we were functioning was essentially at odds with how the objects of our enquiry were constituted.
Here is an excerpt from my working notes:

There is this moment when what we are looking at, or looking for, seems totally evasive or invisible. After a few days at the city desk, I sat down and wrote a note to myself that I had looked all over for assignments and couldn't find them anywhere! Similarly, Dorothy did it; speaking of a story she was trying to find the origins of, she said, "It's really incredible; I ask myself what happened, and nothing happened, really. It's just this pulling together..." These are the moments of seeing that terms like "story" or "assignment" which claim to describe something more or less tangible, are rather the descriptions of something like a social form...a social relation, or organization of practices which gives form to something....

We want to connect up those practices like an orchestration; seeing the orchestration is seeing those terms getting done. It is just a matter of being able to show how that works.

We began to work on the relation between our sense that we couldn't find things, like news or assignments or stories, and the notion that the descriptive use of language makes an object of the organization of practices in which words arise. What we found was that the understanding of how description works did begin to account for our sense that we couldn't find things. In the case of assignments or stories, if we took the terms to represent an objective phenomenon, as would be conventional, then we were sent off on a search: where do assignments come from; what is a story, etc. We did start with those questions. Only we noticed that there was this kind of gap, this moment in which we saw that "nothing happened, really," or that "they are nowhere to be found". From this we began to see that these so-called objects were rather organized relations.
What also began to be clear for us is how it is possible to use words which have this "mushy" base, which do not represent an objective phenomenon, but rather a social one (e.g. commodity, news). It is possible to use them because they are provided for by an organization of practices; you depend upon that organization in using the term. (See Section III below.)

So we began to see that we had to look differently for the aspects of news production which were represented by the terms we had learned to use. We began to see that the terms represented socially organized phenomenon, not objective features of the social world. So it was to the socially organized practices in which they were constituted that we needed to turn, and that among those socially organized practices was the work of description which produced the appearance of objects. So that we had to locate two aspects:

a) the organized relation of knowing in which objects were constituted as external to the practices by which they were made known, e.g. the descriptive method. This is the problem discussed in Section II below.

b) the organized practices of news production which constitute e.g. stories, assignments or sources of news as something which could be said or named in that way. This problem will be addressed in Chapter Three.
II. How the descriptive method obscures the organized relation of knowing as part of how the object is constituted.

What Smith shows us is that conventional description works ideologically; that is, it represents the phenomenon in a way that excludes the practices on which it depends, including the practices of description which are part of how the phenomenon is constituted. Conventional description sets up an organization in which the object of description appears as wholly external to the work of making it known. The observer is excluded from its constitution; the relation of knowing is ruptured. In this way description is an interpretive practice imposed on the object itself as its features. It constitutes in description an object which is given the appearance of existing in the natural world.

The representation of the object of our descriptive work as out there and independent of our relation is a product of the work of description itself.... In sociological description, you are enjoined to write a description which attributes to that occasion or that sequence of events the status of 'what actually happened' as quite outside the learning of the sense that was made. The active part you played in constituting those events as what they were disappears...To grasp what actually happened in order to describe, you must participate in accomplishing what actually happened, and at the same time you must aim at a description which suspends your presence and the accomplishment which has been essential to the existence for you of what is to be described. (Smith, 1976b:5-6,8)

We see then, a problem which is not that description is done poorly or that it is biased, distorted, interested, or etc. We see that there is a problem with descriptive conventions which are normally practiced in sociology and elsewhere that factual
accounts are produced. The methods that are used are themselves the source of some of the problems we experience.

What we need, according to Smith, is a method of proceeding in description which identifies the work and setting of description as part of the method.

...A way of proceeding which incorporates the position of the observer into the work of observation in a systematic way, not as a particular subjectivity, but in terms of seeing the method of description as creating a definite kind of relationship between the sociologist and the setting she is observing, such that a particular kind of language game becomes involved which is then treated as a feature of what is observed... (Smith, 1977:in conversation)

What such a procedure would do is begin to reestablish description as an organized social relation. It would insert the doing of the description back into the account itself as the practice of that relation.

There is an experience in my field work which was very useful in beginning to see that relation in practice. Actually it was only a puzzling experience to me in the field; it was not until I examined my field notes that I was able to make sense of it. It has to do with doing of description by informants.

When I began to work with the data from my field notes, I immediately saw that a lot of it consisted of other people's talk,
in one form or another: What people had said to me in the newsroom, in interviews, overheard talk, etc... My first concern was how to treat that talk as data about the setting. When I focused carefully on the talk, I began to see that there was more than one kind of talk; that people's talk was not always put together in the same way. I began to refer to the different modes as different "orders of talk". Two in particular became my focus.

