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Reed, Darren J. [orcid.org/0000-0001-9018-0145](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9018-0145) (2017) Performance and interaction on Soundcloud: Social remix and the fundamental techniques of conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*. pp. 82-98. ISSN 0378-2166

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.01.012>

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## **Abstract**

This paper applies the analytic practices of conversation analysis to the visible activities on the music sharing site Soundcloud. Rather than ask whether Soundcloud interaction is more or less like talk, we understand it to be premised upon the combination of different ‘fundamental techniques’ (Manovich, 2007) of technology use and of conversational practice and structuring. Far from concurrent, audio presentation and textual comment are skilfully combined in the interface to form meaningful digital-material interaction through forms of what Goffman’s (1974) terms ‘layerings’ or laminations. A parallel is drawn between these ‘asynchronous’ activities and the practices of musical remix, or what we will call social remix.

In the case of Soundcloud one fundamental technique is the technology afforded creation of textual comments, which function in the interface as temporally and spatially positioned sequentially relevant next turns in relation to the musical performance. Here the working methods of naturalistic conversational interaction are transferred into the domain of online practices in a knowing way. Social remix speaks to opportunities for mundane or lay analytics, afforded by playback control and repeated listenings, and the knowing production and strategic deployment of members methods of sense-making for all practical purposes (Garfinkel, 1967).

We find through our analysis textual turns that function indexically as ‘single word assessments’, situated within the Soundcloud visualisation and act as immediate and spontaneous responses to the music, and ‘second assessments’ in which a second textual comment is sequentially linked to an earlier one without the need for temporal proximity. The ‘sequential integrity’ (Author, 2000) of these textual activities are actively achieved. Both ‘techniques’ are used to show up the skilled production of meaningful layered action and interaction.

## **1. Introduction**

This paper is concerned with social remix practice in the social media site Soundcloud ([www.soundcloud.com](http://www.soundcloud.com)). It is concerned with a normally forgotten aspect of remix, that of layering. Understood through Goffman’s (1974) term *lamination*, layering is positioned as a key element of ongoing sense-making practices, that aligns with a conversation analytic mentality rooted in the ethnomethodological notion of the hermeneutic spiral (Mehan & Woods, 1975).

Rather than ask whether Soundcloud interaction is more or less like talk, we understand it to be premised upon the combination of different ‘fundamental techniques’ (Manovich, 2013:25) of music production and presentation, and of conversational practice and structure. Specifically music

production rests on the ability to create layered sounds, and present them as a musical piece; musical presentation, in this case is afforded by the ability and opportunity to upload a musical piece to a social media platform, and have that piece (and portions of the piece) played by other participants, who can then add textual comments which are spatially positioned within a visual representation of the performance; conversation practice and structure is seen in the active construction of these textual comments as conversational turns at talk.

The term *social remix practice* indicates an interest in producing something more than a social commentary on remix, mashup, or culture as production and consumption. Instead the term indicates an appreciation of creative musical remix practice as emergent culture (van Dijck, 2013; Hallam & Ingold, 2007) at those points when performance meets social interaction. In particular it examines the moment when performance meets social interaction, when Soundcloud participants comment on compositions, and by doing so add layers of meaning to the original recording.

Social remix practice is implicated in what Lev Manovich (2013) calls 'deep remixability' (p. 25), or 'digital materialism' (Manovich, 2002, p. 10), the idea that digitisation not only allows for the separation and combination of content — sound, image, and text — but also allows for the transference of what the content's 'fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression' (Manovich, 2013, p. 110). This is seen when texts become 3D animations, sounds become visualised, and live action footage combines with computer generated materials. Manovich's deep remix aligns with Marshall McLuhan's (1967) distinction between figure and ground, where "figure" relates to content, and "ground" relates to the technology or technique that shapes that content. Further Manovich's transference of fundamental techniques is seen in the ways that ephemeral social action and interaction ("figure") become inscribed, recorded and archived through information communication technology ("ground") as digital traces; digital traces being the behavioural footprints left behind by human behaviour and machinic affordances.

The intention guiding this paper is to incorporate remix theory into an ethnomethodological and conversation analytic appreciation of the active production of temporality and sequentiality in the activities of the social media site. Conversation Analysis (CA) is formulated as the close examination, or micro-analysis, of contingent instances of emergent culture; in this case, seen in moments of performance and interaction online. At the same time CA can only be applied to the intricacies of ongoing social action and interaction. In this paper we explicitly appropriate the technical phenomenal terminology of CA to help detail the features of Soundcloud, rather than carry out a typical CA analysis of naturally occurring face-to-face interaction. Having said that, we would claim that the analysis is true to the fundamental principles of CA, and its 'analytic mentality' (Schenkein, 1978). As such the paper combines technology studies with performance studies through a concern

with social interaction and remix culture. It looks to differentiate between human agency and non-human agency by foregrounding the affordances of the software and the ways they combine with individual human actions to form sensible behaviours.

Conversation Analysis is an approach in Sociology that is concerned to reveal the social actions of actors. Premised upon the work of the late Harvey Sacks in the 1960s and 1970s CA is ‘the study of talk-in-interaction, the systematic analysis of the kind of talk produced in everyday naturally-occurring situations of social interaction’ (Hutchby, 2005, p. 55). Typically it is based on audio or video recorded interaction, which are transcribed with a specialised form of notation that details its produced qualities (including pauses, false starts, sound elongation, overlap, and the like) and the manner in which each speaking person delivers their talk in ‘turns’ developed by Gail Jefferson. While focussed on spoken language, it also includes an appreciation of embodied movements such as gestures (Streeck, 2009), gaze (Goodwin, 1981) and torso movements (Schegloff, 1998). Talk-in-interaction in these instances is extended to various other ‘actions’. While initially controversial, CA has also been applied to written language use (McHoul, 1982), and forms of online textual interaction (Stommel, 2008; Stommel & Meijman, 2011; Lester & Paulus, 2011; 2012) as a form of ‘digital CA’ (Giles, et al, 2015).

In good part this paper is concerned with the application of CA’s *analytic mentality*, to novel formats of communication technology. Schenkein (1978) details this mentality in speaking to studies that,

“ground their analytic concerns in detailed observations instead of preformed models; they are oriented toward conversation as an essentially interactional activity; they focus on the sequential emergence of turn-by-turn talk; they offer conceptual schemes for characterizing the interface between local context and abstract culture; they employ a standard transcript technology stimulating close attention to the productional details of conversational utterances; they share a commitment to building a nonintuitive descriptions of the phenomena under study; and they offer an array of finding on the organization and artfulness of natural conversation” (p.6).

The relationship between ‘local context and abstract culture’ can also be pursued at a material and technical level. So it could be said that naturalistic conversation is accomplished through the use of the body as technical artefact, in line with what Gibson (1979) calls its ‘affordances’ (p. 127). These technical affordances and constraints allow for rapid and immediate responses that are finely detailed (‘orchestrated’), sensitively responsive and ephemeral (Hutchby, 2005). One consequence is the requirement is to capture these ephemeral actions through recording and transcription.

More explicit affordances and constraints are apparent in technology mediated communications. Here the affordances of the medium mean that interaction is at a temporally and physically dislocated; yet actions are recorded, are permanent in some way, and are produced to be visually detailed and available for replay and re-examination. Early in the author's career it was argued that these features, seen in newsgroup interactions, provide a greater 'empirical warrant' for studying online interaction as technical objects; given that they come, in a sense, pre-transcribed, they do not suffer from accusations of interpretive selection and representation (Author & Ashmore, 2000; Ashmore & Author, 2000).

The relationships between social interaction and technological affordances as understood through CA is approached by Hutchby (2005). While much of his commentary and analysis is oriented to spoken interaction, he extends this appreciation of technological affordances to Internet Relay Chat (IRC), a form of textual interaction. While sequentiality is a normal aspect of spoken talk-in-interaction, in IRC the sequential relatedness of messages is 'achieved' by participants in creating (reading and writing) the posts, underpinned by the availability of a written permanent record of the various textual contributions. In this sense the 'next turn proof procedure' (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974:729) deployed in everyday spoken interaction - the idea that in a next turn a speaker shows understanding of the previous turn, and in some senses reflexively construes the meaning - is found to be a *resource* for the writer and reader alike. Expectations of 'what typically comes next' becomes a normative basis for adequate reading of the relevance of posts that are often separated and dispersed amongst other posts due to the constraints of the technology that results in sequential disruption in the produced textual record<sup>1</sup>. As such this work continues the authors doctoral work (Ashmore & Author, 2000; Author & Ashmore, 2000; Author, 2001; Author, 2009) and more recent interactionalist studies of text-based internet communication, but looks to use these motivations as a means to examine the methodological assumptions of those approaches.

## 2. Background

According to Kirby Fergusson, a New York based filmmaker and social commentator, 'everything is a remix' (<http://everythingisaremix.info>). In Rhythm Science in 2004, the academic and sound artist Paul D Miller claims that, "unlimited remix is the artistic and political technique of our time" (Miller, 2004, p. 11). Eduardo Navas (2012) provides a definition of remix culture as "the global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies that is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste" (Navas, 2012:65). We are less concerned, here, with these large-scale assertions, and more concerned with the incorporation of remix into an

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchby makes the valuable point that the written record only shows the publicly available actions - that are the consequence of using the software. The full activities of any participant - e.g. sitting in front of a screen, typing on a keyboard, screen gaze patterns - are omitted.

understanding of social interaction in online spaces. Yet, it is important to recognise the prevalence of remix culture in society, and the consequences for research into social practices.

