CHAPTER 7

FROM THE INTERACTION ORDER TO SHARED MEANINGS

One lesson of structurationalism is that social order does not exist in an abstract space above and beyond the actual sites of social relations, but rather must be constantly remade and maintained in lived spaces of interaction. Accordingly, any larger patterns of social order and organization that may exist must be constituted and built on patterns and relations played out at the concrete level of individuals in individual events. This recognition extends beyond simply seeing evidence of social orders in concrete data, as the consequences or ramifications of more abstract orders. Rather structuration directs us to look at the interactions as themselves the site at which order is constituted.

The grounding of society in concrete interaction suggests that social order can be effectively studied in concrete individual interactions. The advent of recording technologies has facilitated researchers in capturing interactional data, examine them, slow them down, and analyze their social realities in great detail. Conversational analysts study social orders through microanalysis of synchronous talk interaction, either face to face or telephonically (Lerner, 1993; Schegloff, 1987). Yet writing facilitates and connects people, events, and interactions across time and space, creating objects for co-orientation, co-relation, and action that do not rely on co-presence. Further, the typifications, patterns, and social organization of communication that facilitate communication at a distance foster and structure larger social and organizational aggregates. The textual, symbolic, and concrete objects that are multiplied and travel across time and space, furthermore, provide a concrete means of understanding how social order at a distance is possible; further, the study of how people produce, engage with and use these objects can open up some of the fundamental mechanisms of larger social orders. Nonetheless, the project of grounding social realities in the concrete interaction is a powerful one that provides us guidance in pursuing larger "at a distance" orders in concrete ways. Therefore, before we consider how interactional order is enacted in the literate world, we should first consider how people studying face-to-face interaction have pursued the project of understanding the interactional order.

THE INTERACTION ORDER

There is no more powerful and fundamental investigator of the interactional order than Erving Goffman. Fortuitously for our purposes, he has also considered communication in somewhat less personal circumstances, such as in lectures, over radio, and even in print, providing bridges to the literate interactions that are the focus of this volume. So it is with a discussion of Erving Goffman that we begin this chapter, and particularly with his essay "The Interaction Order" (Goffman, 1983). In many ways this posthumously published essay is the culminating theoretical statement of his career, framed as the 1982 presidential address for the American Sociological society, but never delivered in person as he was battling cancer.

In this essay Goffman starts from the premise that we spend much of our life in the presence of others and that the conditions and needs of life ensure this. For us to cohabit this shared space successfully (that is to meet our individual and shared needs without undo conflict) we need to make plausible and appropriate surmises about each other's status and relationships, but even more about intentions and goals. We get much information for coordination visually from observing each other's actions, orientations, gaze, and appearance, including both ritual and spontaneous elements. Speech greatly facilitates and makes more efficient these coordinations. Further, this information is gathered and used within the concrete situation perceived by the individual. As Goffman notes, "It is social situations that provide the theater in which all bodily displays are enacted and in which all bodily displays are read. Thus the warrant for employing the social situation as the basic working unit in the study of the interaction order" (1983, p.4). We may equally say it is within situations that speech is heard and interpreted.

Significantly, Goffman's fundamental attention to the social situation mirrors rhetoric's fundamental concern for the rhetorical situation or *kairos*. It is through the recognition and construction of situations that people find order in interaction, so as to be able to anticipate that actions will be effective. To do this they must have a way of perceiving the specifics of the immediate situation in the here and now as it unfolds and of associating that with what they perceive as repeated patterns of events. These perceivable patterns need to be shared with other co-participants to the degree that their understandings will coordinate or align in producing interactions that can unfold in ways that make sense to all participants. That is, if they do not have sufficient alignment in understanding the event, conflicting definitions will produce behaviors that others will not be able to make sense of or perceive as cooperative, putting the event in danger of disintegrating. Schutz might call these shared patterns of perceptions typifications, while Goffman calls them cognitive presuppositions.