The first order or mode of talk is the manner in which people in the newsroom talk to each other in the course of their work. This is talk that was only available to me by overhearing and recording it, usually along with a few visual observations to provide a setting for the talk. For example:

The city editor looks up from a copy of an early edition which he is reading and says to an assistant "I don't see a follow in this speech; it's too vague. What do you think? I guess we might call the old peoples' association and see what they think." (Fieldnotes of 17 March, pg. 5)

A reporter comes to the city desk asking if the editor has noticed the "threatened demonstration" coming up in Chilliwack tomorrow. He says, "Do you think we could have a photographer out there and get anything back in time to print?" The editor considers, say yes, and makes a phone call to line up a photographer. (Fieldnotes of 7 March, pg. 6)

The second mode of talk is the one that is used by people in the newsroom to tell an observer, such as myself, about the work that they are doing. It is the kind of talk that happens in response to questions, in an interview situation, or might
be volunteered as explanation of some aspect of the work. It
is talk that is specifically designed to make sense of the
work for others. For example, the following statements were
made to me:

I think what 'spot news' is, is human interest -
and that is a very tattered old phrase, but - a
good sort of human interest story, or a people
story, that other people like to read about and
can relate with. (Fieldnotes of 12 July, pg. 9)

News is all things to all people. What interests
you doesn't necessarily interest someone else.
Quite apart from the specialties in the paper...
there are people who like the Sports pages, and
people who like the Finance pages and like the
family pages, but its hard to zero in on the news-
paper and tell you what's news. It's hard for me
to answer that...I think that in a nutshell, what
we are talking about when we talk about "what's
news" [is] 'what's news' to the greatest number of
people...You see, we're in the field of trying to
serve two hundred and fifty thousand subscribers...
(Fieldnotes of 12 July, pg. 10-11)

...a really good well-trained reporter, one who is
keeping his eyes and ears open is the one that picks
out the best story. (Fieldnotes 12 July, pg. 9)

What is interesting about these two kinds of talk is that
comparing them suggests that how the talk was put together was
in part determined by the occasion of that talk, the kind of
work it was meant to do in various situations. One might say,
how the talk was put together was determined by the relation
the talk was performing. That is, in the working relation
between people in the newsroom, talk was organized to exchange
meaning between people whose terms of reference were the same;
their talk depended for its sense on the working relations of which they were a part. In their relation to me as informants, however, people in the newsroom organized talk to perform a descriptive relation; to tell me about their work. This kind of talk tried to "make sense" of the working relations for someone like myself who didn't already know their sense. It was immediately clear to me when I examined these kinds of talk on paper that they were quite different methods of making meaning with words.

It was also clear after some reflection that the second kind of talk, the descriptive talk was the kind that we as sociologists were accustomed to working with, and was the kind that we ordinarily produced. What then became problematic for me was how to account for this striking difference between the kind of talk that took place the work setting we observed, and the kind of talk that we knew how to use to represent that setting. How did we get from one to the other?

When we consider this problem in the light of Smith's work, we see an illustration of what Wittgenstein was talking about. We see that we are observing two distinct language games. The use of language in different settings and for different purposes accounts for the differences in talk that I experienced in the newsroom. The experience begins to illustrate how the
occasion of the account and the parties to that occasion become incorporated into a descriptive account in a systematic way through the use of language. Thus we began to recover one aspect of the social relations which are concealed in the description.

What we also see is that it is fundamental to the possibility of a descriptive account that it arises in a social relation. That is, knowing is necessarily a relation between the knower and the object of knowledge. Yet we depend upon and our conventions require a form of accounting which denies this essentially social basis of knowing. We depend upon a method which represents objects as existing independently of the practices which bring them into being for us.

It is the problem of the anomaly between how it is that you must go about doing the work of observation in order to prepare an objective sociological or anthropological account and how it is that you can in fact know what is going on; for to know what is going on sociologically is also to have become a participant in making its sense. For you must already be part of it in some sense to know what it is and what is happening. You must see it from the inside. You must have an insider's understanding and an insider's understanding divorces us forever, from the form of knowledge which represents its object as existing independently of the knower. (Smith, 1976:5)

We find ourselves faced with the problem that descriptive accounts are by their very nature inadequate because they conceal precisely what needs to be made explicit. That is, they gloss over rather than making visible the "practical activity of actual
living individuals which both is and produces the phenomenon with which the social scientist is concerned. (Smith, 1974a:7)

Thus conventional descriptions cannot perform for us the sociological work which we require. We need an alternative method of accounting which explicates rather than glosses the practices in which phenomena are constituted. We need a method of explication.

What would an explicative account look like? Clearly it would not look like conventional description. This is because the assumption that the object of description arises and is known in a social relation, of which the work of observation and description are a part, necessarily precludes the conventional approach to description in which the object of description is objectified and externalized.

The method of explication on the other hand, begins with the assumption that the object arises and is known in a social relation to which the observer is a party. It sets out to recover that structure, to find the phenomenon as it arises in the practice of those relations. And its goal is to produce an account of the object which is organized by that structure. Thus the method is one which incorporates systematically the position of the observer in the account of the phenomenon.
Therefore the work should be quite different from conventional description. Objects in this kind of account should reflect their socially accomplished character, and the reader should be located in relation to the phenomenon in such a way that the method of assembling the phenomenon as what it is, is present to her in the reading of the account.

Thus an explicative account is one which replicates the original phenomenon. It is an account which works in the same way as the phenomenon in the original setting in which it arises. This does not mean an account which merely makes the argument that a given phenomenon arises as a social relation, but an account which also actually shows how that is done as a practice.
III. How the descriptive use of terms is dependent upon the original working setting, and how that dependence may be utilized to develop an alternative procedure for doing accounts.

The possibility of an explicative account is derived from the relation which Marx showed us between terms and the working practices in which they arise. That is, that they are fundamentally historical. Terms do not take their meaning from the discourse in which they are used; they take their meaning from the social process which they name and perform. There is a social organization on which words depend.