To enable this focus, we turn to a more social appreciation of remix centred upon what Goodwin (1979; 2007) and others have called 'lamination' or layering. It is lamination that we see in the recording studio, as tracks are combined and intertwined, and it is through an examination of the concept of lamination that we can see the ways that social practices of commenting combine with the machinic affordance of replay in the music sharing social media site Soundcloud: 'recording' 'replaying' and 'layering' being the key dynamics of social interaction in this domain.

Social Remix is not merely a component of contemporary digital technologies, it is a component of social performance and intellectual life. Key to such performances is the communicative turn, the activity of mutual sense-making inherent in social interaction, and what Goffman (1983) calls the 'interaction order' (p. 1).

### ***Laminations and social remix***

Erving Goffman offers the term 'lamination' in *Frame Analysis*: "Given the possibility of a frame that incorporates rekeyings, it becomes convenient to think of each transformation as adding a layer or lamination to the activity" (Goffman, 1974:82). By way of example, Goodwin (1981) uses Goffman's term to talk about the anniversary: "[a]n anniversary is constructed via the lamination of events at two separate moments in time, an original event which becomes the object of celebration, and the anniversary itself" (p. 101).

Lamination also hints at forms of technical and social sedimentation, that are useful when understanding the accretion of comments in Soundcloud. Macbeth (1999), for example, uses the term to describe the cinematic shot: "The history of film studies is punctuated by treatments of the directed achievements of the cinematic shot, meaning those highly crafted sequences of continuous action that are the laminations of scripting, direction, acting and equipmental virtuosity" (MacBeth, 1999:135).

Finally lamination can be seen to be relevant to social remix, in terms of the manner in which social practice is itself an ongoing matter of sense-making in the hermeneutic spiral. In a text which combines ethnomethodology with phenomenology, Mehan and Wood (1975), based on Heidegger, outline the distinctive qualities 'interpretation' and 'understanding' as being the engines of meaningful social practice,

“This imagery places people within a spiral of meaningfulness. People create meaning, but the world comes to them independently of their interpretive activities ... I call this image of human being the ‘hermeneutic spiral’” (p. 194).

In more ethnomethodological terms the hermeneutic spiral is premised upon the indexical and reflexive citation and sedimentation of meaningful communicative interaction, which is itself premised upon the documentary method of sense making of Karl Mannheim (Mehan & Woods, 1975:145; Garfinkel, 1967:76).

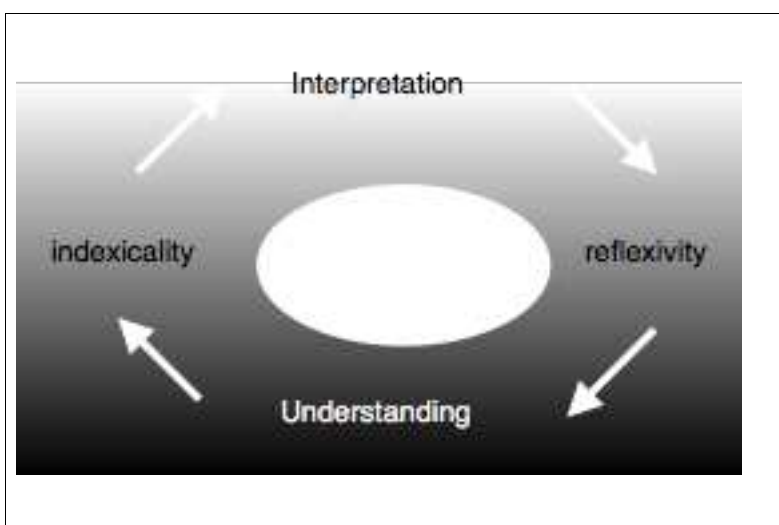


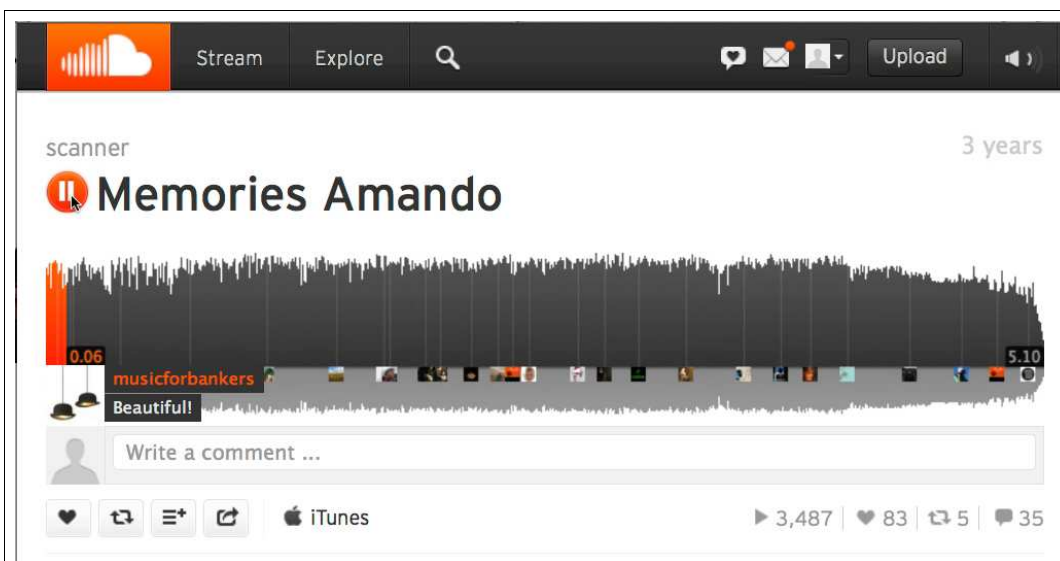
Diagram 1: The hermeneutic spiral (Author, 2009:4; Mehan & Woods, 1975)

The argument then is that these general principles of meaningful social action prefigure those practices in Soundcloud, and hence draw those technology mediated interactions back into a general theory of social life. Soundcloud is one more instance of the hermeneutic spiral, albeit with the added advantage of a reified product and record or those practices. Turning this idea round, we could say that ethnomethodology, at least those aspects inspired by the phenomenology of the hermeneutic spiral, is concerned with remix culture; its practices and procedures have from the start been oriented to revealing ethnomethods (or ‘fundamental techniques’) of remix in everyday life.

### 3. Analysis

The examples in the following analysis are taken from the Soundcloud pages of an artist called Scanner, real name Robin Rimbaud. Rimbaud is famous for live musical performances in the 1990s, in which he captured mobile phone and police radio conversations, and incorporated them into his live set. We follow the CA method of collections, wherein we present instances of similar interactional phenomenon to build a case for their analytic validity. Unlike CA we are working back from the formal

record (capture in the Soundcloud interface) to reveal a history of behavioural traces. That we don't have the original behaviours to hand, it could be argued, undermines any claim to be analysing 'naturalistic' human action and interaction. The counter argument says that these traces are exactly the resources used by humans to make sense of, and to, one another in an ongoing manner. In this sense we are being true to the social and technological context under investigation, and our findings, while not relevant to the 'imminent' experience of ongoing and unfolding social life, nevertheless have analytic value. These findings, we argue, complement those analyses of people in front of computer screens that capture individual 'interaction' with the device (Meredith & Potter, 2013). We will use two of his compositions to show some early analytic findings. This is a track by Scanner called "Memories Amando" (<https://soundcloud.com/scanner/memories>)<sup>2</sup>.



**FIGURE 1: SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 1 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

Soundcloud is a social media website on which participants post musical compositions. The site transforms the composition into a visualisation of a 'sound cloud'. The activity of first downloading and then playing the individual file is indicated by the cloud 'filling up' (seen in the diagram as an orange colour in the left hand end of the wave diagram) and progressing along a timeline from left to right. Participants play the composition and write text comments in the box below. As the participant presses the enter/return key, these comments are positioned spatially and temporally within the sound cloud as it plays on the next occasion. Subsequent participants experience both the original composition and the inserted comments. As they add their own text comments, these

<sup>2</sup> Please note, the data was extracted in 2014 and the interface for Soundcloud has subsequently been redesigned.



become part of the visual-aural experience. Each playing and commenting results in a layering, or lamination, of performance and comments.

Unlike a traditional performance in which the audience is co-located in space and time, and in which social convention prefers a simultaneous response, there is no space 'after' the performance in Soundcloud, and hence no opportunity for post-performance individual, or collective, receipt (through applause, for example).

In terms of CA such features and activities resist a simple understanding of sequential interaction, yet, as we will see, participants themselves are in the business of maintaining what I have called previously the 'sequential integrity' (Author, 2009:188; Author, 2001, see also Gibson, 2014) of the actions within the constraints of the communicative format.

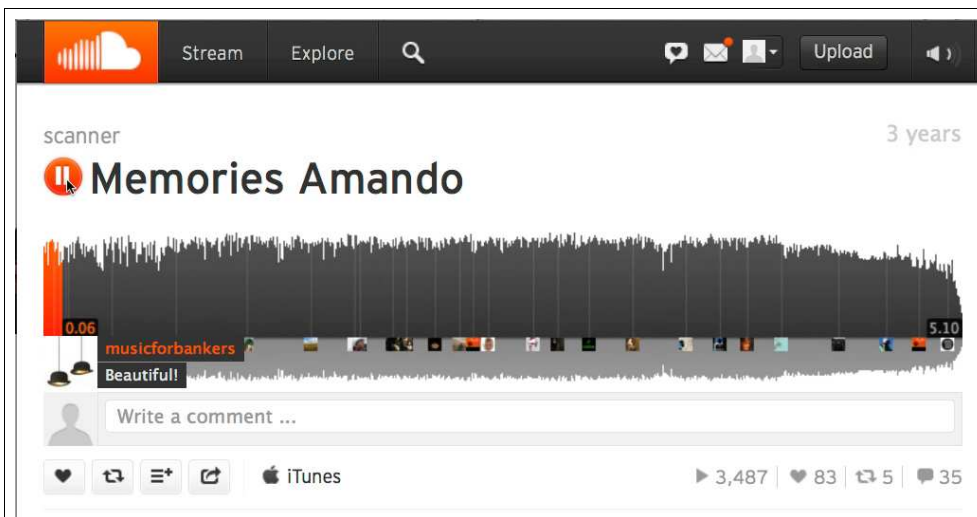
There are a variety of things that people do with comments: They might respond to the track; They might thank the creator of the track; They might reference their own pages. We are interested in a particular kind of comment, a discursive act that is called an 'assessment' in CA (inter alia Goodwin, C. & Goodwin, M. H., 1987; Antaki et al, 2000; Lindström & Mondada, 2009).