To use the metaphor drawn from literacy that Goffman himself invokes, the situation and people's behavior must be read (1983, p. 4) and, therefore, must be readable. To use a less literate imagery, one must be able to make sense of one's immediate surroundings and the behavior of others in a way that is sense-able, that is, accessible to human sense-making procedures. Some micro-sociologists indeed argue, people need only that immediate sense-making to operate within the world, and that the meso-and macro-social structures are for the most part constructs of analysts and not the real world in action. Goffman actually holds a contrary position, saying that larger social structures have an independent influence on our lives, though they may bear on the micro and the micro might bear on them. He cites the example of being informed by an employer or a spouse that your services are no longer needed. Although the particular form of the sharing of this news may have some short term emotional consequences, the fact is that a day or a week or a month later, the change in business or personal arrangements will far outweigh the amicability of the termination interview. Nor, as he points out, do amicable interactions seriously change the underlying inequities of class, race, or gender.

Nonetheless, the concrete mechanisms and consequences of these larger social arrangements must play out and be delivered in a sequence of real settings, as sites for local action. These patterns, typifications, or cognitive assumptions are operative in a number of ways: through the belief and orientations that focus perceptions of situations calling for action; in the means and resources available to be deployed in the situations; within the artifacts and arrangements which provide the grounds of local interaction; and in the significations deployed in the moment-by-moment improvisation of behavior within the situation. Social life and the enactment of meaning exist only as they concretely happen during evanescent wisps of unfolding moments as perceived by the participants. Yet these vanishing moments leave a residue of enduring artifacts, texts, arrangements, and habits that create a complex mutable order that gives some shape and predictability to future moments, which are themselves equally concrete and evanescent, saturated by semi-stable, attributable meanings. While artifacts and memories may travel across situations, yet they exist in people's life world in the evanescent here and now formed by attention, meaning-in-action, and interaction. While there may be some aspects of human existence that may be understood to a significant degree without reference to the unfolding moment (such as the structure of organic chemicals found in the body—but even bodily chemical states are responsive to our neurological attunement to situations), almost all the questions about language and writing (once you get beyond the chemistry of paper and ink), depend on meanings given and taken by people in the moment. So rhetorical force is directly and irremediably enacted at the

interpreted moment, no matter how much textual artifacts may endure across multiple situations and circumstances to provide a commonality of situations and conditions. Nor does even a fixed text mean the same thing in all situations and to all participants; the physical existence of documents just results in the document being available for inspection or other use by multiple participants in multiple situations (including legal evidentiary, analytic, and academic situations). In each new situation the meaning of the text is reenacted within the habits, practices, interests, and arrangements available to the participants.

Goffman identifies two reasons for our being attentive and compliant to the interaction order—that is, the set of understandings that allow us to cooperatively create situations within which our behaviors make sense to others in ways that align with the sense we wish them to make. One (which Goffman calls the "social contract" reason) is that we have much to gain by respecting this order at small cost and much to lose if the interaction order dissolves. That is, by recognizing and framing our behaviors within the order, we are able to act with others, and if we do not attend to the order we would lose that ability to act with others and would gain nothing. As Goffman points out, even criminals and others who normally violate the norms of the interaction order, rely on those norms to locate their targeted violations and to hide their misdeeds from easy notice. The second reason (which Goffman calls the "social consensus") is the unthinking assumption that what one sees around one is how people act and there are no plausible or sensible alternatives—this is similar to what the phenomenologists would call "the natural attitude." The social contract and the social consensus both lead to the conclusion that the constraints that apply to oneself also apply to others and that one should submit to them (except for conscious and focused violations, such as by criminals).

PROXIMATE INTERACTIONAL ORDERS AND DISTANT

Goffman's focuses on the immediate, proximate space with its temporally unfolding events visible to the participants, even as what is attentionally relevant may expand or contract as events unfold and as definitions of the situation change through shifting frames attributed to the visible, audible space and towards which the participants align. This shared alignment defining the situation, Goffman calls footing. His well-known essay on "Footing" (1981) and his volume *Frame analysis* (1974) elaborate these ideas most explicitly.