Smith puts it this way:

"...we take for granted that the phenomenon does not arise independently of the words that are part of its performance, but that its naming is integral to the social relations it constructs, the social practices, ordinary routines. It is not that there is a term which names a phenomenon independently of it, ...but that the terms, the words used, are essentially performative; that is, they are essentially part of the activity which is the social relations, they are part of that organization and not separate from it. (Smith, 1977b)"

So we begin with the understanding that there is a social organization which can be explicated, and that it is this organized practical activity which is the social process with which the sociologist is concerned. It is an account which explicates these organized practical activities that Smith recommends as an alternative to conventional description.
The explicative method, then, begins with the notion that there exists an intimate link between a description and the social organization of the setting it describes. Though the description may not display that social organization, it does indeed depend upon it. It is a knowledge of this organization which makes possible the work of describing. It is this relationship which can be used to track back through descriptive accounts to the social organization on which they depend. This process of tracking back becomes the investigative procedure.

Smith says:

How the describer...does her work is controlled by her knowledge of the socially organized processes which the terms...serve to describe. This knowledge enters into the ordering of the description, the way the description is done; it is essential to the sense that is made by the description. There is no way in which you can write a description of a particular setting without that being in crucial ways determined by the social organization of that setting, even though it may not adequately describe it. There is a determination of the description and the social organization of the setting which is an essential relation. It is that kind of relation that we are hopeful of exploiting; that there is that actual relationship that exists. (Smith, 1977b)

I can illustrate this essential relation from my experience in the newsroom. One of the aspects of news production that we were most interested in learning about was the assignment process. In an attempt to focus on the practices which constitute assignments, I began to collect in my fieldnotes various uses of the word "assign" in different contexts: an assignment, to be
assigned, getting an assignment, to be on assignment, doing assignments, typing up assignments, looking over assignments, etc. I found myself looking for a way to express what these various activities had in common that resulted in them all being named with the same word. Much to my surprise, I found that assignments were not the same "thing" on all occasions. So I tried to figure out what they "were".

I found in my notes that what tied all the various uses of the word "assign" together was some relation to the city desk. I found observations in my notes like "The only way in which they were changed to become assignments was that they passed over the city desk again...."; "The stuff just seemed to pass quietly over the desk and the meaning was understood as to what was to be done with it..."; or "Reporters run their information across the city desk for permission to spend shift time working on it. The desk is a clearing house....". Out of these observations, I arrived at the conclusion that assignments could best be understood as "authorizations".

What Smith points out about this "conclusion" is that it creates an ideological description, by eliminating precisely the actual social relations that need to be described. However, the process itself of arriving at "authorizations" as a descriptive device is very illuminating, since it was only possible by virtue
of my knowledge of the actual work practices in the newsroom. Thus it demonstrates how it is that a description depends for its sense on the social organization of the setting it describes. It is the essential relation to which Smith referred.

Smith says of that process:

What we had done was to go from this collection of various uses that we could find in actual working contexts, to set up a descriptive procedure which would allow us to talk as sociologists about assignments as an organizational feature...which would have allowed us to describe how assignments were done, what assignments were, etc. using that kind of method...But you see that in that process there is already exhibited a very important way in which we depended on the original in being able to do that...If you go back through that process, what you find is that link is really there. Though the social organization is not described by the description [eg. assignments are authorizations], nevertheless, the description depends necessarily on it. (Smith, 1977b)

Smith sees that this essential link between a description and the social organization of the setting it describes is a general feature of how accounts are generated. It is the same method which the member or the observer uses to constitute what is happening that she also uses in making the account; both are constrained by her knowledge of the same socially organized practices.

"Essentially to state it very simply, the notion is that in order to be able to use categories in what is
recognized as an intelligible fashion in any given working context, you must already understand the social processes which produce those relationships as ordinary practices. The ways in which people talk, and the kinds of terms they use, and the ways in which they talk about things make sense only in relationship to socially organized practices which produce the phenomena which can be named and are completed in that way. Therefore implicit in your developing knowledge of how to talk properly about things is a social organization which is not explicated by the terms you use." (Smith, 1976a:1)

What Smith is hopeful of doing is developing in sociology a substructuring procedure much like the one used by Marx. It would allow us to track back through the descriptive terms and accounts which are ordinarily available to us as a means to know our world, to the socially organized practices on which that language depends.

How we begin this kind of work is by taking the language seriously. We take what is ordinarily available in the talk as the place to begin. We then go in search of how it is that things are constructed so that they can be spoken of in that way. That is, we look for the socially organized practices within which that language is intelligible. What we are looking for is not to be found in the talk itself, but is presupposed by the talk. The talk locates for us the socially organized practices which need to be explicated.

What you do is treat his way of talking about it as one that is assuming all these kinds of practical things, so that what you do is not treat what he says as information, but as data. So that you say then in
so far as his talk is boggling, there are things about how it's put together that make sense of the description that he's making, and I don't know what they are. (Smith, 1976a:5)