We are interested in the way assessments, or varieties of assessments, function to do different kinds of work: how they function to engender participant (or audience member) interaction; and in particular the way they convey spontaneous emotional response.

The following analysis gives examples of three basic kinds of assessments: 1. the single word assessment with and without additions, in relation to "doing spontaneity"; 2. music related or reference-latched assessments, that work through content referencing and visual positioning; and, 3. 'second assessments', in relation to the way they function sequentially in relation to first assessments, yet are temporally distal - that is (using a term from Computer Mediated Communication) produced 'asynchronously' (Garcia & Jacobs, 1999). This last assessment example will be used to pursue an examination of temporality and the engineered ('achieved') nature of sequentiality, by examining the date stamps on the comments, which are additionally listed in isolation from the Soundcloud visualisation.

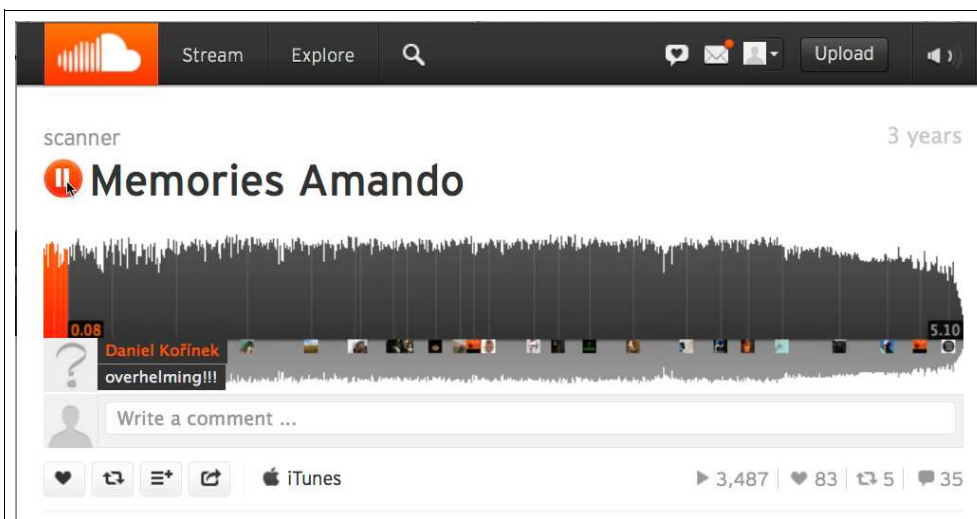
### ***Single-word assessments***

We start by looking at examples of single word assessments inserted into the Soundcloud visualisation of the music track 'Amando' by Scanner.



**FIGURE 2 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 2 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

After six seconds of music playback *musicforbankers* has inserted the text ‘Beautiful!’ (Figure 2). Two seconds later *Daniel Korinek* comments ‘overwhelming!!!’ (probably meaning overwhelming<sup>3</sup>)(Figure 3).



**FIGURE 3 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 3 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

Later in the track at one minute and forty-eight seconds *RUI RAIIO X* has inserted the text “nice” (Figure 4).

<sup>3</sup> Spelling mistakes are a regular aspect of participant comments, possibly because they are written quickly, and because there is no opportunity to edit comments once added.

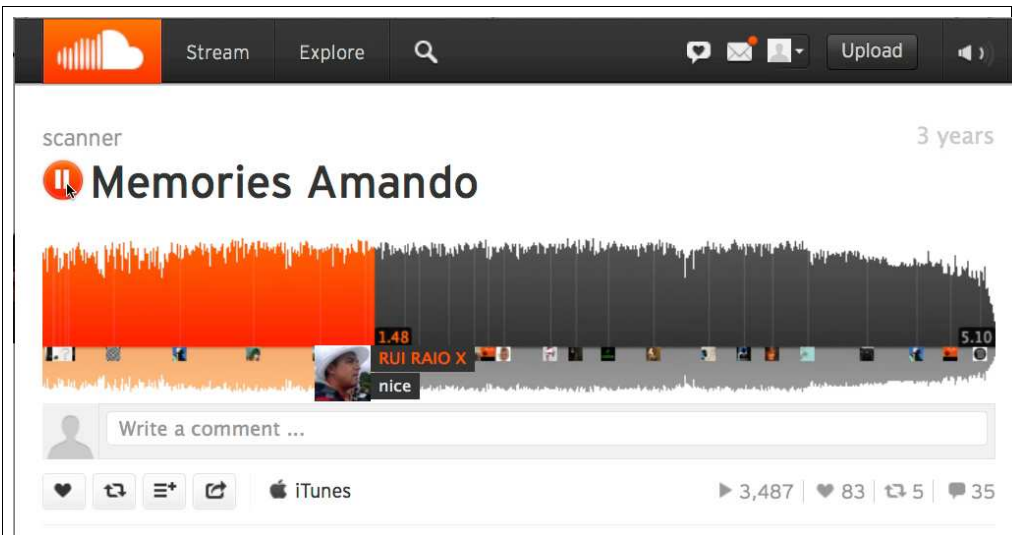


FIGURE 4 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 4 - MEMORIES AMANDO

At two minutes and twenty-one seconds, Paul Lewin writes the comments 'lush' (Figure 5).

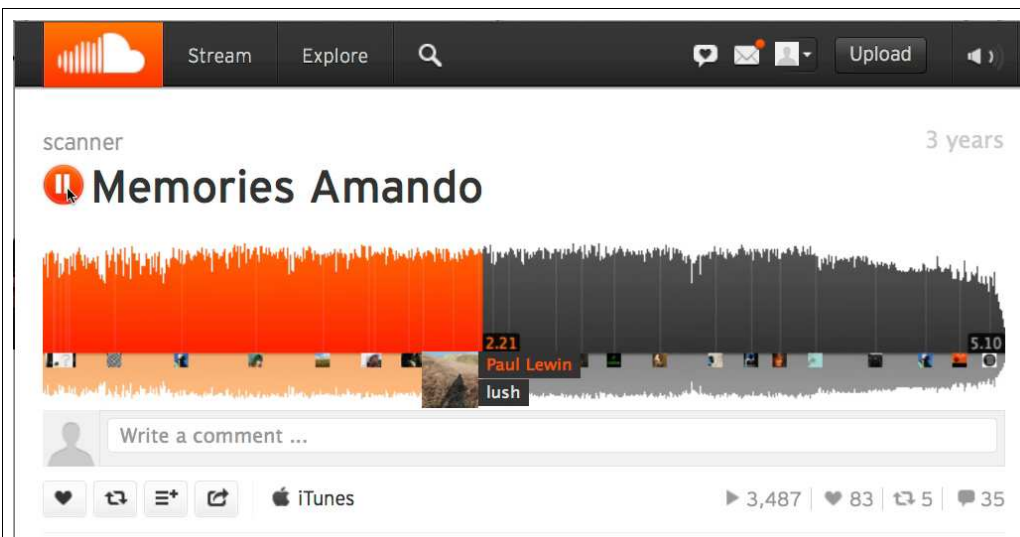
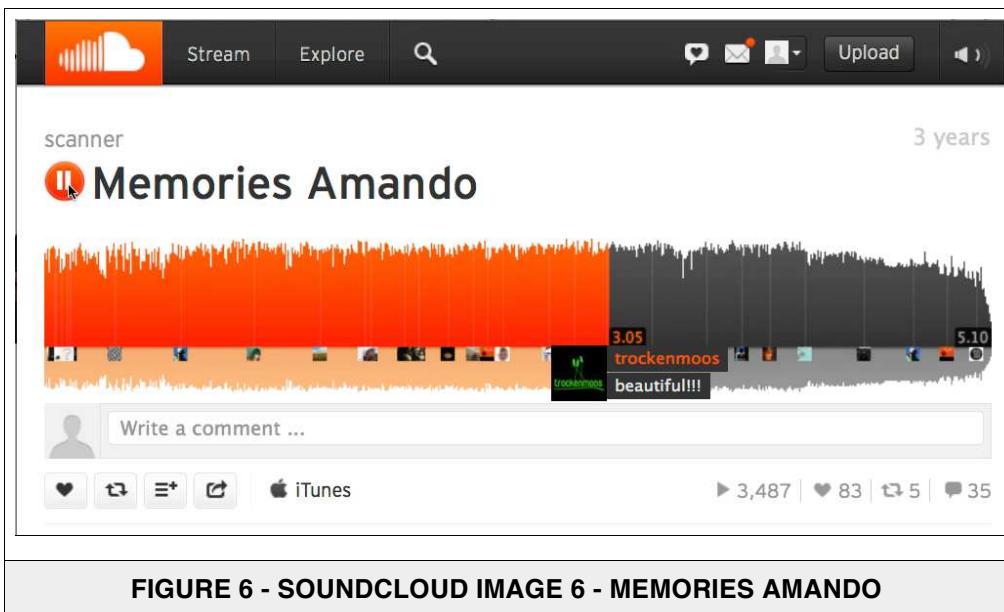


FIGURE 5 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 5 - MEMORIES AMANDO

At 3.05 trockenmoos has commented "beautiful" with three exclamation marks (Figure 6).



