The Graphic Transcript: poaching comic book grammar for inscribing the visual, spatial and temporal aspects of action

Eric Laurier, University of Edinburgh 2013.

Abstract: A brief review is presented of existing forms of transcription of talk that incorporate visual, spatial and temporal elements. The most common forms use text and a line-by-line based system and conversation analytic transcripts have been successful in making a number of other features of talk visible. The desire of geographers to draw upon video recordings and time-lapse photography have lead to time-series images being used to bring those visual materials into documents. The graphic transcript is proposed as an alternative form of transcription that hybridises the qualities and evidentiary criteria of the transcript with the representational conventions of the comic strip. The comic strip itself has recently been undergoing a period of experimentation and hybridisation with other forms. The graphic transcript brings together familiar comic strip features such as panels, guttering, speech bubbles and captions with the transcript's criteria of providing an evidentiary record of earlier events that is available for re-inspection and re-interpretation by other analysts.

Keywords: Transcription, comics, conversation analysis, language, action, timing

Scenes and words

> The street is a scene of words, then, but it is also a scene partially constituted by words. (Philo 2011: 367)

The quote from Chris Philo orients us toward a wider world of words, one where cities (and many other places besides) are produced by words and where words are made sensible by the places we hear and read them in. Spoken words that are the discussions between planners in planning offices, that are the presentations in law courts, that are the games of 'tig' in the school playground, that are the 'can I help you?' of the shopkeeper to the customer leaning in to look a little closer at a jumper. What I wish to examine here is a small part of how we might not only draw upon but draw through video recordings in order to attend to the words and the scenes and the co-constituting of those scenes by those words and those words by those scenes.

Video recordings provide a germane medium for examining words and scenes together and human geography has been steadily integrating video into its repertoire of methods (Crang & I. Cook 2007; Garrett 2011; Spinney 2011; Laurier 2012). It is a consequence of using video as a medium for recording words and scenes that I would like to consider in this article. In drawing upon video, geographers have struggled to with how to bring video into their texts, relying on either transcripts that lose much of the looks of the original events or sequences of frame-grabs that lose the words. One solution has been to use the video recordings themselves to create video articles and Geography Compass has been one of the journals that has made the first steps in publishing an article in the form of a video (Evans & Jones 2008). An alternative track for incorporating video that I will explore in this article combines the ideas, conventions and criteria of transcription with those of the comic strip.

Transcription

Transcription is a transformation from one recording medium to another that preserves the words that Philo argues are unavoidably important while losing much of their scenes. In pursuing geographies of talk (Laurier 1999), I raised similar questions about how much transcriptional detail and what forms of notation are required to register speech events. Developing such notations remains motivated by a shift from translating 'what' people said into textual form, to how that 'what' is said and, crucially, how it is heard by participants. It is a shift from examining talk as containing things like beliefs and attitudes to studying people's talk as doing things such as agreeing, disputing and advising, in other words, to talk as enmeshed in social practices. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EMCA) share an orientation to language as action and, moreover as an event, with more-than-representational theory and non-representational theory (Lorimer 2005; Thrift 2008) and phronetic social science (Flyvbjerg 2001; Hargreaves 2012). Conversation analysis (CA) provides markers for transcribing hearable elements of talk such as interruptions (Laurier 1999), laughter (Delph-Janiurek 2001) and pauses (N. Cook 2009). Candace West, in classic work on gender and talk, provides an example of an interruption visible from the transcription format:

(Excerpt from Zimmerman and West corpus, 1975)
    Male: Where the hell have *you* been?
(1.4)
    Female: Well I had to find Foster n' ⌈then⌉
    Male: ⌊Do⌋ you realize
what time it is?

From (West 1979: 83)

In West's example she marks the overlap of the speech through extended square brackets. An interruption is produced as an interruption not by 'what' is said but by when, in relation to a first speaker's talk, a next speaker begins to talk. Transcription provides a record of the fact that in the original event the male speaker began to talk before the female speaker has completed her turn. Alongside using particular notation such as square-brackets, the typographic spacing[1] of the words themselves are used as rough metrics of duration and marking other audible features (laughter, silences, in-breaths), CA transcription sensitises the analyst to the timing of each person's speech in relation to the other.