This proximate face-to-face space creates an urgency, because we are visible to others and open to their evaluation. If we are not responsive to the interactional order, others may project their interpretations and reactions onto the space. If

we violate the presuppositions or typifications or frames active for others in that space, or if we do not discipline our behaviors to be readable by others, we may be hailed to attention, rebuked for inattention, accused of failing to respect our responsibilities to the moral order, or even cast out as irrelevant, irresponsible, or insane. Goffman by the end of his career even placed this aligning to the interpretable public order of those immediately around us as driven by the desire not to be deemed insane. This position resonates, with a punitive clarity, with Adam Smith's understanding of moral sentiments arising out of our seeing ourselves as others might see us and G. H. Mead's view of our forming our sense of ourselves through the eyes of others so that we can make ourselves understood by them.

Yet while Goffman makes a strong contrast between immediate social spaces of the interactional order (defined by mutual visibility imposing mutual readability) and structural social order (where we must be responsive to forces and people not within our immediate sphere of mutual visibility and mutual real time readability), he himself examines some interactions that had more tenuous holds on full immediate reciprocality—such as scripted lectures (where audience responsiveness and attentiveness may influence delivery, but rarely disrupts the flow of talk) or radio addresses (where people's attentiveness and reactions are invisible—even to the extent as to whether any listeners are tuned in) (Goffman, 1981). In these cases Goffman looks at the speaker's or author's anticipation of the audience's interpretive frames, and the author's attempt to shape, mold, and invoke those interpretive frames and footings. Accordingly, while Goffman's typical sites of investigation—people managing pedestrian traffic on a crowded sidewalk, maintaining face in a business meeting, or managing roles in a psychiatric ward—may be viewed as being on one end of a spectrum of immediate visibility and moral accountability, they are not divorced from other points on the spectrum where our financial life is shaped in our interaction with institutional statements, monthly payments, and readings of our bank balances; or our citizenship life is framed around periodic encounters with ballot boxes; or our intellectual life is formed by our reactions to the words of authors within the journals we read. All of these interactional spaces must be readable and read, and our presence depends on our participation, stances, alignments, and frames.

FRAGILITY OF WRITTEN INTERACTION

In writing, however, the problems of attentiveness and alignment are far greater than in face-to-face interaction. Without full, embodied co-presence

the channels of communication are more limited, the opportunity for noting response and making adjustments to retain attention and alignment are rarer, and the compulsion for attention and accountable response is more tenuous. The largest issue is that many people do not even look at or read (in the narrow sense) another text, even when there might be some expectation they do. Even personally addressed letters go unread, let alone group memos. Books that "all citizens should read" may sell a few thousand copies, with many purchasers never opening it or putting it back on the shelf after a few pages; only a few may read it cover to cover.

In written communication, rarely does a text press itself on us demanding attention, unless it touches an inward compulsion. Of course there is the letter from the Internal Revenue Service or bank or other powerful social institutions that a person dare not ignore. These cases of high compulsion and accountability identify strong interpretive frames that demand attention and limit the likely actions. The letter from the IRS is likely to have only a few kinds of gists—requesting further information, commanding further payment, calling for an audit, presenting a refund. These gists correspond to form letters and narrowly framed genres. Individualized messages from the IRS are contexted within regulations, past communications, and personal finances that locate the meanings, actions, and urgency of attention. Even then there are some people who throw away such notices unread, claiming they will have nothing to do with the IRS, until the IRS sends out the police to take physical possession of the people or their assets—thereby compelling attention.

More often in reading, though, texts are self-selected. Even at the office, which files we deem relevant and then examine are a matter of judgment. Unless we decide to go to a file, or pick up the morning newspaper, or click the link to a website, there is no interaction. The text remains unreadable in the interpretive sense because it is unread in the decoding sense. Attention is not just a random matter, for what constitute our interests or what strikes us attractive or meaningful, depends on the sense of meaning we are building about our lives and the world. That sense of meaning of our life world includes evaluations of the kinds of meanings we believe various kinds of documents will contain for us: "Oh, I never read magazines like that, because they don't have substance . . ." or "I used to read it, but then I grew up," or "that stuff is too hard to understand," or "it may serve the interests of managers but not consumers."