**FIGURE 6 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 6 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

In one sense these kinds of exclamations and evaluations are unremarkable. They can be seen as a form of what Goffman (1981) calls ‘response cries’. More typically a form of self-talk in everyday life, they nevertheless implicate a form of emotional expression. Goffman describes them as ‘exclamatory interjections ... We see such ‘expression’ as a natural overflowing, a flooding up of previously contained feeling, a bursting of normal restraints, a case of being caught off guard” (p. 99). They occur routinely in both spoken and written language.

A key feature of these kinds of assessments is their indexical character. That is they are entirely dependent upon their context of use for their sense and reference (in this case, visually in the temporal and spatial position in which they are situated in the Soundcloud, and aurally, in relation to the progression of the musical sound). If we were to examine the textual turn in isolation quite what is being assessed is unknown, and therefore the valance of the exclamation is ‘empty’ in and of itself, if it is not indexed by the preceding social context. It is a shortcoming of a textual format such as a journal article that it is not possible to play the segment of music preceding the assessment so that the reader can situate the textual comments in the musical recording. However readers are directed to the relevant Soundcloud page (by searching Soundcloud for ‘Memories Amando’).

The inserted single-word assessments ‘nice’, ‘lush’ or ‘beautiful’ act as ‘situated’ assessments, in the sense that they are positioned on the time line by the participant. Such assessments act to construct something like an embodied or visceral response, that is somewhat similar to Wiggin’s (2002) notion of pleasure construction in talk about food, specifically in what she calls the gustatory mmm assessment utterance. Here the utterance ‘mmm’ is produced in social situations involving

food consumption. In food assessment she tells us, “the gustatory mmm highlight[s] three key features of pleasure construction: immediacy, spontaneity, and vagueness” (p.322).

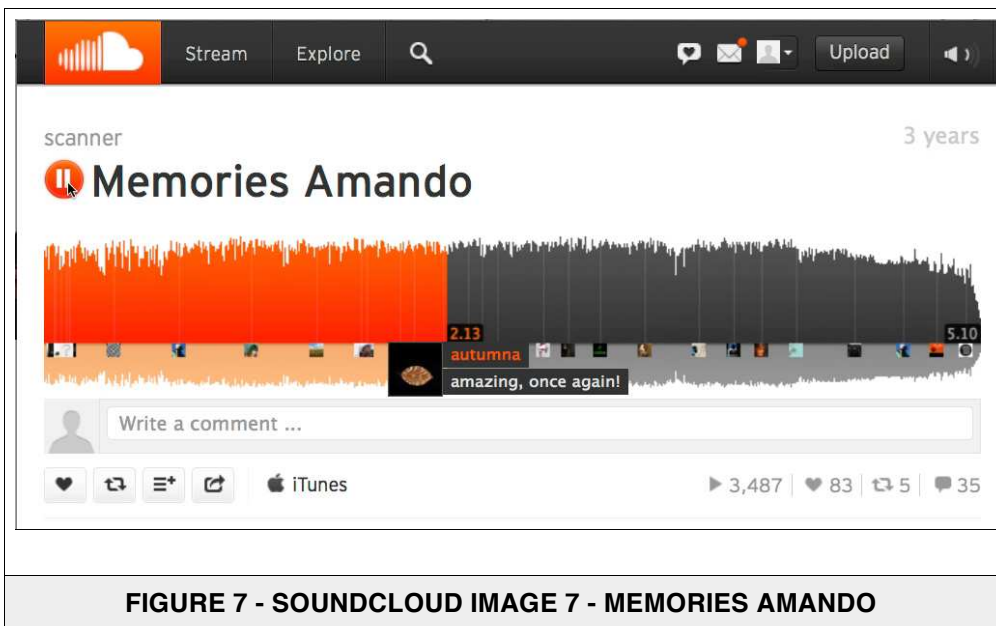
Gustatory mmms are deployed, and accepted, as complete turns at talk, and positioned strategically within mealtime interaction, such as during what Mondada (2009) calls the ‘discovery phase’ of the meal, when the food is served up or given out. Gustatory mmms are also used when the conversation ‘runs dry,’ or as a means to curtail and avoid conflict or argument (Wiggins, 2002). Wiggins identifies pleasure responses (“mmm”) and disgust markers (“eugh”, “yuck”) as a form of response cry and notes that they tend to be ‘turn initial’, occurring at the beginning of a speaker’s turn. They are often produced alone, or followed by a minimal phrase (see later).

We can see these qualities of immediacy spontaneity and vagueness in the use of words such as “beautiful” “nice” and “lush”, which do not reference particular elements of the composition directly, but work to convey emotional engagement. They are set alone, (often) contain few letters, include emphasis through exclamation marks, and convey a rushed activity through things like spelling mistakes. More particularly in relation to the presentation of a musical piece, they attain their meaning through their positioning and situated-ness within the Soundcloud graphical interface.

### ***Single word assessment with additions***

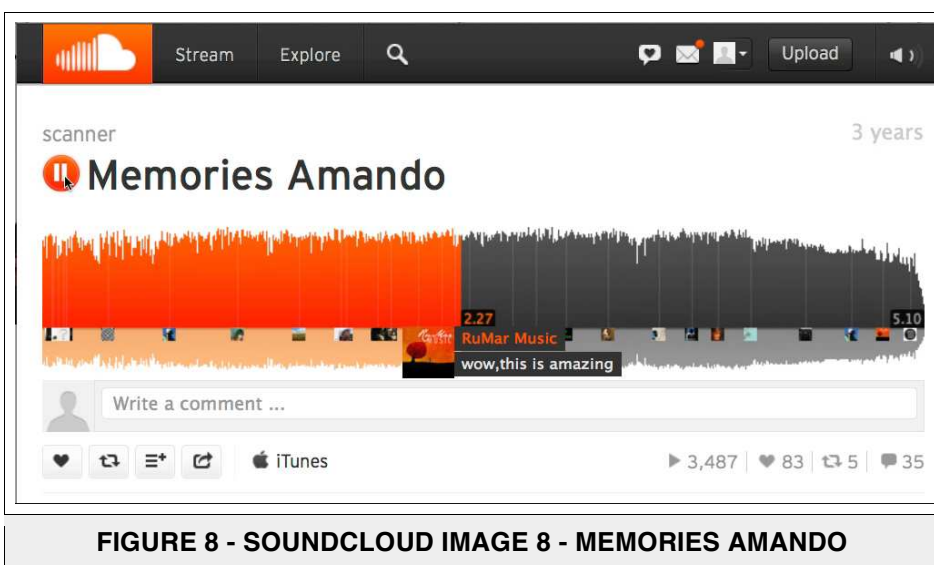
Single-word assessments are also combined with further text, or what we might call additions or extensions, and note, taking a line from Goffman (1981), that they engender a change of ‘footing’ (p. 111). In Goffman’s analysis of response cries he notes the spoken phrase ‘I knew it! Did you have to?’ is comprised of of two ‘moves’: a form of ‘self-talk’ in the first sentence, and a form of ‘conventionally directed communication’. It is this second element that warrants a second turn (or ‘dialogue’ or ‘interchange’). In CA, we might say that while the expressive turn may stand alone as a single utterance, and implicate no second turn, the second element produced as an assessment implicates a second assessment.

Usually additions are noted through punctuation, either a comma, full-stop or a semi-colon. We have a couple of examples in the Scanner track. At 2.13 autumnna writes “amazing, once again!” (Figure 7).

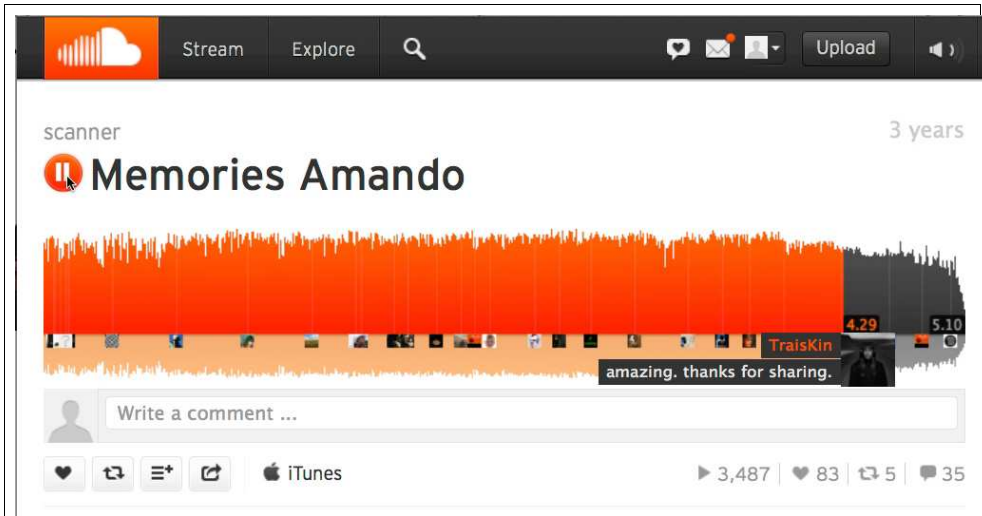


Note first that there is no reason for the comma, the phrase “amazing once again” would work without it. Spoken out loud, the comma implies a rest and parses the textual utterance as having two elements. Cutting the comment up with a comma puts ‘amazing’ first and sets it up as a one-word assessment which is still immediate, spontaneous, and vague, but then provides emphasis through the imputed earlier positive experience of this, or another, track with ‘once again!’.