So we see that this approach prescribes the method of data collection one would use in the field. That is, it becomes necessary to take pains to record exactly what people say, and to treat it as what needs to be provided for by actual practical activities. I found that in my field work I did not catch on very early. I had a notion that I wanted to know more than the superficial explanations, so I did this unfortunate thing of suspending all explanations given me, suspending them that is at one level, always looking for more information to verify it or at least understand how it was true. One of the results of this suspension is that I did not take pains to record exactly what people told me, or how they told me. I did not attend to the language itself specifically enough, although I was attending to what people said as one of the ways I would find out what I wanted to know. Eventually I began to see that I should do exactly the opposite, to record every exact word that people used and how and when they used it. I finally began to understand how to use what they said as data, rather than as explanation or information; not to treat what they said as telling me what I wanted to know, but to use what they told me to find out what I wanted to know.
When I started to attend to language in the field in this way, I found that it actually transformed the setting for me. I learned to hear in peoples' talk the organization that they were 'performing' by the terms they used, how they were assembling the phenomenon as it was for them, in the way they talked about it. I had a very clear sense that it was the "right" method of proceeding, since I was suddenly able to move from situation to situation in the newsroom, encountering all the uses of the term "assign", and others that had been troublesome to me, and the various uses of terms were no longer a problem. I was able to hear in what people said the organization which they depended upon for the sense of what they were saying. This ability to understand happened for me very quickly once I began to think about things properly, because I had already been around the newsroom for some weeks doing field work and was already partly familiar with many aspects of the organization of things to which people were referring. But I had not been able to make sense of things people told me or to find the aspects of the organization as I understood them to be. Once I learned to listen, it was clear to me that the reason I couldn't make sense of the setting before was because the way I was thinking about it was out of step with how it actually worked for those who did it.

Orienting to peoples' talk in a new way resolved this problem for me and completely reorganized my method of work.
I began to see how to focus on the organization of activities which provided for the talk I heard in the newsroom and the kinds of ordinary statements that were made about the work of producing news. For example: "The city desk regulates which local events reporters will cover"; or "Much of the copy doesn't require any work"; or "Assignments are generated out of the booking file"; or "She handles assignments that go out to reporters stationed outside the newsroom"; etc. My task became the writing of accounts which would show how those statements represented organized practical activities of people in the newsroom. The following chapter begins to demonstrate this kind of work.
CHAPTER THREE
TOWARD EXPLICATIVE ACCOUNTS

In this chapter I would like to illustrate some aspects of working in the way that is prescribed by the foregoing discussion. I will introduce some examples of accounts which begin to have the character of an explication of socially organized practices, and I will make some observations from my experience of trying to learn to write in this way.

When I began to try to write accounts of various aspects of news production, I found that I was in a great deal of difficulty. I found it very tricky to put on paper the organization that I was learning to 'perform' in the newsroom. When I tried to write, I found myself treating my own knowledge of how to perform the setting as a resource for my account rather than as the method of assembling the account. And so I found that things came out in the same objectified mode that I recognized as characteristic of conventional description. My sentences seemed in spite of my best efforts, to give to the subject matter the character of having an existence independent of my knowledge of it, and independent of anything that was done to bring it into being. So I ended up with accounts of assignments for example, which still represented them as objects, even though I knew that that is not how assignments 'were' in the newsroom.
This experience demonstrated for me how thoroughly entrenched we are in an objectified mode of knowing the world. In order to do an account which does not have this character of an objectively accomplished world, we need a way of putting words together which restores to social phenomena their sense as a practical accomplishment of real people.

I began to see that it is necessary to organize an account which actually blocks us from entering into that familiar, objectified relation to the subject of the account. We need to use language in a way that only makes sense when we enter it from within the organization of social relations in which the phenomenon does arise for us.

We have called such an account an explication, to distinguish it from conventional description. Such an account must at each step address the problem of how it is that social phenomena are there to be observed. That is, it must take as its problematic, what is already given in description, that the phenomenon is there to be described. The account must make visible, and require the reader to participate in, the work of assembling the phenomenon, putting it together as what it is, rather than presenting an object which is already assembled somehow prior to the account.

I think it will be useful to look at examples of the two different kinds of accounts. The two examples which follow are
both on the topic of sources of news. The first account is a relatively conventional type of description, which as the flat character of a world which is objectively there. The second account is an attempt to learn to do it the other way; to construct an account which explicates the organization of social relations in which the phenomena arise for us.

This discussion of sources of news is only a sample of the kind of work that needs to be done. It is very detailed, and in some ways, technical. Following this technical example, I will go on to discuss how it is part of an enquiry on a larger scale into the social construction of news.

The first example below is very brief, and so is the discussion which follows it. It is intended only to illustrate a descriptive style of work, and to provide the point of departure for the account which follows it.

DEscribing SOURCES OF NEWS: AN ILLUSTRATION

There are a number of routine sources of local news for the newspaper. Probably the most abundant source is the newspaper itself. That is, news stories from previous papers provide a constant source of information about newsworthy developments. Another is radio news; in Vancouver, all CKNW news broadcasts are monitored by the newspaper to catch the latest developments and any items the newspaper might have missed. Another source is police radio which is listened to in the newsroom to give the paper early access to newsworthy occurrences. Press releases are another source of information from a wide variety of businesses, community organizations, and levels of government. Then there are a great number of phone calls which are referred to as phone tips.
A phone tip is a call which gives the newspaper some piece of information that may be used in the making of a news story. The information must be of public concern. For example, a call from an alderman about a public meeting being announced would be a tip. So would a businessman calling to say that the bank next door to his shop was being robbed. However, a call from a pensioner saying that his check was two days late would not be considered a suitable matter, or someone calling to say that her neighbour was beating his wife.

The most interesting feature of this type of account, is that it is basically correct. What it does give by way of information about sources of news is accurate. Because it is informational, and because it does tell us what we expect to hear, it feels quite acceptable as an account of sources of news. The problem lies in what it doesn't tell us and never will. It is put together in a way that excludes consideration of how things arise, how they get done, how they work, how they are known; and it does not even direct us to the questions. It tells us about sources of news in a way that adds little to our understanding of them.

