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The Communal Function of Social Interaction on an Online Academic Newsgroup

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Social relations in academic settings can be intensely problematic. Our case study joins the ongoing conversation among scholars interested in communication issues in academia by shifting analytic attention from individuals negotiating the boundaries of academic communities from the outside to how an academic community negotiates its own boundaries. Using analytic strategies from the ethnography of communication and ethnomethodology, we analyzed observable interaction on an online academic newsgroup (the Ethno hotline hosted by the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, CIOS) to investigate how fellow academics criticized one another's communicative conduct in order to accomplish membering, the negotiation and affirmation of communal membership, and their community's identity. We approached such criticism as natural criticism, that is, criticism members of a self-identified community apply to the discursive conduct of those they see as communal members. We found that natural criticism functioned as a communication practice and as a symbolic resource for membering in the context of this scholarly community. We also found that, as a practice, natural criticism was accountable in multiple ways, and communal members responded to it negatively when it was seen to violate the moral and practical order of the community. For example, when the practice of natural criticism took on a pattern we refer to adversarial mirroring, this pattern became subject to negative evaluation by other members of the community. Our study contributes to language and social interaction scholarship on membering and natural criticism, and to communication scholarship investigating the management of social relations in academic settings.

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When communal members grossly violate the social order of a community, other communal members often respond by criticizing the problematic act and the perpetrator in order to restore social order. We analyze a series of such violations and critiques in an online academic community and find that some forms of criticism, ironically, undermine rather than restore communal order.

Over the past two decades, a considerable number of U.S. communication scholars have studied the challenges of managing social relations in academic settings. The majority of such studies have been concerned with the social, psychological, and communicative vicissitudes individual actors encounter as they negotiate their membership in academia. Communication scholars tended to focus on the experiences of actors occupying marginal or nondominant social positions. The range of marginal positions under consideration included African American (Allen, 1996, 2000, 2005) and White (Dallimore, 2003; Nicotera, 1999) female academics, academics of various ethnic and/or racial backgrounds (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999), progressive academics (Boyd, 1999), undergraduate students from ethnic/ racial minorities (Covarrubias, 2008; Orbe, 2003, 2008; Orbe & Groscurth, 2004), and evangelical Christian graduate students (Coley, 2010). The chief concern of most of these studies was how individuals sought opportunities to affirm desired identities in a social environment that often refuses or impedes such affirmation. As a result of the studies' analytic focus, academic communities were presented as having a *relatively orderly existence* unaffected by individuals' attempts to establish their membership in them. Relative to the community, aspiring members were presented as *outsiders* even in cases where "officially" they counted as communal members (i.e., they were full-time students, faculty members, etc.).

The function of a case study like the one presented in this article is to join and enrich an ongoing scholarly conversation by providing the rigorous and principled analysis of a relevant case (Chen & Pearce, 1995). We join the conversation by reporting our analysis of observable social interaction in a case where members of an academic community responded to what they saw as *communal disorder* resulting from the actions of *insiders*. We enrich the ongoing conversation about the challenges of social participation in academic communities by pursuing the lived experience of a community in three ways. First, we shifted research focus from the social challenge of affirming individual identities with relation to the community to the challenge of affirming the communal identity of the community itself by restoring its social (moral and practical) order. Second, the preferred data of the studies discussed above are accounts of events collected in the form of interviews, autoethnographies, or personal narratives. We analyzed online social interaction as it unfolded in the course of a clearly bounded exchange. Finally, one of the chief goals of the studies we wish to engage in a conversation was to formulate cultural critiques of social actors' experiences in academic communities. Such critiques were formulated from theoretically informed ethical vantage points, such as feminist standpoint theory (Allen, 1996) or critical Whiteness theory (Covarrubias, 2008). Our goal was to capture indigenous (or "natural") criticism formulated from community members' local ethical perspective. As communication scholars operating in the language and social interaction

tradition we are ethically committed to discovering the local bases for communication as coherent social action, including the moral and practical orders communal members rely on to assess some communication patterns as socially destructive.

The particular facet of social action we were interested in was membering (Philipsen, 1989), the observable use of symbolic resources in communication to identify with, and to create, affirm, and negotiate the shared identity of a community. The ethnography of communication research tradition (Carbaugh 1996, 2008; Milburn, 2004; Philipsen, 1992) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) compelled us to approach the academic community not as a social or administrative entity that "contains" communication but as the communicative accomplishment of those who count themselves as members of the community. In this sense, our study is closest to Goodall's (1999) account of academic "communing" as the outcome of academics' context-bound "everyday exchanges of words and actions" (p. 487).

A vast amount of communication resources are available to academic actors to accomplish community. We concentrated on a subset of those resources, a communication pattern Carbaugh (1989/1990) called natural criticism. Carbaugh distinguished natural criticism (criticism community members apply to discursive conduct in their own communities) from academic criticism (the cultural analyst's critique of relevant existing scholarship) and cultural criticism (the cultural analyst's critique of discursive conduct in the community under consideration). In the present study we were concerned with the analysis of natural criticism, of academics' local expressions of dissatisfaction with "the way we speak" and "the way we are" as a (fractured) community. Natural criticism is best thought of as reflexive communication that brings into sharp relief the local system of rules and obligations members are expected to enact in everyday interaction.