At times what might be a single-word assessment elsewhere gets incorporated into an addition. Here we see RuMar Music start with a single-word assessment ‘wow’, but then add ‘this is amazing’ (Figure 8).

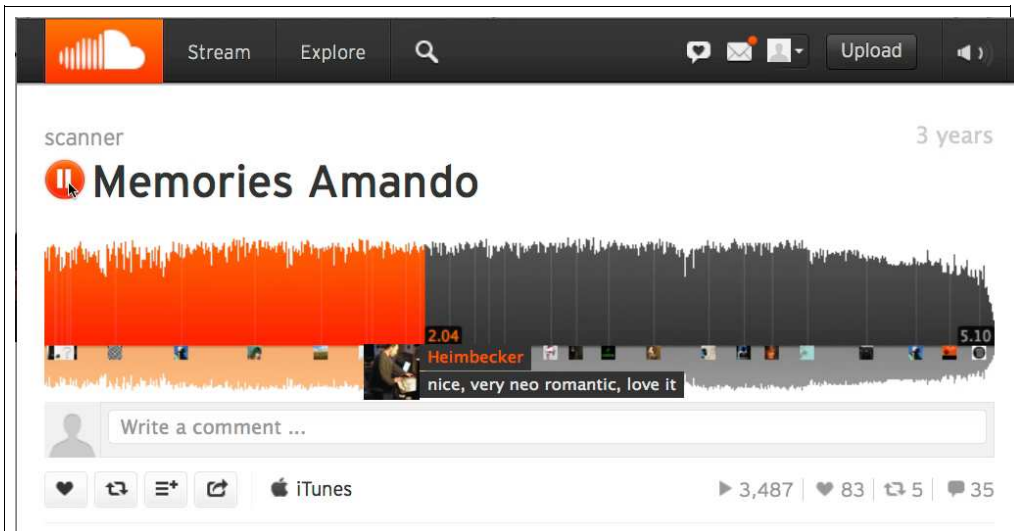


TraisKin's "amazing. thanks for sharing" (Figure 9) works slightly differently. Again it contains a single-word assessment 'amazing', but this time the second section stands alone and acts as a new statement addition rather than a continuation, clarification or amplification of the assessment.



**FIGURE 9 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 9 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

At 2:04 Heimbecker's "nice, very neo romantic, love it" (Figure 10) has a three part structure, starting with a single-word assessment, followed by a clarification, and then what we might call a general statement assessment 'love it'. We haven't time to look at this type of phrase, but there are a few of them in this clip, including 'lovely stuff', 'great work' and 'beautiful stuff'.



**FIGURE 10 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 10 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

To see how these general statements assessments do not ‘do spontaneity’, consider how the comments by Bakenshake at 1.46: “This is niiiiice. I love it.” (Figure 11) works through the extended nice, with the additional vowels, indicating emphasis through an extended spoken-like phonetic extension, but it does not read as an immediate visceral response.

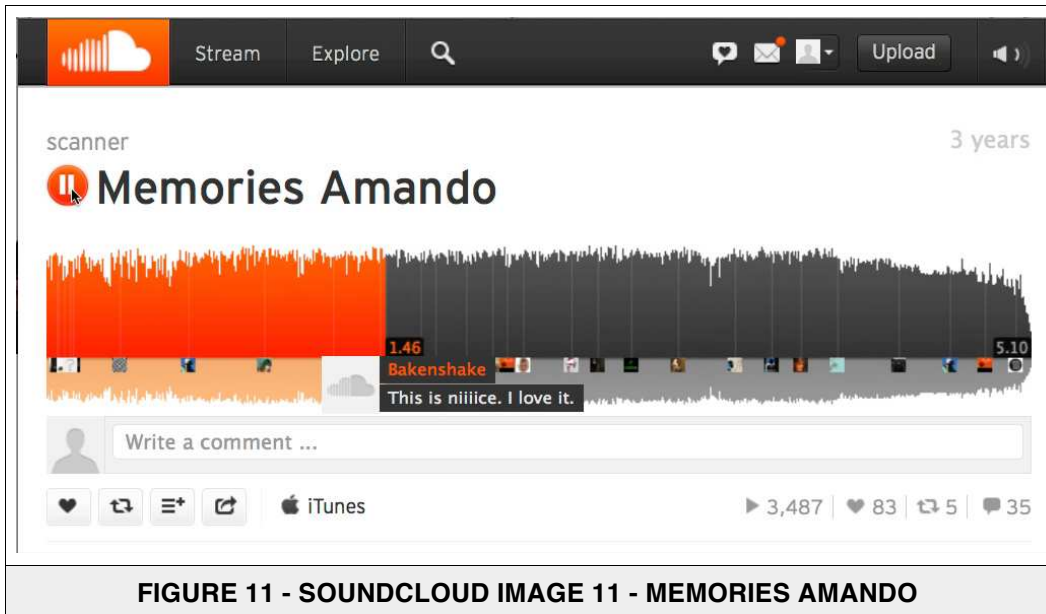


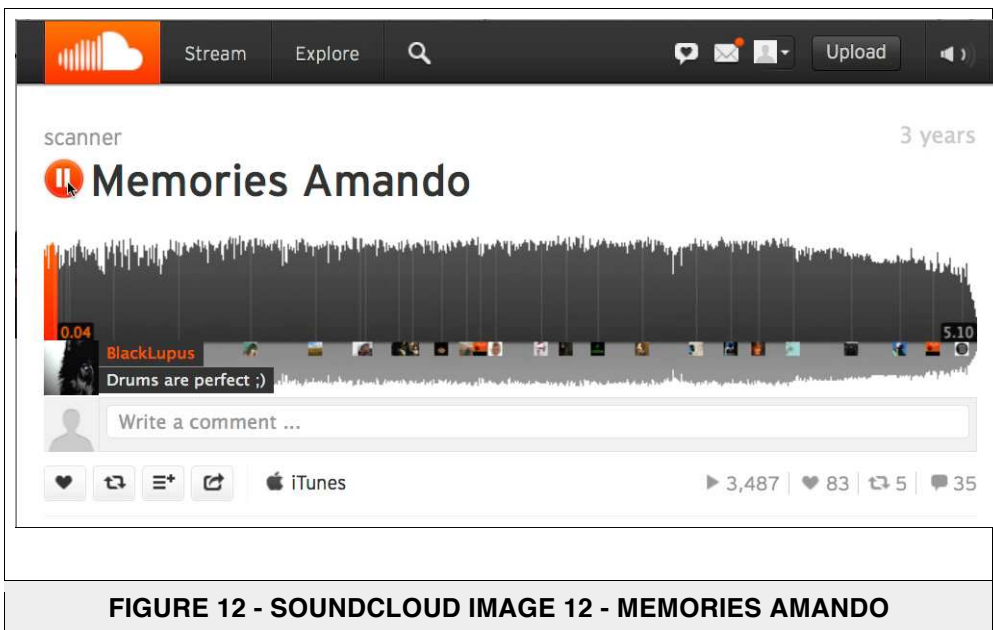
FIGURE 11 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 11 - MEMORIES AMANDO

These texts do not stand alone of course, they are embedded in the visualisation, and hence associated with the music. We want to make then a general point: single word assessments can act as a spontaneous expressive act, and in this way form single instances of participant engagement that do not necessarily warrant a follow-on turn. As we will see in the later analysis, the addition of an assessment element that changes the footing of the comment can implicate a following turn, formed as an agreement or disagreement. Before moving on to show these ‘second assessment’, we wish to detail one further in

### ***Referent-latched assessments***

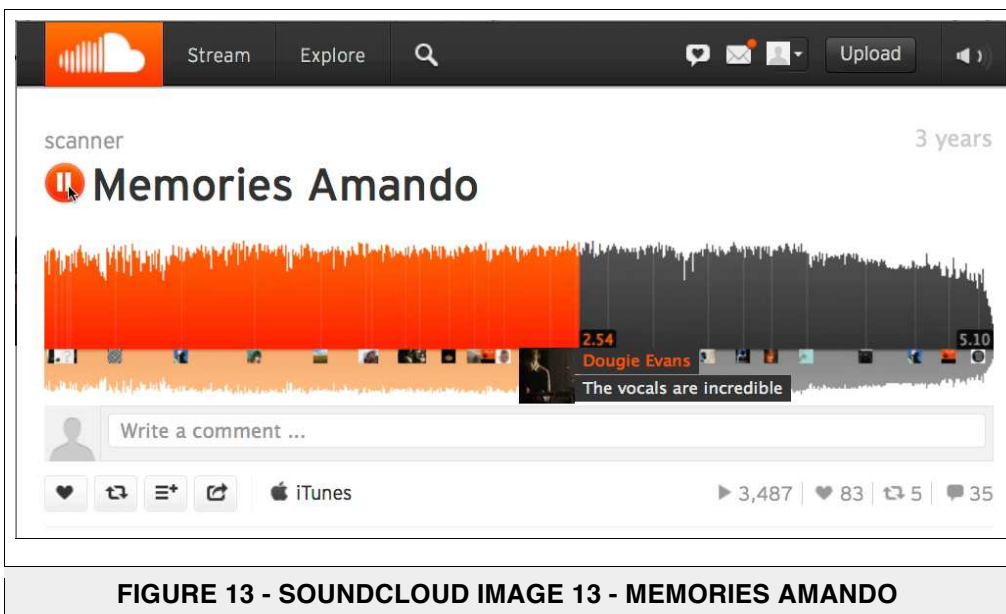
As we have already noted is not easy to make claims about their relationship to the music. However there are some assessment comments that specify aspects of the music, and hence the relationship is easier to see. We call these referent-latched assessments; but note we are not giving up on the idea that the single-word assessments and the assessments with additions, are not situated in some sense and hence arguably located, merely that there is a class of assessments that do work to situate themselves and make themselves relevant to particular aspects of the composition.