For example, how do previous papers come to have some effect on future news stories? How is that done as a practical matter? What does it mean to monitor a radio broadcast? How does radio news have items that the newspaper doesn't known about? How does the newspaper use police radio? Does a reporter write news reports from what she hears on the radio? Are press releases used as news stories? Do reporters write stories from phone tips? etc.
The problem with the account of sources is not that it is lacking in these details. Rather it identifies sources of news in a way which disregards the problem of how they are brought about in practice. A phone tip, for example, is described as a call that has certain features. Its character as a "tip" is attributed to the call itself, rather than to the relation between the caller and newspaper in which its character as a tip is constituted. The second account of sources of news which follows is lengthier and more detailed, but that is not my concern. I am concerned with the procedure that it uses to make something known. It is an attempt to produce an explication rather than a description. It will be clear that it is a piece of work in progress; it includes remarks on the procedure itself and observations on details of data that need to be added to the account. I feel that it is not a bad thing for accounts to have this character of being under construction given that the doing of the account needs to be made visible as part of the social construction of the object.

SOURCES OF NEWS: DOING AN EXPLICATIVE ACCOUNT

The notion of "sources of news" is commonly used in talk about the production of news to describe the means by which news events become known to the newspaper. Accepted in a common sense manner, the term carries a connotation of news springing up from the social world like water from a well, at the door of the newspaper office.
Used in this common sense way, "source" is part of a way of talking about news which glosses over the phenomena it is used to describe. It obscures, rather than making visible, those processes by which the newspaper acquires information. That is, it obscures how the notion of "source" is a description of part of the process of news production.

When we investigate the processes which "source" is used to describe, we find a number of observable activities which are the active work of constituting certain persons and places in the social world as resources for material used in the production of news. A source of news is found to emerge as the product of a bureaucratic style of work which organizes those locations as routine providers of the material which is utilized in the production of news. Thus a source is not something which volunteers from the social world, but is produced in the work of news production.

So that we arrive at an understanding that a "news source" is not any kind of natural object that can be found by looking for something that conforms to that description. It arises only as a product of the organized social practices by which the newspaper acquires what is treated as information for the purposes of making news. A source has no other existence than in the organized social practices which bring it into being. It is what would be called a socially organized phenomenon.
So we need a method of describing "news sources" which retains the character of the phenomena themselves. We need to be able to do an account of sources which represents them not as objectified, natural phenomena, but as social objects which arise out of the work practices they describe. In other words, we need to describe what a source is in terms of the work practices by which information is gathered for the purposes of producing news.

When we investigate these work practices, we find a number of routine procedures which scan, listen for, attend to, recover, in various ways, features of the social world which are treatable by those methods which produce news stories. These work practices organize a relation between the newspaper and the community which is sometimes described as "monitoring", or a kind of active listening. These monitoring practices are part of the method by which the corporation organizes its enterprise. The material which is produced in this way is a dependable feature of the news production process. In this sense the monitoring practices can be treated much like the well which dependably provides water. The monitoring practices provide a dependable source of news material.

There are quite a number of practices that need to be investigated in detail in order to describe the various "sources" in terms of the work out of which they arise. For example, one
would have to investigate the activities of clipping previous papers to display how it is that the newspaper itself becomes a source of subsequent news stories. One would have to carefully detail the work of monitoring radio news in order to show how the radio becomes a source of news for the newspaper, and similarly the work of monitoring police radio to show how that is utilized. One would have to look at the activity surrounding press releases to show how they are a dependable source of news. One would need to look at the writing of memos as the procedure by which the knowledge that reporters acquire becomes a source of news material. This list is certainly not exhaustive.

Here I will discuss in detail only one of these practices, the source of news which is known as phone tips. This discussion will serve primarily to demonstrate what an investigation and account of the kind we are recommending would look like. It will be clear from the discussion of phone tips that this work requires a highly detailed level of data. It is a level of data that is demanding to record in the field, and is not often collected for ethnographies.¹

**Phone Tips**

One important aspect of the monitoring procedure which accomplishes what is called "sources of news" is the telephone. The newspaper makes itself available day and night to receive telephone calls which may serve the purpose of providing what

¹See Errington (1973) for an illustration of the kind of data that is required.
can be treated as information to be used in the production of news. We can look in some detail at how this is done.

The location in the newspaper organization where people are prepared to receive such calls is the rewrite desk in the newsroom. However, not all calls that come into this desk will be considered "phone tips". It is in the procedures used to handle individual calls that they become differentiated and constituted as various different kinds of calls. It is the procedure which constitutes certain of those calls as "phone tips" that we shall examine in detail.

Constituting a phone tip is a procedure which treats some calls as providing information which can be utilized in the production of news stories; treating a phone call as a source of information for the purposes of making news. This is done by handling the call with a preliminary procedure which serves to integrate it into the stream of the news-making process. This preliminary processing is actually available to observation in the work routines of the persons who receive calls. The procedure goes something like this:

The phone rings. A person at the rewrite desk answers it. She recognizes, by a process involving the identity and intention of the caller and the subject matter of the call that the call appears to her have the character of "being" a phone tip. At first we called this a process of typification (Schutz). Later
we began to see that the work of recognizing a call as "being" a phone tip could be fully explored as a practical activity by use of data on precisely what the rewrite person says, asks, writes down, attends to in the course of the phone call. Roughly this is the work which determines whether the caller seems to have some information which she wants others to know; whether that information is of public interest, whether the caller can be considered authoritative, or perhaps "just a crank"; whether there is further information available, etc. The details of this determination, as a procedure which can be learned, need to be filled out. My data on this procedure is at the moment incomplete.