Ethnographers have identified and studied natural criticism, its various social functions, and normative basis in a variety of contexts, from the speakers' shared or contested cultural perspectives. They reported how working-class political codes (Huspek & Kendall, 1991; Philipsen, 1992) and elite political discourse about hate speech (Boromisza-Habashi, 2010, 2013) were used to achieve participation in conflict-ridden political scenes in the U.S. and Hungary respectively; how individual Israeli (Katriel, 1985) and U.S. (Carbaugh, 1988) speakers criticized the larger collective of which they were members in order to reaffirm their own preferred identities; and how members of institutions criticized one another's conduct in an attempt to manage problematic institutional relations in the university classroom (Covarrubias, 2008), in nonprofit organizations (Milburn, 2009), and in public meetings (Witteborn & Sprain, 2009).

We treated natural criticism as a communication practice, a culturally variable "pattern of situated, message-endowed action" (Carbaugh, Gibson, & Milburn, 1997, p. 6). A communication practice is best seen as action that can be observed across speakers and communicative episodes; it is action situated in the context of its observable use; and it is action rendered intelligible to communal members by a locally relevant system of cultural meanings. To demonstrate the value of the approach to communication practice proposed by Carbaugh and his associates (1997) we analyzed natural criticism occurring

in an online community of academics. We pursued competing local meanings of the symbolic terms "fascism" and "intellectual/scholarly debate" and acts of natural criticism that made use of these terms in order to identify cultural meanings and rules that clash in an online exchange among academics. We argue that, in addition to the above definition by Carbaugh and his associates, natural criticism is accountable action in that it is subject to evaluation (i.e., metacritique) by fellow interlocutors. Such evaluations, we argue further, can be patterned themselves.

Our case study was designed to answer the following question: How do academics achieve membering in an academic community by engaging in the communication practice of natural criticism? We found that communal members used natural criticism to negotiate the social boundaries of the scholarly community by drawing boundaries around intelligible and appropriate modes of participation on the Ethno hotline. Further, we found that the patterned practice of natural criticism took on a pattern of its own—a pattern we refer to as adversarial mirroring—and that this pattern was subject to negative evaluation by other members.

Below, we first outline the case. Next we build up a cultural analysis of natural criticism on the online newsgroup. Finally, we complement the cultural view of natural criticism (one focusing on accountability based on a local moral order of communicative action) with an ethnomethodological view (one focusing on accountability based on a local practical order of communicative action).

The Case

We identified natural criticism as a resource for membering in an online exchange on the Ethno hotline, an English-language online newsgroup. The primary audience of the newsgroup comprises ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts affiliated with institutes of higher education in the U.S. and the U.K. Heated exchanges like the one we analyzed are highly untypical on the hotline—the dominant tone of participation can be described as civil, and sometimes collegial. The first author retrieved the online exchange on March 6, 2006, from the newsgroup's publicly available "Recent transactions" archive hosted by the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship (CIOS). The exchange consisted of 13 posts distributed among related threads. The posts contributing to the exchange will be discussed without reference to the actual names of participants. From the perspective of this analysis, the actual identity of the participants is irrelevant. We edited spelling errors in the text of the exchanges in order not to distract the reader's attention from the contents of the exchange.

The exchange was initiated by a newsgroup member on February 28, 2006, who called list members' attention to a "rant" on Wikipedia regarding the entry on sociologist Harvey Sacks (1935–1975). There, the late ethnomethodologist David Sudnow was engaged with other editors in what one of the editors described as an "edit war." Sudnow edited the entry on Sacks to include his personal views of Sacks's legacy, Sacks's personal life, and on conversation analyst Emmanuel Schegloff's management of Sacks's "intellectual property" (Sudnow, 2006). This entry was eventually deleted

by other Wikipedia editors. Later, on the discussion page related to the Sacks entry an unidentified poster who claimed to represent Sudnow's views posted a lengthy message titled ''Additional thoughts on Sudnow's POV'' (2006). In this post, the author included statements intended to undermine Schegloff's credibility as a person and researcher. The author also threatened Schegloff with ''teach[ing] him how was [*sic*] play hardball in the Bronx'' (para. 4) and planning ''to pay him a visit and have it out with him'' (para. 7). Members of the Ethno hotline treated this post as Sudnow's own. The post had been later reedited.

''Intellectual/Scholarly Debate'' and ''fascism''

The core issue around which the 13 posts cohered was whether Sudnow's Wikipedia entries and apparent animosity toward Schegloff were proper matters for ''scholarly'' or ''intellectual debate.'' Participants used these metadiscursive terms to point not only to a particular kind of communicative pattern that characterized the talk of scholars in general but also as a communicative ideal to which, they believed, all members of the list should aspire. In the course of the debate, two ''senior figures in the discipline,'' as a list member characterized them (let us call them Professors Art and Bea) presented two competing interpretations of ''scholarly/intellectual debate'' and challenged one another's interpretations by casting them as examples of ''(intellectual) fascism.'' The exchange was concluded when a list member, ''an avid reader of the list,'' who self-identified as a student posted a message on March 3, 2006, explaining that he or she was ''really disappointed with the on-going and somewhat private conflict between the scholars which has been going on for days now,'' and stated that he or she was considering leaving the newsgroup unless ''we . . . return to normal scholarly discussion'' (see Excerpt [5]).

The first round of natural criticism between the two professors began when Art called on members of the group to stop discussing the ''dispute'' between, and about, Sudnow and Schegloff on the Ethno hotline.