Even after readers pick up a text, attention may wander, and interest may fade. Many documents are fallen asleep over, skimmed, put down. In short, readers escape or diminish the text's presence and withdraw from the interaction before the relationship, the cognitive attention, the effort to create shared meaning goes very far. It is as though people walk away from you as you

start speaking, or turn away to look at the TV, or demand you jump ahead to the point. Even in situations of structured accountability, students do not get through the assigned reading, managers do not read the reports in any detail, users don't follow the instruction manual, and applicants don't attend to the regulations for submission.

Even if people read a document all the way through, they read at varying speeds with varying levels of attention and retention, from the perspective of their own understanding and goals. Variation in reading becomes visible in those unusual circumstances when people actually compare their readings, as in classes devoted to discussing specific texts, whether of poetry, philosophy, or social theory. Under such circumstances differences in what people take to be the meaning are likely to emerge along with disagreements as to what seems most important or salient to each reader. Advanced training in specific disciplines of reading, whether literary, theological, legal, or philosophical, may serve to proliferate alternative readings, even as training excludes certain naïve or inattentive ones. No matter how well crafted a text may be it is always porous, even in the law—that is why we have lawyers and courts. This is the puzzle the hermeneutic circle tripped over (De Man, 1983; Gadamer, 1975; Shklar, 2004), that reader response theory (Fish, 1980; Iser, 1980) attempted to account for, and new criticism attempted to ameliorate through close reading (Richards, 1924, 1929), even though new criticism quickly became a means to proliferate even more readings (Brooks, 1947; Empson, 1947).

THE INVISIBILITY OF FRAGILITY

The fragility of face-to-face communication is often hard to detect because participants regularly adjust to each other to carry situations forward, and repair when minor breaches appear to occur (H. Sacks, 1995). Often our interlocutors anticipate breaches and adjust for them, even when we do not perceive any threat of rupture; we call such behavior apologetic, accommodating, or anxious. We work hard to hold situations together and maintain at least the appearance of mutuality, as the ethnomethodologists noted by identifying "let it pass" as one of the primary methods people follow in attempting to make sense of each other and situations (Garfinkel 1967, p. 3).

We notice the fragility, however, when situations fall apart, hard feelings ensue, and people create unpleasant characterizations of former interactants and the behavior which violated expectations. Garfinkel's notorious breaching experiments revealed how even small deviations from normatively expected behavior can lead to very large social ruptures (Garfinkel, 1967). Such

experiments test the limits of expected behavior and reveal the depth of moral importance we place on others holding up their part. Such experiments also reveal the pressures on us to follow expected behavior.

The fragility of literate interaction is even more invisible, because the rupture happens out of sight. People rarely let us know if they have not read what we wrote, if they lost interest, or were so outraged they stopped reading. Nor, even if they finish, do they report back to us the meaning they got from the text. We happily go along believing they read what we wrote. Ask any author who is lucky enough to be widely reviewed or discussed in other publications about how well their readers understand their work or even if their readings seem at all plausible, and you may see another side. On the other hand, it is rarely in the author's interest to contest the readings, for at least the text is being read and discussed. The common wisdom of authors is to let the text speak for itself. For the most part people hold their reading privately within themselves as part of their own amusement, intellectual development, curiosity, formation of beliefs, or accumulation of information for action. If they compare readings, their comments may be sweeping or vague, so that rarely is anyone likely to contest in detail what they gleaned from texts.

Only in limited cases is there in fact any exigency for us to come to shared readings of any text in any detail. Immediate operational needs can necessitate shared interpretation, such as a group making sense of a manual to carry out a repair, but the readings match only to the level needed for immediate practical purposes, which then gets taken over by the exigencies and materiality of the action and artifacts themselves. Embedding reading practices in complex sets of shared social practices may also help align readings. Although students first encountering a chemistry textbook may have all kinds of unusual understandings of the text, if they solve enough problems, do enough experiments, discuss enough phenomena, and engage in enough other professionalizing activities over years, their readings of chemical texts will align with the readings of those who have become their colleagues. Specialized practices of asserting understandings of readings before commenting, such as associated with Rogerian argument (Rogers, 1961), or the review of relevant literature in scientific work are attempts to create shared communal alignment to prior texts to then carry forward discussion. When people have significant stakes in comparing readings in detail, professionalized forums and disciplined technical practices may arise and may be honed in interpretive debates—such as in law, philosophy, literary studies and theology. Sometimes in these forums the discussion leads to people to consent to more aligned readings, as Fleck (1979) in his observations of thought collectives, and Fish (1980) in his interpretive communities. Yet even in professional forums no exigency may press for resolution, with people simply

refining and arguing for the validity of their particular readings. Only when there is a judge or jury to determine the authoritative reading does that settle the question, but even then usually under duress and with muttering of those who feel they have to buckle under to the state.