**FIGURE 12 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 12 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

We see right at the beginning of the Soundcloud the comment by BlackLupus of “Drums are perfect ;)” (Figure 12). This refers to the drum track that is hearable from the beginning of the track. [We must ask what naming the drums does in this case.](#)



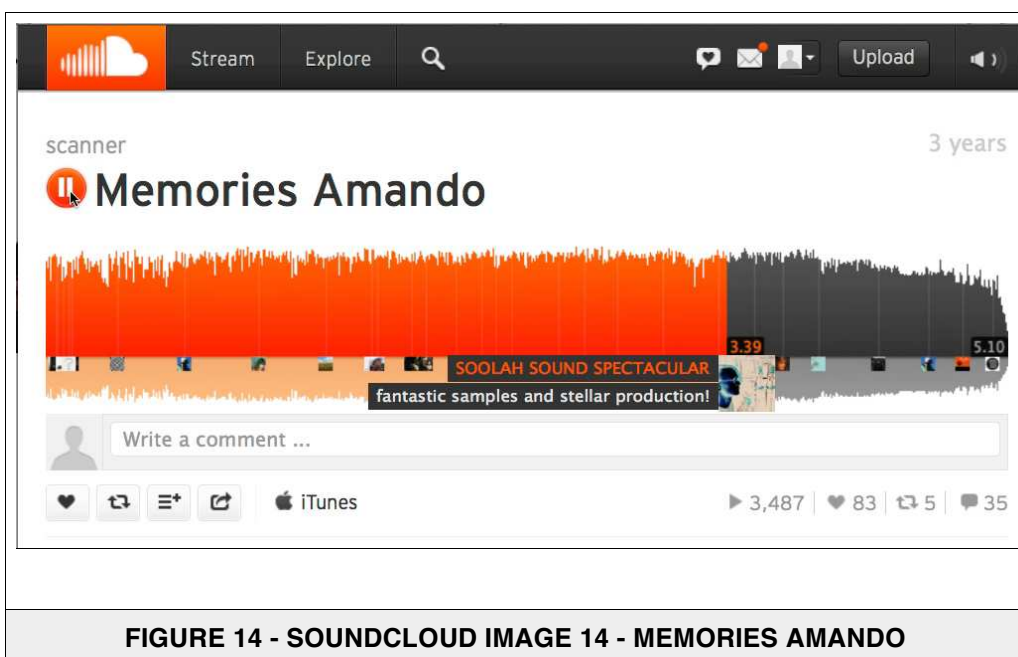
**FIGURE 13 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 13 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

Later there is a sample of an operatic voice incorporated in the mix. Dougie Evans comments “The vocals are incredible” (Figure 13).

The comments of both Blacklupus and Dougie Evans are music related. That is they refer to aspects of the musical composition. In these cases, however, the referenced elements are not specific to a

moment in the composition because the drums and the voice continue for a period of time. Unlike the single word assessments shown earlier, that locate the emotional expressive act at a particular point, the comments about the composition more generally are not reliant upon a specific placement within the Soundcloud timeline graphic for their relevance. They are therefore what we might call forms of 'generic assessment' that stand back from the productional detail and form a type of 'review' of the musical piece.

However we would like to finish on an instance of generic assessment which we argue is situated at a particular moment in the visualisation of the musical piece, the moment when the musical aspect commented on reappears or restarts, and is 'seeable' in the soundcloud visualisation.



**FIGURE 14 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 14 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

Soola Sound Spectacular writes 'fantastic samples and stellar production' (Figure 14). This is a comment about something more than the content of the musical composition, it is about the activity of composing, using the notion of 'samples' and 'production' to show epistemic access (ref). These being technical terms used to describe the copying of sounds ('sample') and technique of musical mixing ('production') respectively.

The comment is positioned immediately after the sampled voice returns to the track. To hear this we would need to play the segment of music. However, we can also see it because the lack of the vocal track and accompanying instrumentation reduces the volume of the track, and hence change the sound wave representation (note the dip in the cloud graphic immediately before the inserted comment).

As with pointing and other forms of deixis in embodied interaction, the referent of the situated assessment is entirely contingent upon the common perspective of listener and commenter in relation to the composition. It is indexical. To understand its focus we too have to be listening to the music.

Pointing is also reflexive in that the object is construed in activity, made perceptually relevant through the documentary method which comprises the hermeneutic spiral. Pointing at something, simultaneously constructs the thing as object to be pointed at, and makes it available for further scrutiny. 'That thing there' becomes an object through the lamination of the participant comment over the musical performance.

### ***Second assessments***

The second form of assessment extends from this point about the reflexively construed referent. All the comments we have looked at could be seen as first assessments in the terminology of CA, which by their nature make relevant a second assessment, or agreement or disagreement. However as we have noted, certain assessments constructed as response cries, spontaneous expressions of emotional response, do not necessarily implicate a second assessment because they are not produced as a form of 'directed communication'.



**FIGURE 15 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 15 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

At twenty-three seconds into the Soundcloud visualisation a participant with an ascii face for a name writes "pretty damn cool; it makes we want to move" (Figure 15). This is a two part assessment, with a general statement assessment before the semi-colon and the addition of a clarification in the second half. Twenty-two second later at 0.45 (Figure 16), Ambient Shane writes "Very cool indeed,

great vibe going on here robin- TUNE :)”. At the point of collection there were no other comments in between these two and hence as a person plays the piece the two comments are experienced sequentially in the timeline.

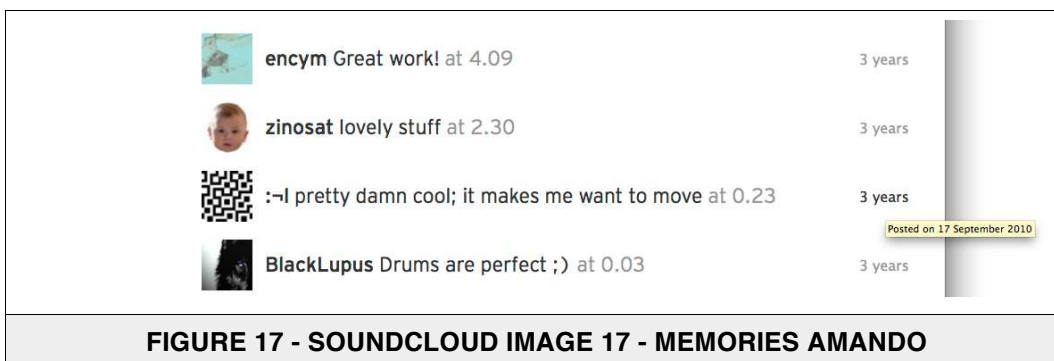


**FIGURE 16 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 16 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

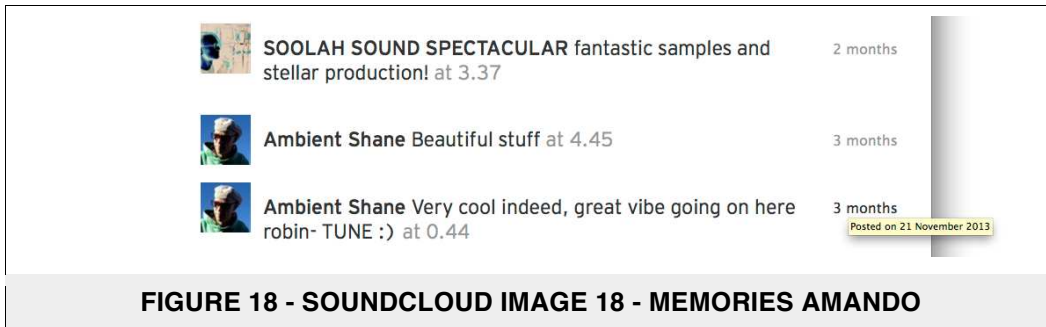
Ambient Shane’s upgrade of ascii’s “pretty damn cool” to “very cool indeed” is a very typical move in second assessments which simultaneously have a preference structure of agreement with positive assessments with the use of an ‘intensifier’ modification ‘very’, used to upgrade the assessment (Pomerantz, 1984:65).

There is a distinction to be had between the *creation* of the comment, i.e. the moment in time the user wrote the comment and embedded it in the Soundcloud visualisation, and the design of the comment, i.e. the content and positioning of the comment in the visualisation.

The Soundcloud site allows for the presentation of the comments in a list, which includes the date of production (seen when hovering the mouse over the comments). If we look at the first and second assessment in our first example we see that ascii’s “pretty damn cool” was written on the 17th September 2010 (Figure 17), while the upgraded second assessment, by Ambient Shane, was written on 21st November 2013, over three years later (Figure 18).