(1) Excerpt from Art (2006, March 1)

1	Art	Please do not invoke this controversy, or anything related to the author of the
2		wikipedia entry on this list. Sudnow is a potentially dangerous man as his
3		wikipedia entry makes clear; he has left threatening phone messages on
4		Emanuel Schelgoff's answering machine, and his wikipedia entry stops just
5		short of the legal definition of verbal threats. Whatever his dispute with
6		Schegloff might be – and whatever side one takes in that dispute – nothing
7		justifies such hostile, threatening behavior. It is bizarre to me that this even
8		needs pointing out, but such behavior – or even the invocation of it – has NO
9		place on a scholarly mailing list.
		(3 lines omitted)
13		Given the seriousness of the issue involved, and the actual threats made by
14		this person, I would encourage the editor of the Ethno hotline to please delete
15		any further messages pertaining to, or invoking Sudnow's dispute with
16		Schegloff. This is NOT a scholarly debate; such posts amount to the
17		perpetuation of threats against a member of this community. Such posts
18		should not be forwarded to the community, but should be filtered and trashed
19		just as any other inappropriate message would be.

Art framed those parts of Sudnow's Wikipedia entry that are related to Schegloff's role in managing Sacks's intellectual heritage as "verbal threats" (line 5) and "hostile, threatening behavior" (line 7) and, as such, as threats that target a member of the "community" (line 17). By implication, this "community" includes Schegloff himself, all members of the newsgroup, but it does not include Sudnow who, as Bea pointed out later, "was removed from this list by the administrators some years ago for breaching aspects of its policy." Thus, Art positioned Sudnow as an outside threat to the "community" of scholars. It is the community's responsibility to protect its members from outside threats by "filtering and trash-ing" all "inappropriate messages" (lines 18, 19), including ones that call attention to the threats.

Further, "scholarly debate" (line 16) in the above excerpt functions as a metacom-municative term that expresses the communicative order of this, and any other, "scholarly" community. For Art, this order is self-evident ("it is bizarre to me that this even needs pointing out," lines 7–8) and therefore normative, that is, a taken-for-granted moral code for the conduct of verbal, online action. The communicative order invoked as "scholarly debate" does not allow for the invocation of "threats" because they "perpetuate" those threats (line 17).[1] A "dispute" (line 15) between two members of the community, and representations of the "dispute" on the news-group, introduce an alien element into the communicative regime of "scholarly debate," the communicative expression of the community of conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists who subscribe to the newsgroup.

In response, Bea expressed "great respect" for Schegloff and Sudnow's work but added that "my understanding is that Sudnow does have a legitimate point of argu-ment with Schegloff regarding the execution of Sacks' literary estate. That makes it a scholarly dispute" (Bea, 2006, March 1, lines 4–6). In the same post, Bea went on to summarize the "current controversy in the U.K. in which the historian David Irving, notorious as a 'Holocaust denier', has been imprisoned in Austria for being in con-travention of the Austrian law against denial of the Jewish holocaust during WW2" (lines 15–18). Bea sided against the Austrian decision and expressed support for the view that "Irving has simply forwarded an interpretation of historical data which is not verified by the vast majority of historians and should either be ignored or defeated in reasoned intellectual argument" (lines 19–21). After introducing his stance regarding the Irving judgment, Bea added:

(2) Excerpt from Bea (2006, March 1)

21	Bea	Although
22		I don't want to make entirely unwarranted comparisons, Art's call that
23		references to Sudnow or his opinions should be 'filtered' by the managers
24		of Ethno hotline or Wikipedia amounts to a form of intellectual fascism. If
25		there is an argument with Sudnow's claims, it should be up to Schegloff to
26		have it, or if he doesn't want to have it, to leave it up to the rest of us to
27		weigh up the evidence that is available to us. What good intellectual
28		debate does not need is people feebly saying 'please stop'.

How did Bea arrive at the allegation of ''intellectual fascism'' against Art from the jailing of David Irving? There was an analogy at work, the source of which was Art's ''call'' for ''filtering.'' The target of the analogy, the compared-to, was more complex. The invocation of the Irving trial brought into view implied charges of ''fascism'' against Irving on the basis of his ''holocaust denial.'' In the Western context, interpreting ''holocaust denial'' as a token of ''fascism'' is a move often made in many registers of society, especially antiracist advocacy and the popular press. What Bea argued, then, was that the Austrian court's decision to jail Irving mirrored the ''fascism'' of which the court had accused him. The court was guilty of a type of fascism, ''intellectual fascism'' (line 24), that opted for legal measures to silence controversial views instead of allowing them to be ''ignored or defeated in reasoned intellectual argument'' (line 21). Bea's line of reasoning could be glossed as follows: to charge Irving with fascism was an act of fascism itself because the charge subjects intellectual inquiry to censorship. This latter type of fascism, ''intellectual fascism'' (line 24), becomes the target of the analogy in Excerpt (2) above. As a result, Art, who ''called'' for the ''filtering'' of Sudnow's views from the Ethno hotline including his ''legitimate point of argument with Schegloff regarding the execution of Sacks' literary estate,'' is presented as on a par with the ''intellectual fascists.'' Art's call functions as a precipitating event that prompts Bea to formulate the allegation of ''fascism'' as an element of critical metadiscourse.