By making the timing of action visible, CA transcription contributes empirical materials to then guide the growing collection of theoretical and experimental work in human geography on temporality and rhythm (Crang 2001; McCormack 2008; Simpson 2012). A body of work that has suffered as Simpson (2012: 2) argues, from a lack of consideration of 'how to actually do rhythmanalysis or research rhythm in an empirical, and especially practice-based, context.' Moreover in its insistence on 'words' the CA transcript may provide some remedy to that work's fixation on the 'pre-discursive' and 'pre-cognitive' and in sympathy with Philo's (2011) restatement of the importance of words.

Time-series images

From a different direction in geography than concerns with the transcription of talk, time-series images have attempted to bring temporal features to light, drawing upon video recordings and photographic records. Time-series images are used to exhibit, analyse and evidence sequences of movements, appearances, disappearances and alterations of environments, bodies and objects. They have helped both physical (Cerney 2010) and human geographers document temporality, movement and change in environments. By shooting from a fixed perspective and thereby also fixing the position of unmoving elements, the movement of the moving elements is then made visible. In the example from a student study (fig. 1) we thus have a fixed perspective looking down a set of stairs, with walls, ceiling and lighting and backdrop remaining the same.

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[1] CA uses the monospaced typeface Courier because its even spacing establishes a rough timing. It has also become an industry standard for screenplays for the same reason.

Fig. 1 Excerpt from longer time-series in Latham & McCormack (2009: 258)

The time series in figure 1 was used by geography students to document their disruption of the flow of pedestrians on the stairs exiting a U-bahn station in Berlin (Latham & McCormack 2009). By having to find situations to record images of everyday rhythms in the city and by 'working with a certain sense of experiment with documenting encounters through images, students really began thinking through the rhythms of everyday sociality in ways that were certainly not reducible to the problem of how to represent these rhythms' p257. The time series also exhibits a sequence of one action happening and then another. Each image showing a moment that is seen as part of a course of events that is continuing. If we look at figure 1, image-by-image, then we see, on the right hand side, a young man walk further up the stair looking at something to his right. Looking again at figure 1, salient to the students' interests, in the middle of the first image frame you can hopefully make out two persons twisted around, then track for subsequent two images that they look back at the student blocking the middle of the stairs. Not only do they look back but they also slow their pace up the stairs. By the fourth frame they have continued their progress up the stairs. More than experimenting, the time series provides us with a visual record of the embodied organisation of urban crowds, one that has its origins in William H Whyte's (1985) classic studies of public spaces.

The time series, as it name would imply, allows the interval between images to be set at different rates to make different sorts of change visible. In pursuing rhythms of longer durations Simpson's (2012) studies of street performers pushed his analysis toward time-lapse techniques. The images still portray moments from the same perspective that allow the detection of changes through following various courses of actions but unlike fig 1 we cannot trace the pedestrian movements of individuals, instead with the help of Simpson's narrative we track the building and departing of

crowds. In setting the gap to intervals of years or decade geographers have made visible geomorphological change with 'repeat photography' (Cerney 2010).

As much as the time series allows slow change to be made visible by speeding it up, the time series also allows the very fast to be made visible by slowing it down (Laurier 2013a; Laurier 2013b). By doing just that, Spinney (2011) provides a sense of the kinaesthetics involved trial bikers jumping a gap. As Spinney argued, the action happens so fast that it is not amenable to documentation in a notebook. Equally rapid is the playing of videogames studied by Ash (2010) and he also uses time series to make visible the logics of rapid play. At one point in his exhibiting of play move he is interested in both the player's discussion and showing us what is happening in the game. His solution was to produce two transcripts: one of the talk between game-players as they play (fig. 2), and the other of what they are looking at on screen (fig. 3).