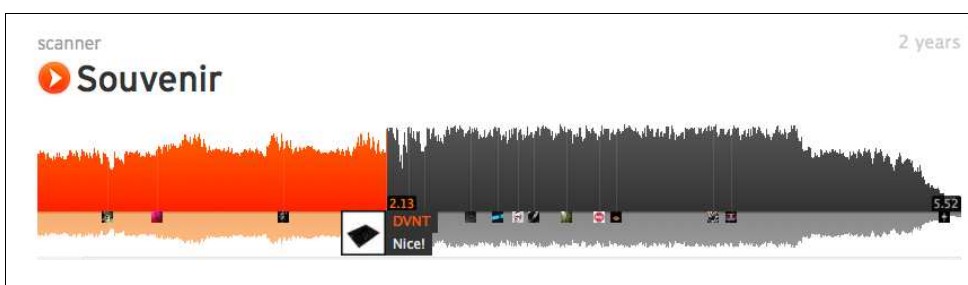


**FIGURE 17 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 17 - MEMORIES AMANDO**

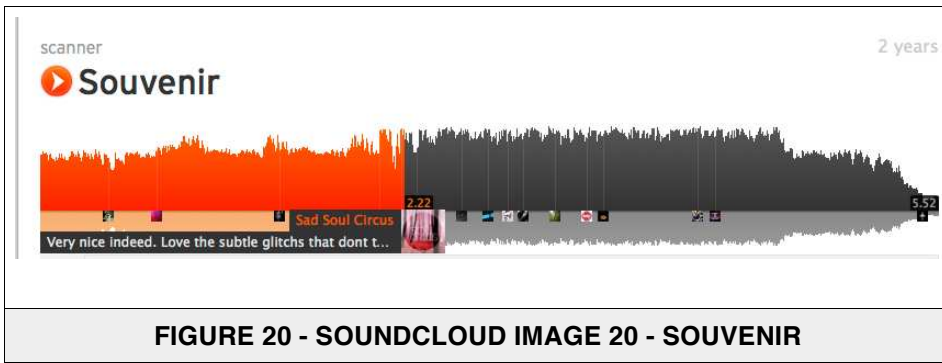


Our argument is this: the two comments are topically related and while not produced in a temporally proximate manner, are hearably related in that they are produced and positioned in relation to one another to be heard as ‘turns at talk’. Developing the argument about ‘sequential integrity’ (Author, 2009), we argue that the members’ methods of verbal conversational turn-taking are knowingly transposed into the textual format. Textual comments are created to be not only ‘speech-like’ but also ‘conversation-like’; they are actively produced not only in terms of the form of language used, but also in relation to the structure of social interaction.

Here is another example of a first and second assessment. It is taken from another track by Scanner called ‘Souvenir’. At two minutes and thirteen seconds a participant called DVNT comments “Nice!”, a single-word assessment, indexical and visually positioned music related assessment in that it requires the musical performance for its meaning and referent (Figure 19). Nine second later in the Soundcloud visualisation, Sad Soul Circus contributes “Very nice indeed.” (2.22 seconds). Here the upgrade is accomplished through two intensifier elements positioned before and after the repeated assessment of ‘nice’ (Figure 20) (<https://soundcloud.com/scanner/souvenir>).



**FIGURE 19 - SOUNDCLLOUD IMAGE 19 - SOUVENIR**



**FIGURE 20 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 20 - SOUVENIR**

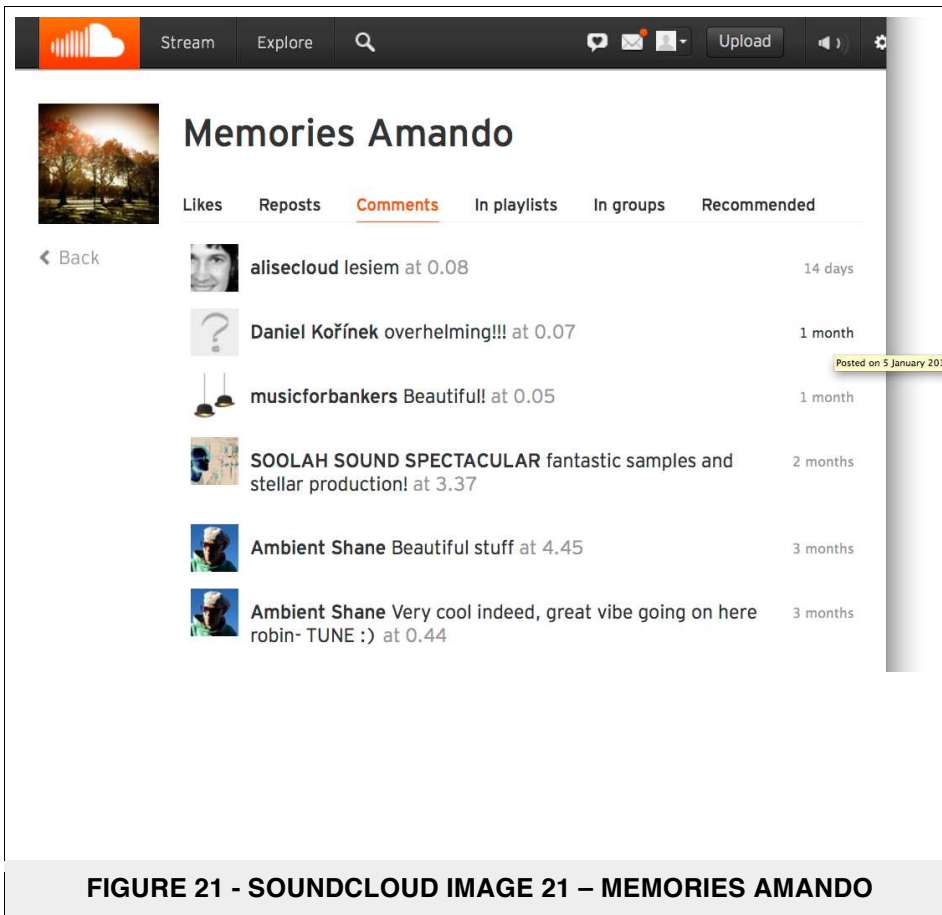
The production of a first assessment followed by a second assessment, we might say, is unsurprising and a routine action in talk-in-interaction. However we need to be clear that the presentation of the comments in this way is an *accomplishment*, born of the knowing manipulation of the technological affordances of the Soundcloud application. Its visual recording and accessibility in the Soundcloud visualisation for future participants is a matter of human agency 'before' the screen. This brings to mind the human user of the computer or smart phone, and their perceptions, motivations, and interactions with the application.

One consequence of this form of representation is that the Soundcloud visualisation obscures the production of the comments in various ways. We might say that it 'black boxes' the 'offline' human activities (Latour, 1999). Blackboxing is,

"the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become" (Latour, 1999:304).

Latour talks of the success of technology, however, in this case we might talk also about the invisibility of the human in front of the screen, when thinking about computer mediated communication (see Meredith & Potter, 2013 for a CA approach to online/offline analysis. Also, see Kaerlein, 2013).

As we have shown above, we cannot see from the visualisation when the comments were actually produced. The primary visualisation provides for their spatial positions within the soundcloud of the composition. An alternative is to look at their real time temporal relationships, as in the above example.



As we have seen accompanying each Soundcloud is a list of the comments made, listed by time stamp in days, months or years. By hovering the cursor over the date stamp we get the exact day that the comment was created. So for example, the incorrectly spelled “overwhelming” produced by Daniel Kofinek, in our earlier example, was written 1 month before the date it was collected, on the 5th of January, 2014.



The comment by musicforbankers, which occurs 2 seconds earlier in the Soundcloud visualisation than that by Daniel Korinek, at 0.05, was written the day before on the 4th of January. In this case the temporal ordering of the composition on the visualisation is consistent with the real time temporal ordering. On one day, one person contributes a comment, on the next day someone contributes



another comment, but positions it a couple of second later in the Soundcloud visualisation. However, there are often greater temporal discrepancies.



**FIGURE 23 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 23 – MEMORIES AMANDO**

If we look at our second example again, “Nice” by DVNT, it was written on the 29th November 2011 (Figure 23), while the upgraded second assessment, positioned eight seconds later, in the soundcloud by Sad Soul Circus was written on the 22nd December 2011 (figure 24). The temporal orderings are consistent but there is a greater gap of twenty three days.



**FIGURE 24 - SOUNDCLOUD IMAGE 24 – MEMORIES AMANDO**

As we can see from the comments list, they were not written consecutively in real time. Other participants contributed comments in between. Indeed this is a potential problem for visualisation; in theory it is possible for another participant to interrupt the (visually) ‘produced’ sequentiality of two message at any later stage. There is, therefore, an underlying affordance of visual sequential disruption in Soundcloud. Obviously the greater the temporally represented period between comments, the greater opportunity for intervening comments to appear.

As we have seen ascii’s “pretty damn cool” (0.23) was written on the 17th September 2010, while the upgraded second assessment, by Ambient Shane, was written on 21st November 2013 (0.44), over three years later. Again, there are no intervening comments at the point when the data was collected.

### ***Sequential Integrity in Soundcloud***

When sequentiality is implicated, as with a second assessment, sequentiality and temporality have a relationship, with the second assessment written some time after the first assessment. However such relationships are far from universal, with comments early in the Soundcloud visualisation written a long time after those positioned later. We might say that there is an *order relationship* with first and



second assessment, but that the close sequential relationship is a matter of interactional work. Namely a combination of an appropriately written comment (as upgrade for example) and its deliberate positioning immediately following the first assessment.

If there is too large a space we do see inserted comments between first and second assessments, which opens up the possibility that we have already been looking at just such an instance of 'produced' sequentiality but have ignored it because of intervening comments and the lack of obvious topicality and comment construction. It is not something we can deal with here; the phenomenon will be considered in future analysis.

## **Discussion**

### ***Remix Culture as practice/praxis***

Remix culture is understood to extend from the affordances of technology. In music production the separation of musical tracks, and the possibilities for addition, omission and re-arrangement, mean that the same musical elements can be recombined in numerous ways. In intellectual life, the ongoing construction of meaning through citation, quotation, and summary means that while knowledge is produced anew, such productions are accomplished as forms of remix. Arguably language has always functioned this way. Any given sentence is only the selective reordering of words from an available vocabulary. Fergusson's assertion that 'everything is a remix' is typically founded upon the digital turn in media production. However such moves tend to ignore the underlying distinctions between content and form, or content and technological format. Manovich's deep remix speaks to the opportunities for transferring one underlying logic onto another type of media.