Having used a procedure which gives determination to the call as a phone tip, the rewrite person then follows a set of procedures that constitutes the call as a tip. She picks up a booklet consisting of four pieces of rough paper with carbon from the desk beside the phone, puts it into the typewriter, and types as she listens, asks questions, etc. She records in this manner the names, dates, places, times, etc. known as the "details" until she has what is known as "all the information". The work of identifying "details" and "all the information" also has the appearance of a process of typification, in as much as the rewrite person experiences various aspects of the call as having that character. But this work also can be examined as a set of practices which can be found in what the rewrite
person attends to in the course of the conversation, exactly what she typically writes down, etc.

Since this work of constituting a tip is organized by its intended use in enabling a reporter to do investigative work at a later time, doing "details" and "information" are procedures such as getting the correct nature of the information which the caller has to offer, getting the correct date and time that things are happening, getting correct names and phone numbers of persons who can be contacted regarding the information, getting the correct name of the caller and time of the call, etc. Doing "details" and "information" are also procedures for organizing features of information in a way that makes it recognizable and usable in the context of news. Again, the details of these practices need to be made known.

The document that emerges in quadruplicate from this process is referred to in the newsroom as a phone tip. The rewrite person puts one copy of it on the spindle on her desk and three copies into the receiving basket on the city desk.

In order to call attention to procedures used in the newsroom which are an essential part of how a phone tip arises, I want to refer to two common occasions on which a caller has information to offer but which are not treated with the procedure which constitutes those calls as phone tips.
One is when a call is treated as a "gripe". That is, often a person will call with information on an annoying situation, a grievance which he wants to have aired. On some of these occasions the rewrite person gives the caller the phone number of the appropriate agency and person who should be contacted for relief of the problem. This is said to be a satisfactory response to many calls. They are calls which start out with roughly the same characteristics as those which become phone tips, but within the practices of answering phones at the rewrite desk they are given determination as "gripes". The call will be referred to in the newsroom as "being" a gripe.

The other occasion I want to refer to is when a reporter "phones in a story". That is, when a reporter calls to dictate over the phone a finished news story. This example is helpful because it shows by contrast that the work of doing a phone tip is structured by the fact that information on that occasion has not already been organized into the form in which it can be used as news.

Phoning in a story is a common procedure for a reporter who is outside the newsroom when deadline time comes around. In this situation, she calls into the newsroom and dictates the news story to someone at the rewrite desk. The way in which this is done is for a rewrite person to set at the typewriter with the
phone over one shoulder and type the story verbatim as the reporter dictates it. On these occasions the responsibility of the rewrite person in completing the work of phoning in a story is extremely restricted. Roughly, her responsibility is limited to matters of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc. What gets recorded in terms of content is wholly the responsibility of the reporter. The rewrite person takes no responsibility for the appropriateness, accuracy, completeness, etc., of the information she is recording. These are the responsibility of the reporter who composed the story, and whose name goes on the bottom of the document which is typed in this way. The rewrite person is responsible for using the proper paper, the proper number of copies, for putting the proper number of copies in the right places, and for identifying himself or herself as the person who took the dictation.

On the occasion of a phone tip, on the other hand, the caller is not a reporter, and the information has not already been worked up in any way to make it warrantable for use in the news making process. Then the work of the rewrite person is organized by a completely different relationship to the caller and the information which the caller can provide. A different set of procedures entirely is required to give to the call the organization which identifies it as a phone tip.

What is visible in these accounts is that the character of a phone call as a "tip", a "gripe" or a "story" does not merely spring up from the nature of the calls themselves. The activities
of the occasions are part of the procedure for bringing the calls into being as what they are. For example, in the case of a phone tip, it becomes clear that a phone tip does not merely spring up as a source of news from some disposition in the social world to provide the newspaper with news. Its character is clearly an accomplishment of a number of organized practices which bring a phone call into that relation to the work of producing news.

A phone tip acquires the appearance of an objective event, then, in the talk which describes these organized practices. In describing the call itself as a phone tip, we are using the referential method to which Smith has called our attention. We represent a phone tip as existing on the other side of its name like an object, rather than as a social practice. In doing so we attribute a feature of the method of describing the activities, to the call itself as its character.

In the accounts of their work that people in the newsroom did as our informants, and in the accounts of news work that have been written by journalists and sociologists, the organized practical aspects of the work have become objectified. We have come to understand aspects of the organization of the work of news production as features of the social world. Thus what is or is not a phone tip is treated as a matter of the features of the call itself. A call from an alderman to announce a
public meeting comes to be seen itself as "a tip". What this does is render invisible all the "actual activities of real people" in which that character arises.

TOWARD OTHER EXPLICATIVE ACCOUNTS

This discussion of phone tips should be treated as an indication of how it is possible to work. It is an attempt to develop a way of organizing an account which explicates the socially organized character of phenomena. Similar work can be done with other aspects of the production of news.

When we look at the various terms which are a part of news work -- news, assignments, stories, events, developments, local -- we find that the terms arise in the work of producing news and name aspects of the practical organization of that work. They name organized relations between people, and they have no other existence than in the practice of those relations. Though we come to see them as discrete events, as objects or occasions which can be found like mushrooms, we discover upon closer examination that they cannot be found like mushrooms, but rather like phone tips. That is, they can be found only by learning the procedures for constituting them; only by learning to assemble them as what they are in the socially organized practice in which they arise.