Bea's notion of ideal ''intellectual debate'' (lines 27–28) was clearly at odds with Art's notion of ''scholarly debate.'' For Art, ''scholarly debate'' implied a communicative regime that prohibited personal attacks on any members of the community. In contrast, Bea advanced an interpretation of ''debate'' in Excerpt (2) above as a communicative environment in which personal attacks are secondary in importance to the intellectual argument they accompany. If, as Bea suggested in an earlier post, Sudnow's Wikipedia post did contain a legitimate argument the presence of this argument was reason enough to accept it as an element of ''good intellectual debate.'' From Bea's perspective, Art's move to try to shut down the discussion of the ''controversy'' was, in essence, a form of censorship directed against the communicative exercise of intellect, the defining activity of a scholarly newsgroup. Art's vision of the newsgroup as the communicative enactment of a community whose integrity was threatened by personal threats stands in contrast with Bea's vision of the newsgroup as the channel for the enactment of a community whose integrity was threatened by the stifling of intellectual argument. Taking the analysis a step further, Art presented the newsgroup as an extension of existing offline social relationships among fellow academics and hence suggested that communal members protect each other from harm and sustain the community by casting out ''dangerous'' elements. Bea, on the other hand, saw no such continuity between the offline social world and the social environment of the newsgroup. For Bea, it followed that list members should be willing to identify opportunities for intellectual argument even inside the most vicious personal attack in order to sustain their community.

Let us now consider Art's critical metadiscourse about Bea's allegation of "fascism."

(3) Excerpt from Art (2006, March 2)

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21  Art  Now I'm not sure what Bea's definition of fascism is, but in my view an
22         important component of it includes the use of violence and threats of violence to
23         intimidate others. Whereas scholarly debate involves the use of reason to
24         persuade others (which is what I have done in this and my previous posts),
25         Sudnow – and now apparently Bea as well – believe that violence, threats and
26         coercion can be used in place of reason. That, I submit is fascist. So, now I find
27         myself in the position of having to defend myself against a charge of fascism
28         made by a person who apparently supports the use of threats and violence
29         against others. Who is the fascist Dr. Bea – those who stand up to people who
30         use violence and threats to intimidate others, or those who support the use of
31         such threats by calling it "scholarly debate"?
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For Bea, "(intellectual) fascism" was the use of authority to silence someone's views instead of allowing it to be "ignored or defeated in reasoned intellectual argument" (Bea, 2006, March 1, lines 20–21). In this excerpt, Art marked the argument that "violence, threats and coercion can be used in place of reason" (lines 25–26) as "fascist" (line 26). Art recounted two types of communicative events that precipitate his allegation of "fascism": to "use violence and threats to intimidate others" (lines 22–23) and to "support the use of such threats by calling it "scholarly debate"" (lines 30–31). Not only do "fascists" threaten others with violence, they also attempt to legitimize such threats by proposing that they do not violate the communicative rules of the newsgroup. Both of these acts are contrasted with "the use of reason to persuade others" (lines 23–24). The rhetorical question at the end of the excerpt fulfills a dual function: it reattaches the label of "fascism" from Art to Bea, and it provides the interpretation of Art's call in Excerpt (1) for standing up against "hostile, threatening behavior" (line 7). In Excerpt (3), Art is presented as the protector of the newsgroup's communicative regime, the newsgroup as the community's voice, and the scholarly community itself, and Bea as a threat to all three.

Art relied on the symbolic term "fascism" to turn Bea's argument against itself. Art first proffered a characterization of "fascism" as "the use of violence and threats of violence to intimidate others" (lines 22–23). Art then went on to argue that Sudnow and Bea share the belief "that violence, threats and coercion can be used in place of reason" (lines 25–26). What follows, for Art, is that because the character of Bea's conduct is identical with "an important component" (line 22) of "fascism" Bea is the real "fascist" (line 29). Notice the shift in the exchange from the issue to the person, that is, from the characterization of "(intellectual) fascism" to the identification of "fascists." We will return to this point in our discussion of adversarial mirroring below.

In Excerpt (4), Bea responded to Art's charge of "fascism" by rearticulating an argument made earlier for the separation of personal disputes (here, the dispute between Sudnow and Schegloff) and the intellectual dimension of those disputes (here, the fate of Sacks's scholarly legacy). Although Bea did not use the term "fascism" he referred to "totalitarian activities" (line 24) such as censorship, an activity he had associated earlier with "fascism."

(4) Excerpt from Bea (2006, March 3)

1	Bea	Before this gets out of hand, as exchanges in fora such as this often do, let me
2		be clear: Nothing in my earlier post can, or should, possibly be read as a defense
3		of violence, intimidation, brutality, torture or murder as legitimate tactics in an
4		argument.

(3 lines omitted)

8		My argument, which I am perfectly happy for people to agree with or disagree
9		with as long as their grounds are not willful misinterpretation, insult or sarcastic
10		insinuation, was against the idea that references to disputes occurring here or
11		elsewhere should be censored. I don't believe that the act of referring to a
12		dispute or to the tactics by which a dispute is being prosecuted amounts to
13		support for, or perpetuation of, any matter in the dispute or its conduct including
14		and especially threats against someone's personal safety. Nor, as it happens, do
15		I believe that refraining from such reference (either voluntarily or under
16		instruction) will cause the producer of the threats to desist. The threats, as I said
17		earlier, are a matter for the individuals involved. For the rest of us, if we wish to
18		read, take a view on, comment on, or suggest that others might want to note,
19		publicly available materials such as web-pages, then it should be up to us. We
20		are all consenting adults with doctorates and therefore, apparently, intelligent.
21		And anyone who actually reads the materials in question will probably come to
22		the same view as me: that Sudnow's tactics are ridiculous and therefore
23		(unfortunately, in my personal view) ineffectual.