This paper has looked to apply a conversation analytic mentality to Soundcloud interaction as a means to address the way that participation is a layered process. That comments are inserted into the visualisation of the performance piece means that they are available on every next viewing and as such constitute a new performance object - one that carries with it accumulated or sedimented responses.

Such arrangements disrupt the typical temporal ordering of performance and receipt, and also disrupt the typical notion of a 'remix'. By introducing the concept of 'social remix practice' this paper attempts to foreground a form of remix culture that is a consequence of the ongoing, and 'emergent' nature of cultural production. Yet at the same time social remix practice speaks to the formation of a new performance artefact that is different on each next occurrence. If remix practice is a key dynamic of creative and intellectual social life then the social remix practice afforded by Soundcloud is one mundane instance of when a cultural performance is remixed and refigured through social action.

### ***Affordances of Soundcloud***

The Soundcloud application is a moment of social and technological assemblage. The social actions made possible by Soundcloud are cultural in the sense that they engender a form of shared practice and understanding, and Soundcloud is cultural in the sense that it allows for the production of new cultural artefacts underpinned by a particular set of social and aesthetic values. Arguably this is entirely novel, but at the same time it relies on the existing foundations of contemporary social action, social structure and cultural formats. The novelty of Soundcloud is seen in the manner in which social actions combine and form social meaning. They are seen in the potential for particular actions of engagement and meaning production.

Social Interaction is captured and manipulated in Soundcloud. What is normally ephemeral and momentary becomes inscribed in laminations of meaning. Social practices become digital traces. Unpacking these traces takes analytic work by participants, the kind of analytic work that conversation analysis does.

Novelty is rooted in the way in which interaction in Soundcloud involves two main temporal orderings:

- (i) the 'real-time' ordering of comments, and
- (ii) the 'composition-time' ordering of who is perceived to comment when in the spatial representation of the song.

Composition time ordering is essentially ironic. It is a produced and accomplished representation of conversation-like relatedness.

The activities of assessment, and the reflexive constitution of referents in the musical composition, through spontaneous emotional response, reference to musical content, and reference to structural elements of composition itself, reconfigure and combine with the original composition performance in an ongoing manner.

Social remix practice, then, includes these opportunities for creative engagement with different temporal orderings. The reinstatement of sequential relatedness, and the opportunity to respond as though spontaneously and emotionally engaged are a consequence of the affordances of the software.

### ***Fundamental techniques of conversation***

Garcia & Jacobs (1999) focus on new communication technology formats and how they change the nature of turn-taking. They introduced the term 'quasi-synchronous' communication to describe forms of communication that are 'conversation-like' but plainly were not produced by participants at the same time. We might include their analysis in a description of the way that users of communication technologies transfer and translate conversational practices and structures onto new, and potentially disruptive, opportunities for social interaction.

In Soundcloud the participant is able to interact with a musical composition in an asynchronous manner; comments can be days, months, or even years apart. Yet participants can interact with other participants in a pseudo-sequential manner, that links a comment to the performance, and one comment to another, in ways that express temporal relatedness and meaningful interaction. That these linkages are accomplished through existing formats of assessment formation and turn-design, shows up not only the creative and emergent nature of interactional relatedness but also the fundamental techniques of conversational structuring.

The analysis has identified the use of first assessments, as spontaneous expressions of emotion response that are indexically linked to the musical performance and visual representation, and second assessments that are designed to be linked to first assessments, through the use of upgraded assessment constructions. In that the first assessments are indexical, and tied to the particular contextual features of the performance; second assessments are simultaneously a product of the affordances of the software and the affordances of conversational norms and practices. In that these are accomplished, they are noticeably 'known' techniques of sense-making. Indeed the etymological roots of technique (techné) holds the clue to the combination of technology, itself, sharing etymological roots with technique, and conversational praxis as technique. The 'socio-technical' nature of social life expressed as different technical affordances and craft skills (Sterne, 2006).

### ***Methodological developments***

The analytic strategy deployed in this paper could be perilous. Simultaneously it could be rejected by CA and more mainstream discourse analysis as falling between two stools, neither conceptually bound, nor rigorous analytic of ongoing behaviour and activities. To this potential range of criticisms we can only argue that there is value to the analysis and that there are good reasons to make such choices.

In the following section we lay out a couple of more epistemological arguments that underpin this methodological reasoning, and outline its value for methodological development.

It is argued that CA returns to the original behaviour on each occasion of analytic work. The argument is that the transcript is a proxy for this behaviour, and enables the analyst in combination with a video or audio recording to re-examine repeatedly the actual imminent, emergent, actions and interactions. Yet this claim is questionable. Firstly the recording is of course not a complete record, and even if it were, it is still a set of 'traces' of that original, whether captured on magnetic tape, in the case of early recordings, or reified through the chemical reactions that occur as light hits film. The original behaviour is always left behind. Further, audio or video recordings are perspectival in the phenomenological sense and only 'hear' and 'see' certain aspects from a certain direction and perspective. Thirdly, in line with MacBeth's comments earlier, the recording device is implicated in a complex set of technological and social entanglements, from the quality and range of the microphone, through the durability of the tape, or digital storage, to the presentation of the recordings through headphones, computer speakers, and classroom based audio visual equipment. To ignore these processes of production is to ignore exactly those aspects of the social-technical assemblage that make analysis possible. CA relies on these forms of technology based affordances. Arguably, recording, transcribing, analysis, and presentation are forms of remix.

Secondly the choices made in the transcription of the activity are far from neutral. They prioritise the 'view' of the reader and are based on conventional forms of representation. A simple example is the manner in which verbal pauses are presented in transcripts. For many years these were represented by numerical figures - for example 0.2 would indicate two-tenths of a second. This character-based representation came into question with the addition of embodied behaviours that would not only 'fill' those pauses but which also progress and change through those pauses. The move to present pauses as a series of dashes, enabled the representation analysis of gaze alignment movement, or gesture as they are produced. Now, it could be argued that the use of numerical figures obscured and indeed undermined the notion of ongoing continuous behaviour. A number of famous analytic efforts have turned to the idea of pauses in talk as pauses in behaviour. But of course the participants' hearts didn't stop beating, they didn't stop breathing, or moving, or standing. The selection of a particular form of representation lead to the opportunities for particular kinds of analytic findings. Transcript are far from neutral representations. Instead, we would argue, they are analytic technologies, and the conventions are analytic techniques.

Such concerns and their rejection or avoidance can be traced back to a famous argument in ethnomethodology instigated by a high profile, influential, and highly regarded academic called Melvin Pollner (1991). He made the point that an analytic pursuit that has at its core a descriptive reflection on the productive processes and the essential sense making practices of social life must apply these practices to itself. The 'sense-making' practices of analysis, analytic techniques, analytic tools, analytic communities must themselves be part and parcel of the analytic findings. In many

ways Pollner was reaching back to a foundational concern in the sociology of Max Weber. His argument being that humans are interpreting beings, and it is impossible to step out side this world of interpretation to objectively look in on human behaviour. Instead all analytic efforts are implicated in these interpretive worlds.

Turning these comments to CA analysis, one concern in contemporary analytic practice is that we don't undermine an analysis of the contingent ongoing nature of social life by incorporating previous analytic findings as 'glosses' of the phenomenon under study. The argument calls for adequate descriptive work before resolving the analytic insight into phenomenon and findings. The use of collections of phenomenon, just as we have done here, is one way to ensure that similarities in the activities over time are properly described before they are given a name and defined. On subsequent analysis, so the argument goes, we should resist simply applying those phenomenal categories and instead work through the behaviours anew. Such posturings are interesting when we realise that this is a highly selective rule and only works for certain 'phenomenon'. Some phenomena, such as 'turn-taking' or 'talk-in-interaction' have become acceptable glosses and indeed starting points or disciplinary foundations. How, we might ask, is this not glossing in the same way that calling something an assessment is not. Well, so the argument goes, these are structural features of talk, while the utterance 'wonderful' is indexically tied and hence cannot be described as an assessment if not examined in its sequential context. Behaviour is both context sensitive and context renewing in the CA parlance.

Yet to say that turn-taking and sequence are foundations to social life is of course an interpretation, a conceptual assumption, a taken-for-granted feature of CA analysis. What we have in Soundcloud, and arguably in a range of trace-based instances of inter-action online, is not bound by such (temporal) structures and hence should not be approached with such concepts as taken for granted.

A prime example of this in CA is the prioritisation of 'sequence'. This has a long history and is key to a famous foundational paper by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) which detailed the 'turn taking system' (note this is the same system that is foundational still, but this isn't our point). The primacy of sequential progression and the manner in which it is the foundation for figuring through the meaning of each next action (due to their indexical character) is indeed powerful. Yet, and this has been in the discipline for almost as long (e.g. Goodwin, 1979), the concurrent layering of contents, embodied behaviours, and arguable cultural context, are also operative in those solutions to indexicality. These are simultaneous layering of semantic meaning that are not worked through sequentially, but are present all at once. Sequence becomes only one of the mechanism by which sense is achieved. At the same time we are certainly not saying sequential structurings are not important. 'Knowing' in the moment and 'understanding' (or verifying that knowing) are implicated in

the establishing of good, true, shared, rationale, well-founded social meaning. Yet, sequentiality in Soundcloud is a member's method and its establishment is an achievement, accomplished through the affordances of the software. Such analysis, then, not only reveals new forms of sense-making and new methodological practices, but also draws our attention to the fundamental techniques of conversational practice.

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