Fig 2. Transcript (Ash 2010: 419)

Plate 2   Users 1 and 2 search for ethological markers in the environment as they at[tempt to...] blocking their path. © Lucasfilm Entertainment, 2006. The LEGO logo and the Min[...] of the LEGO group © 2006

remained unclear. Once all the lights have been turned green, a door opens that allows the users access to the interior of the sail barge. However, even upon the completion of such a task, these users had no idea what the mechanics underlying the relation between paddle position, light activation and door [...]

thinking … It's a kind of os[...] long-term user)

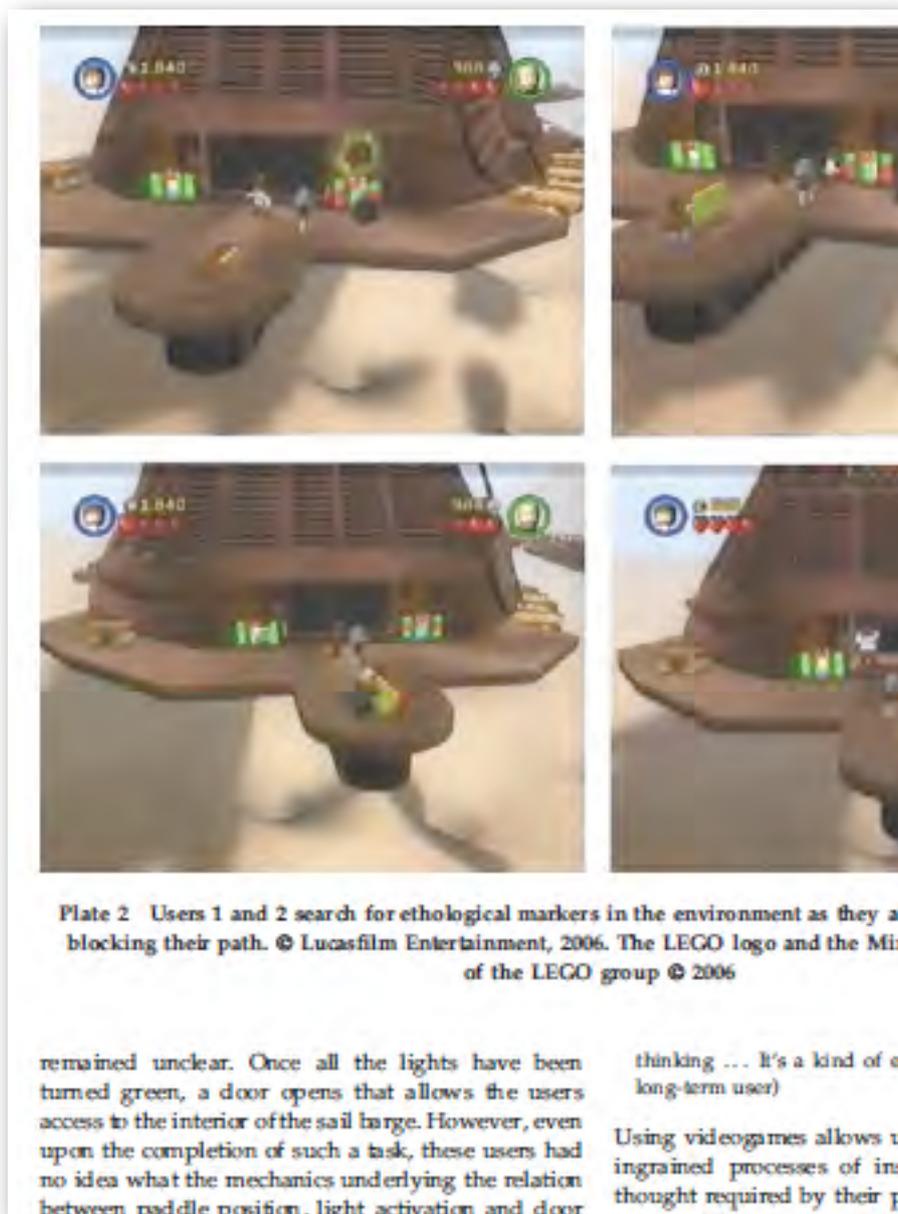Using videogames allows us[...] ingrained processes of ins[...] thought required by their p[...]

Fig 3. Time-series on following page

Ash's transcriptional work is important because it is attempting to bring the 'words' and the 'scene' together. In bringing back the words we can begin to see how speaking itself is not distinct from the temporal, the kinaesthetic nor the technologies it is at the heart of them. There are only a small number transcriptional forms that have been developed in order to bring the visible and the audible into the same transcript. Later in this article I will concentrate on the interdisciplinary studies of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EMCA) which have utilised video recordings and film for around four decades now (Heath et al. 2010). First however we will turn toward the format that has long lain waiting as for transcribing audible and visible events: the comic strip.