This method of work can be used to explicate not only technical work routines, but also more general features of news which originate as a socially organized practice.
For example, consider the problem of understanding what news itself is. A lot of interest in news has been organized around the problem of trying to define it. What is or is not news is commonly treated as determined by features of the happening. "News is the unexpected"; or "News is all things to all people, human interest"; lists of criteria are lengthy. These and other common statements depend upon the assumption that news has some kind of objective character; that news has an independent existence as a phenomenon or as an observable quality of certain phenomena. We think of news as something that is found by looking for it: journalists "gather" it, "cover" it, "catch" it and "recognize" it.

That news exists for us as an ordinary part of the world we inhabit is indisputable; we can go out and buy a paper which will tell us the news. There is a problem, however, in thinking about news in this objectified way, as if it "happened without an author". (Smith, 1974a:28) What is left out of this understanding is, again, the "actual activities of real people" which bring to a happening its character as an item of news.

The character of events as news is determined in a process which is fundamentally social. Its news-ness is carved out of the ongoing social process by the routine activities of reporters in the course of doing their work. The determination of happenings as news is to be found in this work, not in the features of the happening itself. The phenomenon which we know
as "news" is thus a social construction. How that construction is done as a practical activity becomes the topic of the kind of enquiry which is suggested here. It is not my intention to try to develop an explicative account of news in this paper. That is rather the task of many papers, and the goal of our ongoing interest in news. Here I will do no more than begin to indicate how such an enquiry would proceed.

The place to begin the exploration of how news comes into being, following the procedure outlined in this paper, is with the talk of news people themselves. Journalists often use the phrase "news sense", or others like it, to identify how they find news and recognize it. Focussing on this illusive "sense" is very worthwhile. It is not useful because it tells us how news is produced; quite the contrary. As an explanation of how journalists work, the concept of news sense wholly obscures the work it purports to explain. It renders what reporters actually do, completely inaccessible. Rather, the notion of news sense becomes useful only when we take it as a problematic, as a topic for investigation. We need to ask how this "sense" operates as a practice.

The task is to explicate some of the ways that what is called "news sense" is actually organized into the work of news production through practices that are available to observation and description. That is, to bring them out of peoples' heads and into the work setting where the successful practice of this so-called "sense" is a dependable feature of the corporate
enterprise. The newspaper as a business enterprise survives because this successful practice is organized into the work of news production. The corporation does not rely on all elusive talent of a gifted few; it relies on a bureaucratic organization of work which dependably produces the commodity "news" in dependable quantities, at dependable times.

Working in this way it would become possible to see how the character of events as news arises in the actual work practices of the people who do the work of producing it. News can be found as the product of locatable, observable, describable practices. It is not an elusive phenomenon which arises independently; it is not a continual discovery of a gift of the senses. News is rather a product of the organized practices which bring it into being.

In this way it would be possible to show the organized practices of news production which give determination to news. We can take what Smith has said about descriptions and apply it directly to news as a very appropriate example of what she is talking about:

The description must be seen as a special kind of enterprise which is part of a larger organization. ...We make them for practical purposes and use methods which provide for how they meet the requirements of those purposes...Thus we can look at the ways in which the character of a factual account is shaped by the enterprise of which it is a part. (Smith, 1976b:2)
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Two accounts of "Sources of News" were presented in the previous chapter. The first illustrates a conventional form of description; the second is an attempt to begin to develop an account which has the character of an explication and provides an alternative to conventional description. Here we will review the methods by which the two accounts proceed, and consider the implications of the explicative method.

It would be helpful to begin by reviewing briefly the features of the descriptive method that have been discussed in this paper. They are: 1) that the descriptive method references the world, that is it presumes that there is an actuality on the other side of the account; 2) that in referencing the world there is what has been called a process of transference, in which an objective character is attached to the phenomenon as its own character, and which obscures the practices which bring the phenomenon into being; and 3) that the phenomenon is represented as existing externally to the social relation in which it is constituted as known.
Both accounts, I would suggest, proceed by referencing the world. They both presume that there is an actuality beyond the account: woman, phone, typewriter, etc. This is part of what constitutes them as factual accounts, as was discussed. However, I would argue that while the first account does exhibit the remaining two characteristics of the conventional descriptive method, the second account does not.

The first account of sources of news represents a phone tip as something which comes into the newsroom over the telephone. In doing so, it transforms what was originally a set of work routines into an accomplished fact; it makes use of a knowledge of practical routines as a basis on which to summarize, or extrapolate to the product of those routines. Thus "...a phone tip is a call which gives the newspaper...", and "There are a number of routine sources of local news...." In this way the first account also excludes the reader from the work of constituting a phone tip as the object of her knowledge. It "makes sense" of the setting for the reader in a way that excludes her from it.

In the second account, on the other hand, the character of a phone tip as a work process is preserved in the account. The account does not transfer an objective character to a phone tip. It is a set of activities: pick up the phone, listen, talk, type, etc. It retains its character as a social accomplishment. Thus
the second account gives the reader the knowledge of practical activities on which the first account depends; that is, how it comes about that there "are" sources of that there "is" a tip. It shows how these come about as the product of the activity of individuals.