(3 lines omitted)

28		In general, I am against self-appointed censors, thought police, senders of secret
29		(or not so secret) missives instructing others on what to think/say/write/publish,
30		and all other totalitarian activities. Maintaining such a position is difficult and
31		often presents dilemmas (the Irving case I referred to previously is a case in
32		point). But that's why liberal democracy is hard to do while dictatorship and
33		fundamentalism are easy.

Here, Bea used critical metadiscourse to undermine the legitimacy of Art's allegation of "fascism" by arguing that Bea did not in fact express any support for "violence . . . as legitimate tactics in an argument" (lines 3–4). If Bea is not in support of violence, then Art's claim that Art was able to detect a defining element of "fascism" (i.e., support of violence) in Bea's earlier post is unfounded.

As earlier, Bea interpreted the Sudnow-Schegloff dispute as "a matter for the individuals involved" (line 17). This "matter" should be of no concern to members of the newsgroup who "are all consenting adults with doctorates" (line 20). "Missives instructing others on what to think/say/write/publish" (line 29) curtails the choice of this group of "intelligent" (line 20) individuals "to read, take a view on, comment on, or suggest that others might want to note, publicly available materials such as web-pages" (lines 17–19). Such "missives" do two kinds of harm: not only do they limit opportunities for "intellectual debate" (as Bea pointed out earlier) but they also insult the intelligence of newsgroup members by suggesting that they cannot see "that Sudnow's tactics are ridiculous and therefore . . . ineffectual" (lines 22–23). From the perspective of Bea's interpretation of "fascism," Art's suggestion to filter messages directed at communal members comes across as paternalistic at best and authoritarian at worst.

Relying on Carbaugh's (1989) heuristic framework for the comparative study of terms for communicative action let us summarize the two competing interpretations of the symbolic term "fascism" active in the exchange between Professors Art and Bea. The heuristic distinguishes act, event, style, and functional level local interpretations of a given term for talk in a community of speakers. These interpretations can be tracked by describing the relationships speakers posit between the focal term for talk and other relevant terms. *Act level* interpretations make sense of the focal term as an individual performance of communication. "Fascism" at this level was "supporting the use of threats and violence against others" by calling them "scholarly debate" for Art, and "filtering" or "censoring" for Bea. *Event level* interpretations present the focal term as a coenactment of communication that involves two or more parties. At the event level, "fascism" for Art was a kind of communicative action that either uses or "supports" "threats and coercion" against a target. "Fascism" as communication from Art's perspective invoked two configurations of social actors. "Fascism" as the immediate use of "threats and coercion" pitted a perpetrator (a "fascist") against a target (or victim), whereas "fascism" as "support" for "threats and coercion" introduced a bystander who took sides with the perpetrator and became a "fascist" as a result. Bea's interpretation also distinguished a perpetrator and a target role. The perpetrator (the "fascist") prevented newsgroup members from having a "good intellectual debate," a communicative activity that involved "weigh[ing] up the evidence that [was] available" (Bea, 2006, March 1, line 27) and "reasoned intellectual argument" (line 21). While Art's "fascist" threatened the physical dimension of a person in the target role, Bea's "fascist" threatened the intellectual dimension of that person. *Style level* interpretations contrast the native label for the focal term (here, "fascism") with other related native labels in order to give a sense of selection among alternative ways of speaking. For Art, "fascism" (abusive talk) stood in contrast with "scholarly debate" (debate untainted by personal attacks)—for Bea, "fascism" (the authority-based censorship of others' talk) was the antithesis of "good intellectual debate" (the unfettered exercise of intellect that sometimes involves personal attacks). Finally, *functional level* interpretations evaluate the social consequentiality of labeling a locally relevant type of communicative action with the focal term. In this regard, Art and Bea were in agreement: both used "fascism" to label two types of communicative action in order to frame them as serious threats to the social order of the Ethno hotline. Both scholars were concerned about "fascism" as a mode of communication that undermined the social integrity of the newsgroup, either because it threatened with violence or because it stifled the free exercise of intellect.

We can hear Art and Bea's criticism of one another's conduct as competing voices of natural criticism: "The object of natural criticism is, from the 'natives' view,' their indigenous cultural practice; the locus of criticism derives from their own ethical code; with the typical mode of criticism being relatively direct" (Carbaugh, 1989/1990, p. 267). Here, such criticism accomplished not only membering (affirming communal identity and communal boundaries) but also what we may call unmembering (excluding communal members who threaten communal identity).