Borrowing from the comic strip

Geography and the other social sciences have long been interested in cartoons, comic strips, graphic novels and other forms of what Eisner (1985) has collected under the heading of 'sequential art'. In geography the early interest in their examination was around what they might tell us about geopolitics (Dodds 1996; Dittmer 2007). More recent studies have turned toward toward the comic

strip as a medium and how it is created and read, supplementing the early emphasis on the comic as a sequential form. Gallacher (2011a) studying the 'alchemic' relationship that turns 'the disparate elements readers encounter on the page are transformed into a meaningful text' p2. Dittmer also opening up the early emphasis on the sequential in understanding the comic to consider 'plurivectorial narration' and how the comic's visual and textual arrangement can express an 'emergent causality' (Dittmer 2010).

The grammar and form of comics and graphic novels offer a number of possibilities for representing speech, gesture, mood, emotion, motion, objects, sound and character and these were the initial impetus for Gallacher's exploration of manga. Consequently, the comic strip provides transcription with opportunities for representing those same features. While in most transcripts (including CA transcripts such as figure 1), the sequencing of turns at speaking is made visible in the line-by-line, speaker-prefaced, sentences, read left-to-right and down the page, in the comic and graphic novel the convention is to make turns at talk visible by using speech bubbles. The sequencing of images from panel-to-panel and their separation by gutters is also distinct to the comic strip. The images, when hand-drawn, have many styles and levels of iconisation, possibilities of perspective, timing and more (Eisner 1985; Dittmer 2010; Gallacher 2011a).

As I noted at the outset both transcripts and time-series images allow for the examination of time and McCloud (1993) explains that there are a variety of the conventions used to represent time in the comic. Compared to CA transcription there is however no fixed metric for establishing the duration of what is happening:
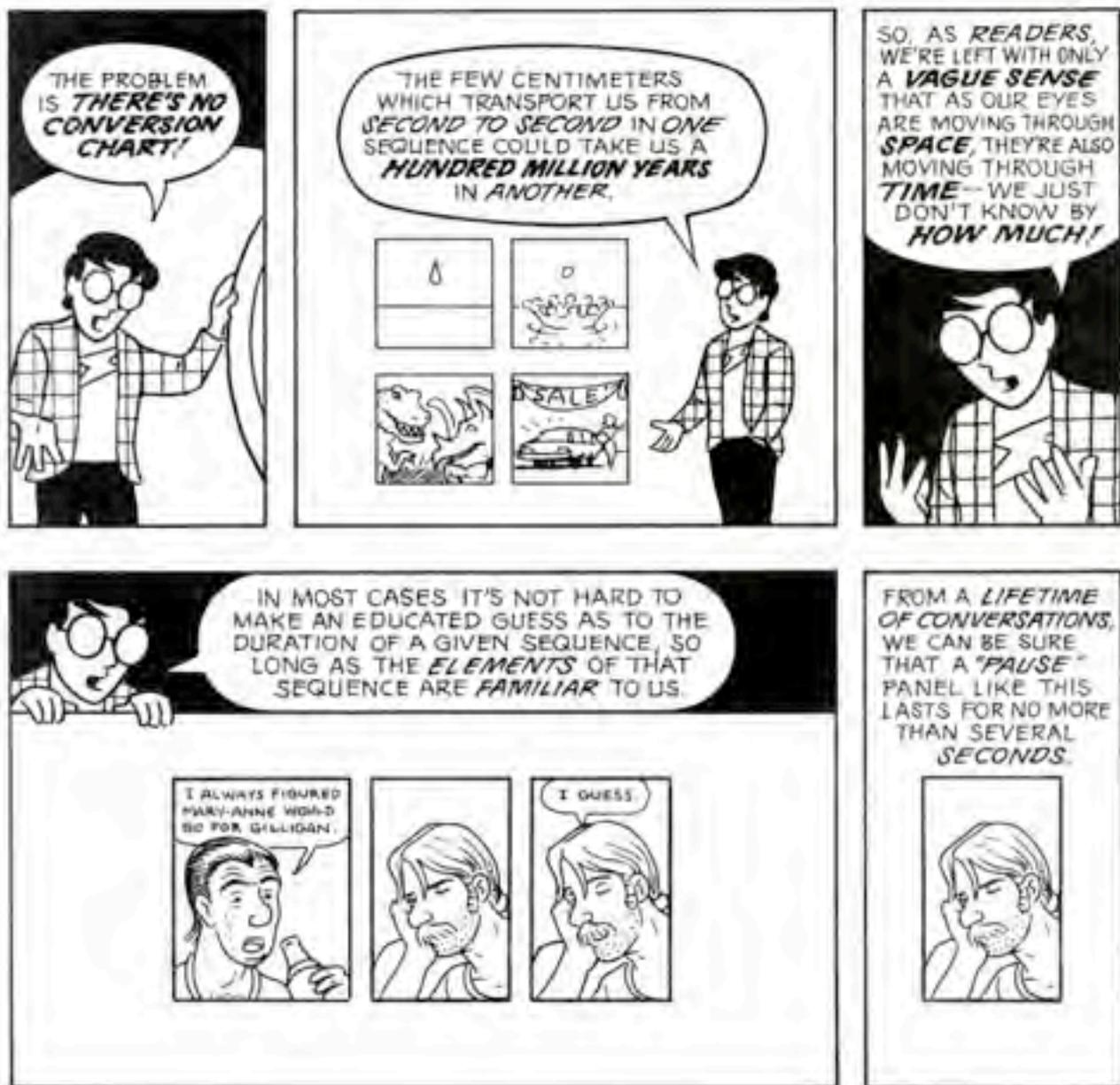
Fig. 4 from (McCloud 1993: 100)