When texts fail to create reasonably congruent meanings adequate for cooperative practical purposes we have many ways of accounting for the breakdowns, hiding the fragility. Easiest and most common is blaming either participant. Either the writer can't write or the reader can't read. Other kinds of stigmatizations and consequent hostile elaborations can hide the breakdown such as accusations that the other person lacks understanding of the issues or is misguided philosophically or is cynically driven by ulterior motives. This is not to say that such characterizations are not sometimes warranted, nor to suggest that critical reading or rhetorical savvy are bad things. Yet these characterizations can be mobilized in instances of communicative breakdown.

Such characterizations masking the breakdown of literate relations are made more tempting because of the semi-privacy within which we usually carry out literate activities—just us and the book or computer terminal. In mental semi-privacy we can tell ourselves stories that remove us from the challenge or difference of the text we are reading or from the difference of those who might read our text. The fact that education and reading are so surrounded by a hortatory ideology of opening up the mind, entertaining difference, and learning the other side, suggests just how difficult and exceptional it is to address texts that do not match comfortably with our preconceptions. On the other hand, the common experience of becoming more sympathetic and understanding of a writer once you hear them read or talk in person suggests just how much the isolation of literacy limits our alignment to others' words and stances (See Inglese, 2010 for a study of how showing video interviews of famous writers to students improves the students' understanding and sympathy for those writers' texts). This value for seeing the writer as a person is matched on the writer's side by the well-known importance (and difficulty of obtaining) a sense of how readers actually respond to what the writer has written. Yet writers often resist accepting any but the most laudatory response from the readers. Even experienced authors must struggle to receive comments with equanimity and to evaluate them evenhandedly.

Characterizations of faulty readers and writers usually assume that an ideal text—well written, carefully read by competent writers and readers—should carry all the burden of successful communication. We tend not to think of the text as a fragile mediator in a complex system within interpersonal human space, and that breakdowns might occur or ramify anywhere. Certainly attending more intently at the mediating artifact with skilled tools of interpretation is

useful, because texts are the scene of transfer of action. Yet the text only sits in the middle of a process, no matter how well and skillfully the text is attended to. So we must view the processes of sense-making within social configurations, rather than taking the text as a universal conveyor of meaning, accessible to all in any circumstance.

CREATING ALIGNMENT AND READABILITY IN WRITING

The fragility of written language puts great pressures on writing to be understood as situationally relevant to the reader, worth attention, readable, interpretable, and useful for the readers' purposes—all within the context of a limited asynchronous communication channel of words (and graphics or other enhancements) on paper or a screen. Despite difficulties, a successful text must evoke in the mind of the reader meanings congruent enough to the intentions of the writer and supportive of the desired actions to be taken by the reader so as to complete a satisfactory transaction. While the worlds of meaning evoked in the reader by literary texts are sometimes considered in literary theory, worlds of meaning are in fact pervasive in all literate interactions and not easy to accomplish. They require high degrees of work by both reader and writer, cooperative stances between them, and a willingness to discipline selves to the technicalities of inscribed language, including the most basic tools of written language such as forms of handwriting and inscription, orthographies, grammars, and punctuation conventions, to be discussed in the next chapter.

One of the key mechanisms of attaining alignment is to cast messages in familiar terms and typified forms. The need for intelligibility thereby reinforces reliance on genres. If, for example, you need comparable specific information from a group of respondents, you are likely to use questionnaires with questions in familiar formats, so respondents know what you are asking for and how they might respond if they so choose. The more unusual the information you seek and the more open-ended or unusual the format, the less reliably people will know what to answer, and the more difficult their responses will be to interpret and compare—and the lower response rate you are likely to get.