The second account also does not constitute what goes on in the newsroom as external to the relation of knowing. That is, the reader must do the work of learning to perform the organization which makes a phone tip visible in order to constitute for herself that phenomenon as what it is. The second account only becomes an account of phone tips by virtue of the reader (or observer) learning that these activities are the doing of phone tips. She must learn to constitute this phenomenon as what it is in her method of reading the account, or in her method of observing the phenomenon. This locates the reader in the social relation that is being organized by the account. When she fails to locate herself as part of it, the account disintegrates.

A very useful illustration of this point occurred in a colloquium at which I presented this account of phone tips as a source of news. The account drew criticism because it appeared to leave out, or refuse to acknowledge, features of 'phone tips'

1Colloquium on Description, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia, May 1977.
and 'news' which seemed obvious to those present on this occasion. For instance, the account denied that 'tips' and 'non-tips' distinguished themselves by the nature of the subject matter, or that some topics were inherently 'newsworthy' while others were not. Those who objected to these aspects of the account did not see 'tip-ness' or 'news-ness' as something that needed to be, or could be, assembled as a practical matter.

This experience demonstrated for me a crucial aspect of the account. It is an account which identifies a series of activities in their organizational settings. In order to understand that as an account of phone tips, the reader (or listener, or observer) is required to participate in the work of assembling these activities as the doing of phone tips. The problem in the colloquium was that people did not bring that method to the account. They brought to the account the method which applies to conventional description, i.e. entering the account objectively, (which is, not to enter it at all). They treated it as an account which would perform for them the work of assembling a phone tip and then hand it to them. My account did not do that. At this point, the disorganization which resulted from the method which they were using to understand the account was then attributed to the account as its disorganization, or its inadequacy in representing phone tips. This experience demonstrated that the account does differ in fundamental ways from a conventional description.
It is hoped that what has been learned in this paper may be used as a basis from which to continue the work of developing a method of accounting which explicates, rather than glosses, the character of the social process. The method which is proposed here is a beginning. It promises to produce an account of the object of study which is organized by and makes visible the socially organized practices in which the phenomenon comes into being. It locates the observer and the reader in such a way that the method of assembling the phenomenon as what it is for them is present in the account as its method.

Such an account is truly explicative; that is, the account makes visible the organization on which it depends. It replicates that organization, so that the phenomenon is constituted in the account in the same manner that it is constituted in the original setting in which it arises. This suggests the possibility of sociological accounts that are grounded in the actuality they describe in a way that is quite different from conventional descriptions. (See Smith 1976b)

This proposal for an explicative method gives a clear indication of research procedures for this kind of work. It prescribes a method of observation which singles out language as the place to begin ones enquiry. It provides instructions on how to work with the data provided in language, using a
"substructing" procedure which returns terms to the working practice in which they arise. It identifies an extremely detailed level of data which is required and begins to define the type of written accounts that must be produced in order to adequately display the phenomenon.

Experience working in this way suggests that the explicative procedure is one that can be used at any level of organization of phenomena. For example, the same procedure which allows us to consider how phone tips come into being also provides the method of understanding how e.g. news itself, or the newspaper as a corporate enterprise, is constituted. The features of these phenomena may not be the same, but the method of explicating the social organization on which these terms depend is very similar in each case. Thus it is not necessary to use a different procedure to isolate the particular object of study from its organizational context than the method used to examine the 'object' itself. It is possible to begin with any feature of the organization and find the ways in which it is constituted in relation to the rest of the enterprise in the practical activities that are the performance of that organization.

For instance, another important aspect of news work which can be addressed by working in this way is the problem of bias and distortion in the news. The approach works quite differently
from conventional concerns with "objectivity". It permits us to see how the conscientious practice of the ordinary, routine procedures of news work legislates a particular view of the world rather than an impartial, "objective" view. A particular view is introduced through precisely the practices of constituting routine features of the organization of news work, such as 'phone tips', 'stories', 'events', 'developments', etc., and through the practices which constitute such routine categories as 'labour news' or 'women's pages'. All these are made visible as practical matters which mediate between what happens in the world and what we read in the newspaper. They are the practical determinants of the view of the world we know as 'the news'.

Paulson (1975) has done an interesting treatment of labour news from this perspective. Her work demonstrates how 'labour news' takes on the character of 'management news' through the routine procedures which are used to produce it.

Both in its presentation and the way it is defined, labour is treated as it becomes significant to those groups managing and administering it in this context, i.e. business owners and management groups, the courts, government agencies, officials, etc...This structuring of the news results in the exclusion of certain categories of events and coverage of a large segment of the work force not included in the definition of labour as unionized labour, i.e. non-union native and immigrant workers, penitentiary workers, etc. (Paulson, 1975:26-7)

Paulson's work provides an indication of the kind of problem that it becomes possible to explore with the approach which is
proposed in this paper.

Thus the explicative method allows us to return to the problem with which we began. It makes possible an examination of the practices by which our knowledge of the world is organized. It allows us to examine the production of factual knowledge as a practical activity of real individuals, and to examine the methods which are used that give determination to what emerges as the product. It is not a problem only in sociology, or in the production of news. It is a problem which stands in between us and all the forms of factual and documentary knowledge on which we depend to inform us and manage our lives. All of these forms of knowledge come about through particular practices which organize the world so that it can be known in a particular way. Thus they build in, or institutionalize, as Smith says,

methods of examining, inquiring into, understanding, and - in short - knowing the world which cannot do other than the work for which they were designed- namely to put it together as an object to be known from [particular] positions.... (Smith, forthcoming:3)

In this paper we have begun to see how this is the case in the work of sociology, and how this process can be examined in the production of news.
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