Adversarial Mirroring

Beyond the competing interactional patterns that constitute the voices of natural criticism we can observe a pattern of argument present in both professors' posts, one that Boromisza-Habashi (2013) termed adversarial mirroring. In essence, the pattern is designed to fulfill two functions at the same time: to discredit the opponent's interpretation of "fascism" and to discredit the opponent's moral standing by alleging that their use of "fascism" is, in fact, an act of "fascism." Consider Excerpt (3) in which Art, in response to Bea's allegation of "(intellectual) fascism" defined "fascism" as support for or the use of threats and violence against others. Art argued that Bea's characterization of Art's call to filter out discussions of Sudnow's threats against Schegloff from the Ethno hotline as "fascism" was direct evidence that Bea supported those threats. Bea would not only allow those threats to be discussed on the hotline but also categorized them as "scholarly debate." Bea's allegation of "fascism" became an act of "fascism." This is the argumentative pattern we call adversarial mirroring. The pattern involves a second speaker claiming to reproduce the allegation of a first speaker for the purpose of exposing that the first speaker's allegation itself functions as a precipitating event that invites the same allegation. As a result of this move, the credibility of the first speaker is called into question and the relationship between the two interlocutors is cast as adversarial. Adversarial mirroring, a critical metadiscursive description and assessment of another's speech, assigns adversarial identities to interlocutors. Speakers engaging in adversarial mirroring symbolically present their own identities and that of the other as existing in a relationship of irresolvable conflict.

A slightly more complex example of adversarial mirroring can be observed in Excerpt (2) and the parts of the exchange that immediately precede it. Here, Bea first mirrored the Austrian court's allegation of "fascism" against David Irving by arguing that this allegation is an act of "(intellectual) fascism" itself. Bea then cast the Austrian court's decision as analogous with Art's call for censorship and concluded that Art's call was an act of "(intellectual) fascism" as well. This argumentative move can be described as adversarial mirroring by analogy.

Bea invoked his earlier mirroring move in Excerpt (4) in response to Art's charge of "fascism"—in Bea's words, the charge of "defense of violence, intimidation, brutality, torture or murder as legitimate tactics in an argument" (Bea, 2006, March 3, lines 2–4). Toward the end of the excerpt, Bea once again cast Art's purported support for censorship and the policing of thought as on a par with the Austrian decision. The actions of Art and the Austrian court, Bea suggested, both fell into the category of "totalitarian activities" and were, thus, "fascistic." As a result, Art's charge of "fascism" against Bea, the defender of "liberal democracy," a system in which individuals can resolve difficult "dilemmas" through reasoned debate, could only be an act of "fascism" itself.

Simply put, adversarial mirroring is a type of cyclical argumentation: one speaker responds to another's charge of "fascism" by alleging that the charge itself is an act of "fascism" because the basis on which the charge is made is a token of "fascistic" tendencies in the other. The definition of "fascism" is assumed by both speakers involved

as a matter of common sense or shared knowledge. But adversarial mirroring is cyclical in a different sense as well: it is a spiraling communicative form that builds on the repeated reconfiguration of the relationship between the precipitating act, the allegation, and abstract metadiscourse. Adversarial mirroring is a five-step form that can be reconstructed as follows:

Step (1): A speaker in the position of judge applies an allegation to a precipitating event. Their allegation implies a particular folk interpretation of a symbolic term used in the allegation.

Step (2): Using critical metadiscourse, another judge identifies elements of another folk interpretation of the same term in the first third-party judge's allegation.

Step (3): The second judge casts the first judge's allegation as a precipitating event and applies the same term to it in an allegation.

Step (4): Using critical metadiscourse, the first judge voices a disagreement which they base on an alternative account of their own judgment.

Step (5) (optional): A judge other than the second may proceed to Step (2).

Much like "griping" in Israel (Katriel, 1985) or "sharing" in the U.S. American context (Carbaugh, 1988), adversarial mirroring can potentially be extended indefinitely by participants across interactional episodes and speech events.

Violating the Local Moral Order: A Cultural View

Art and Bea's critiques of "fascism" were inextricably bound to their competing interpretations of "intellectual/scholarly debate." The charge of fascism in this case was powerful because its meanings were rooted in the core issue the community was grappling with: Do we, or do we not, think of the Schegloff–Sudnow controversy as a proper subject of debate? "Fascism" was presented not only as the opposite of "good debate" but as a kind of communicative climate which inhibited communal members' participation in such debate.

The disagreement between Art and Bea regarding the meaning of "fascism" is brought into sharp relief when we consider cultural messages about sociality (Carbaugh, 2007) in their use of the term. Both scholars highlighted a particular set of social relations (the "dispute" between Sudnow and Schegloff, the relationship between Art/Bea and the Ethno hotline, and the relationship among members of the hotline) but they characterized those relations differently. Art saw the "dispute" or "controversy" between Sudnow and Schegloff as a relationship of abuse between a former and a current member of the scholarly community in which Art claimed membership. For Art, this was a kind of relationship that must not exist within a proper "community" of scholars. Art represented Bea's argument that the relationship between Sudnow and Schegloff was of secondary consideration compared to the intellectual mission of the hotline as the endorsement of violent threats as legitimate tactics of argumentation. Hence, Bea became a "fascist" who posed a threat to the social order of the community that was equal in magnitude to Sudnow's threats.

Bea's view of the "community" of scholars was at odds with Art's. Where Art saw communal members who must protect one another from abuse, Bea saw individual

scholars freely exercising their intellectual faculties. These individuals needed no protection from ''self-appointed censors'' because, as ''intelligent'' people, they were perfectly capable of separating the interpersonal and the intellectual dimension of the dispute between Sudnow and Schegloff. Furthermore, they could engage in reasoned debate of the intellectual problem of which the dispute was the vehicle, namely, the management of Sacks's intellectual legacy. Art's suggestion to ''filter'' out messages from the hotline that invoke the controversy between Sudnow and Schegloff appeared, from Bea's perspective, as an attempt to install a ''thought police'' to suppress the free exercise of intellect. This kind of ''totalitarian activity'' went against the grain of the newsgroup—why else would scholars subscribe to the Ethno hotline than to use their intelligence?