Other devices for locating and aligning participants are narrative reconstruction of the situation of writing or of likely reading use, reminding readers of shared information, and explicitly identifying relevant shared intertexts. Familiar designs, appropriate publication venues, familiar phrasing and a narrowly defined technical vocabulary, or other presentational variables

can also help readers identify and align with the meanings projected in the text and tap into the representations they already have at hand.

Formulations that rely on familiar community beliefs for their coherence is what Aristotle referred to as enthymemes, used as a persuasive device. If a speech doesn't make explicit all assumptions and logic, but relies on the listeners to make the connections and provide the facilitating beliefs, the listeners will evoke feelings and meanings already in their mind and which they feel are their own. They will also find the speaker to be of a like mind and therefore to be trustworthy. Further, insofar as they must think actively to gain the meaning, using what they already know, conclusions become their own, for they have thought it through. Thus the entire shared performance is likely to create a common bond between speaker and listener. In writing, this sense of common meaning and reasoning is even more important to maintain sense of situation, attention, and meaning. But if enthymemes and familiar genres define the total domain of meaning aroused, then one never brings the reader beyond the familiar, as in the tiring diatribes of partisan journalism or the repetitive celebrity "news" varying only in the names and locations.

THE INTERACTIONAL POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES OF EVOKING NOVEL MEANINGS

On the other hand, writing creates opportunities for more elaborate individuation of opinion, extended originality of statements, and more finely honed articulation. The reflective, extended process of writing can remove the writer even further from the reader and the likely contents of the reader's mind. This puts a high burden of mutuality and hard work on both reader and writer to create meaning across the thin stream of inscribed words. This mutual hard work starts at the level of reference, to ensure both interlocutors identify closely enough the objects in the world and concepts evoked by the words to go down sufficiently similar thought paths. Even terms for common objects, such as chair, have a range of mental associations, each of us picturing a prototypical version of each (whether an upholstered easy chair or a fold-up metal utility chair) and having a range of easily imagined variations (some would readily include a natural rock formation and others a multi-seated bench as chair, while others might have to think a bit to understand these variants as chairs). Pronouns and other deictic terms typically cause problems for less experienced writers because they are not as skilled in directing readers to the thing they want to indicate. Further, what is readily attended to and accepted as part of the scene includes

a cultural deictics of attention and boundaries. H. Sacks' (1995) analysis of membership category devices, Hanks' (1990) analysis of cultural deixis, and Bakhtin's (1981) consideration of chronotope all elucidate the cultural and genre horizon of expectations about what a scene is likely to include.

The problem with alignment of concepts is even greater than of material objects. The exact class of events covered by a concept, how a concept operates in relation to other concepts, what system of reasoning the concepts are related to, personal idiosyncratic use of terms within private cognitive worlds, and similar concerns present problems in alignment of imagined meanings by writer and various readers. Disciplinary training attempts to alleviate some of these problems, by long enculturation into disciplinary knowledge and practices that restrict ranges of meanings; yet even within disciplinary discussions theoretic disagreements, misunderstandings, and other misalignments create slippage in conceptual meanings. Particularly as people are trying to articulate novel concepts they are likely use key terms in ways that may not always appear fully coherent to peers as they reach towards new frameworks of perception.

The problem of alignment in meaning-making goes far beyond the identification of individual concrete or conceptual terms, as texts create large networks of meanings that must be understood within the structure of the text and in relation to other meaning structures that might be brought to bear to understand and evaluate the text. How each claim, each sentence is related to each other, what larger structures of meaning emerge from texts, and how that meaning fits with other existing frames of thought present problems for both readers and writers. This problem appears at ever more sophisticated levels as readers and writers become more skilled and engage in more specialized domains with more subtle distinctions and reasoning, drawing together larger complexes of ideas and evidence. Even though the text may unfold temporally in a sequence of sentences, the meaning emerges only as the reader keeps the whole meaning structure in mind simultaneously. Similarly, the meanings evoked when referring to prior texts can be problematic. Readers may find different issues salient in each prior text cited, interpreting them differently, assigning different evaluations, and relating them differently to each other. Even keeping track of who holds what opinion in an article that cites multiple people is difficult, let alone what position the writer holds with respect to all the texts discussed and the overall topic under discussion.