So far, we have been discussing how two members of a community hold one another accountable for their acts of natural criticism. There was, however, a different ''layer'' of accountability active in the exchange: how other participants of the episode under consideration held the two professors accountable within the domain of local moral order. The two scholars' audience commented on their use of ''fascism'' on two occasions:

> Art's response was neither feeble nor did it promote ''intellectual fascism'' he merely suggested a negative sanction against untoward behavior. (Participant 1, 2006, March 2, lines 12–13)

> I can see Bea's point regarding the stifling of free speech (although the use of the term 'fascism' is a step too far, given the problems that emotive language seem to be causing already) . . . (Participant 2, 2006, March 2, lines 27–29)

In both excerpts, participants-as-audience-members squarely reject the use of ''(intellectual) fascism'' in prior critical metadiscourse. The first excerpt suggests that the use of the term is irrelevant; the second that it goes ''too far'' and causes ''problems.''

Those who critiqued the two professors' way of doing criticism did not explicitly formulate what the ''problem'' was. However, based on our analysis we can provide an interpretive account of at least one serious social problem that charges of ''fascism'' had caused in this exchange. As we have argued, the metadiscursive use of ''fascism'' in this case exposed a tension between two versions of the ''good intellectual/scholarly debate'' ideal. One version (Art's) held that debate ceased to be appropriate when members of the community were exposed to threats and other kinds of danger; the other (Bea's) maintained that appropriate debate could not be fettered by concerns for particular persons' well-being. This finding supports the claim that such tension is part and parcel of coexistence in the academic speech community. Discourse analytic work on ''intellectual discussions'' in the context of university colloquia (Craig & Tracy, 1995; Tracy & Baratz, 1993) highlighted this tension as an interactional dilemma decisively shaping social life in academia. Participants of intellectual discussions are required to negotiate two opposing situated ideals, the fierce, often face-threatening pursuit of knowledge and a commitment to the integrity of the scholarly community. Ruthlessly exposing the weakness of a colleague's argument satisfies the first ideal but disagrees with the second; asking

gentle, nonthreatening questions after someone's presentation achieves the opposite effect. "Intellectual discussion" as a communication practice forces participants to be mindful of managing their identities against the background of this dilemma: one should strive not to be seen as either "too nice" or as "too aggressive."

As Art and Bea entered into the spiral of adversarial mirroring, their talk about "fascism" transformed this interactional dilemma into interactional dogma. (It also became an illustration of what "bad debate," as it was locally understood, might look like.) A zero sum game emerged from their exchange in which the two interpretations of "good debate" were shown to be mutually exclusive, and advocating one version of this ideal came to mean a breach of social norms according to the competing version. The use of "fascism" metadiscourse prompted participants to cast themselves as protectors of the communicative and moral order of the community, the order that, rather ironically, was capable of accommodating both versions of "good debate." To put it bluntly, Art and Bea upset the carefully and precariously balanced moral order of their community.

Violating the Local Practical Order: An Ethnomethodological View

Beyond initiating a disruption in *moral* order, when natural criticism is viewed as accountable practice (Garfinkel, 1967) it becomes apparent that there is a deeper disruption in the *practical* order that sustains members' activities. The anonymous post that concluded the exchange called attention to such a disruption.

(5) Excerpt from Participant 3 (2006, March 3)

```
1   P3   Subject: dommage!
2
3        Dear All, should this make it to the list,
4
5        As an avid reader of the list I am really disappointed with the on-going and
6        somewhat private conflict between the scholars which has been going on for
7        days now.
8        If we do not return to normal scholarly discussion, I fear I may unsubscribe
9        from this on-line community which is shame because as a student, I read your
10       usually rich and informative contributions with much delight and stimulation.
11
12       from,
13       a committed Ethno hotline reader.
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To view natural criticism as accountable (rational or locally recognizable) practice is to acknowledge the reflexive dimension inherent in the range of practices through which the criticism emerges. Natural criticism casts itself as an accountable practice, and is always inherently subject to scrutiny. To the degree that natural criticism is recognizable as a practice it is accountable in the sense that it is visibly and reportably consistent with a locally emergent and recognized order of practices.

However, we argue that an integral part of what makes natural criticism recognizable as such is its apparent regulatory function in the ongoing accomplishment of some larger practice (i.e., its ability to be taken as a 'good point' in argumentation).

As our data show, the accountability of natural criticism as rational practice cannot and should not be taken for granted.[2] Presupposing that an observable strip of activity is recognizable—and therefore accountable—as natural criticism within a larger order of local practices, the difference between a partially and a wholly accountable act of natural criticism lies in the degree to which the act is coherent with the interpretive rules that sustain the ongoing activity as a rational accomplishment. The ethnomethodological theory of rule-governed practice suggests that if the locally relevant interpretive rules sustaining the rationality of social activity (in our case, the critical exchange between Art and Bea, along with the contributions of other subscribers) become incommensurate coherence is lost, practices no longer seem recognizable, and the joint accomplishment of the practice becomes irrational and unsustainable.

When the practical order that enables natural criticism is disrupted in this way—for example, by the type of adversarial mirroring Art and Bea enacted—threatening the sustainability of meaningful interaction, the disruption itself becomes unaccountable and therefore subject to scrutiny. Thus, the contribution to the exchange that appears to initiate decisive closure to the discussion can be understood as taking on such a critical, regulatory function. This above post to the list is thoroughly regulatory in its disapproving assessment of the foregoing interaction. Excerpt (5)'s subject line (line 1) ("too bad!" in French) already suggested a condemnation. The above post recognized that censorship has become relevant to the situation ("should this make it to the list," line 3) and expressed disappointment with the inappropriateness of the "somewhat private conflict" (line 6). Finally, the poster concluded with a threat to leave the community if the pattern does not change (lines 8–9). This final contribution itself becomes accountable (recognizable) as natural criticism, and wholly accountable to the degree that, for all practical purposes, it has made enough of a 'good point' to have the result of initiating closure. This final act of criticism, then, represents the culmination of a series of interlocking transitions from critique to metacritique that help to make transparent the process of normative regulation in the self-organizing systems of practice that sustain the intelligibility, appropriateness, and accountability of participation in the community of scholars who subscribe to the Ethno hotline.

Attention to the accountability of natural criticism has helped to illustrate the process by which cultural communities regulate themselves. When this aspect of natural criticism as communicative practice is lost from sight, the lived significance of criticism is also at risk of slipping from view. The analysis of this excerpt of interaction on the Ethno hotline demonstrated the value of including accountability as a fundamental dimension in our understanding of communicative practice because it foregrounded the notion that criticism not only invites accounting, but also accounting can be required of it.

Discussion and Conclusion

By focusing on social interaction among newsgroup members our case study has shown that subscribers of the Ethno hotline rely on natural criticism to regulate one another's participation and thereby manage and affirm the boundaries of the

"scholarly community." The competition between two "indigenous" moral systems, according to which community could be seen either as a social space where communal members protect one another from abuse, or as one where individual scholars freely exercise their intellect, was ultimately silenced by a voice suggesting that Art and Bea's critical exchange had become irrational. The theoretical contribution of our study is that we have demonstrated how natural criticism was multiply accountable: it can violate both the moral and the practical order of a community. Speakers who engaged in natural criticism could be held accountable for acting in ways that did not count as appropriate and/or rational according to the local system of moral and practical rules. These related layers of accountability functioned as communicative resources that communal members relied on to locate themselves or others inside or outside the scholarly community.

Our study also confirms that studying the significance of communication practices in managing membership in academia from the perspective of those who make use of those practices is a productive line of inquiry (see also Covarrubias, 2008; Orbe, 2008; Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). Our findings complement existing studies of social participation in academic communities by exposing some communication patterns, practices, and related meanings that lead to, and sustain, problems of social partici- pation in academic communities. In our data, competing interpretations of norm vio- lations, competing moral orders informing those interpretations, and the practical order of doing natural criticism could all function as sources of problems in social participation. We have also found further evidence for the dilemma-ridden nature of social participation in academic communities (Boyd, 1999; Craig & Tracy, 1995; Nicotera, 1999; Tracy & Baratz, 1993).

Our study draws attention to the possibility of studying academic membering and unmembering in cultural scenes that transcend academic departments and that do not involve face-to-face contact. Future studies of how the boundaries of academic communities are negotiated could productively compare differences and similarities between relevant face-to-face and online communication practices. Future studies could also investigate how membering occurs in academic communities of various scales, such as in departmental, university-wide, and discipline-wide communities.

The analysis of natural criticism as a communication practice can shed light on the indigenous moral and practical order of the academic community under consider- ation. Such an approach responds to Hamelink's (2008) call on communication and culture scholars "to move . . . into the adventure of questions about the ethics and per- spectives of (human) life and thus accept responsibility for the social environment it investigates" (p. 7). Our response has been shaped by a dual ethical commitment. On the one hand, as language and social interaction scholars we are committed to com- prehending the complexity of sociocultural scenes from the members' perspective by

> looking and listening for . . . patterns of communicative conduct that can be observed in the local scene; . . . the terms that the people themselves in a particular social world use for talking and thinking about communicative conduct; [and] the local use, rhetorically, of indigenous meta-communicative vocabulary. (Philipsen, 2010, p. 164)

Such a research strategy gives the researcher a sense of, to borrow a term from Philipsen (2010), the local ''cultural terrain'' members navigate in their daily lives. On the other hand, as academics we are intimately familiar with the difficulty of navigating this terrain. We are committed to shedding some light on the terrain to help, in a small way, our fellow travelers in finding their way to a fulfilling academic experience. With Tracy and Mirivel (2009) we believe that the careful descriptions and analyses of problematic communication patterns, practices, and their meanings have inherent practical value. We hope that members of other academic communities will be able to use our work to make better sense of social interaction they encounter as they manage the social boundaries of their own communities and the boundaries of acceptable conduct within those communities.

Notes

[1]   In a later post, Art provided further explanation of why invocations of the dispute ''perpetuated'' the threats against Schegloff:

> When these matters are brought up on the Ethno hotline (twice in the past) Sudnow DOES begin to call Schegloff again, and DOES attempt to contact him in person again. Thus there is a direct connection between postings on this hotline and the threats against Schegloff. Wittingly or not, posts to this hotline regarding this topic perpetuate threats against Schegloff. (Art, 2006, March 3, lines 11–14).

[2]   Note that it should neither be regarded entirely unaccountable, since it would not make sense to speak of some strip of activity as natural criticism if it could not be recognized as such for practical purposes.

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