Genres and other typifications can serve to align and limit interpretation, but the more typified and common, the more they restrict the potential meanings that can be made. Genres may even have the perverse effect of limiting the precision of message, as there are standards of approximation good enough for

typical purposes built into genres. Thus if a genre typically has only broad non-quoted references to sources it encourages a belief that the source texts are clear and univocal in their meaning and only the most familiar meaning is to be drawn from them. Similarly, the use of standard sectioning of an argument decreases the burden on providing an explicit rationale for the continuity of the parts and the architectonics of the whole. For this reason we often find a paradoxical consequence that the most typical articles (the ones that are closest to conventional expectations), although the most easily read, may not be the most influential, because they bring little novelty to the discussion. Sometimes highly influential texts within disciplinary or professional contexts are hybrid, bringing unexpected resources and modes of representations to the communal reasoning. These hybrid contributions cannot abandon or ignore disciplinary expectations, but they bring in and integrate other recognizable modes of discussion to supplement the conventional meanings. These hybrid supplementations may be controversial and some may view them as hard to understand, inappropriate or irrelevant, but others may see the necessity for the new meanings. Such controversy and simultaneous expansion of reasoning occurred in the United States Supreme Court in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka where social scientific evidence of children's self-conceptions was brought in to argue that legal principle of "separate but equal" was faulted because it led to unequal consequences.

The complexity of novel meaning can create cognitive and emotional strain on both writer and reader. Writers find it hard to think in the new ways their arguments demand of them, sometimes not sure of where their ideas are headed, because their own prior beliefs and knowledge no longer provide firm guides. Further, they may be appropriately anxious that others will not follow them to their new meanings or will reject them for writing such strange and heterodox things. The reader as well needs to struggle against preconceptions to follow new meanings without rejecting them out of hand as being unclear or outlandish. Often enough I have heard people complain of the difficulty of texts and claiming the texts are poorly written when by all obvious textual measures of vocabulary, sentence complexity, cohesive markers, or paragraph and text organization the texts are not in any way exceptional. But the meaning was unusual, introducing unfamiliar material, putting familiar material in unfamiliar perspectives, or looking at issues in greater detail than usual. These problems of articulating and understanding unfamiliar meaning can occur at any level: when a high school student must write an essay that goes beyond plot summary and a teacher must help the student identify the nascent thought being born or when a Wittgenstein is trying to articulate a new philosophical perspective and readers are trying to absorb it. The problem remains the same

of how writers and readers can align well enough over a text for adequately congruent meanings to be evoked.

An interactional perspective helps us understand more deeply how creating congruent constructs of the communicative situation are essential for aligned participation and meaning-making, yet how difficult creating congruence is in ways that go far beyond technical skills of inscription, orthography, and grammar. While face-to-face talk affords many devices to hold the interaction together despite transient misalignments and threatened ruptures, literate interactions at a distance have only attention to the written word, in production and reception, as a mediating mechanism. Literate meaning-making attention, carried out in the imaginations of the separated participants, is fragile, pushing participants to engage in the most normative activities and meanings in order to increase the chance for robust alignment of understanding. Yet the potential of writing to create novel meaning tempts the writer to be more ambitious and challenging in what the text attempts to convey. Successfully conveying substantially novel meaning requires both writer and reader to attend carefully to the nuance and architectonics of the text. Even with high commitment and skill on both sides, the level of co-alignment and mutual understanding is often much less than the fixedness of the inscribed text might suggest. Substantially novel texts, if they convey fresh meanings perceived of potential value to the readers, reveal their success in evoking extensive discussion among readers as to the meaning. The meaning is not fully obvious and univocal from a plain reading of the text. The complexity of constructing an effective interactional order helps us understand that the aim of writing is not a "perfect text" but maximum alignment of meaning construction between writer and reader, creating meanings for the reader in a way that is congruent to the meanings the writer desires to evoke and that lead to the desired consequent thoughts and actions that the writer hopes for.