After figure 4 McCloud goes on to discuss how the reader's perception of the time of a pause between one person speaking and the other replying can be altered through techniques such as widening the panel, removing the border and letting the panel bleed off the edge of the page. Where McCloud's explanation assumes a serial reading from one panel to the next, Dittmer (2010) alerts us to the more-than-sequential reading that comics provide for the reader, emphasising the possibilities for 'comic book visualities open geographers up to uncertainty, tangentiality and contingency' p234. Using an example from Chris Ware's wonderful Building Stories that merges diagram, schematic and comic strip, Dittmer shows us that the comic form can be hybridised and provide for different and more complex forms of reading which also then introduce more complex understandings of time one of which is 'simultaneity'. Gallacher (2011b) makes similar points around the interweaving of multiple streams of time and memory through the concept of 'braiding'.

The hybridisation of the comic with the transcript requires a shift of criteria from the creation of narratives to the creation of records of events. This requires giving some thought to the qualities that make a transcript a transcript and not a scatter plot, nor a paragraph in a novel, nor a model of a

physical process. The transcript is both a text that can be inspected for its accuracy in relation to an earlier recording of an event and 'an independent "work space" that reflexively informs a reading' (Lynch 1991: 7). When the transcript is combined with the time series of video clips, it is also no longer only a trans-script, it is also a trans-picture. The original recording is not only being en-textualised (Bucholtz 2009), it is being, for lack of an appropriate word, en-imagised. The transcript should continue the process of preservation that is begun with the video recording of the original event. The hybridisation of the novel with the comic created the new form that is the graphic novel, here the transcript hybridised with the comic could give rise to a graphic transcript.

Transcribing visible features of interaction

In attending to the visual and embodied aspects of interaction EMCA scholars have presented images in transcripts as unaltered frame grabs, photoshopped frame grabs or hand-drawn sketches. As noted earlier, CA transcription uses the text symbols of the Jeffersonian system (Jefferson 2004); for example: non verbal-actions in double brackets (line 11, fig 5), extended square brackets for overlapping speech (lines 14 & 15). By en-textualising those audible features, the transcript captures details that other forms of transcription tend to ignore even though they were central to what was meant by participants of the original event (Laurier 1999). The Jeffersonian system has been supplemented by inserting images into its line-by-line arrangement. Figure 5 is an example of this form created by the Goodwins (2012). It is of a mother, in the passenger seat, reading her child's school report card to both the child in the back and, simultaneously, involving the father, who is driving:
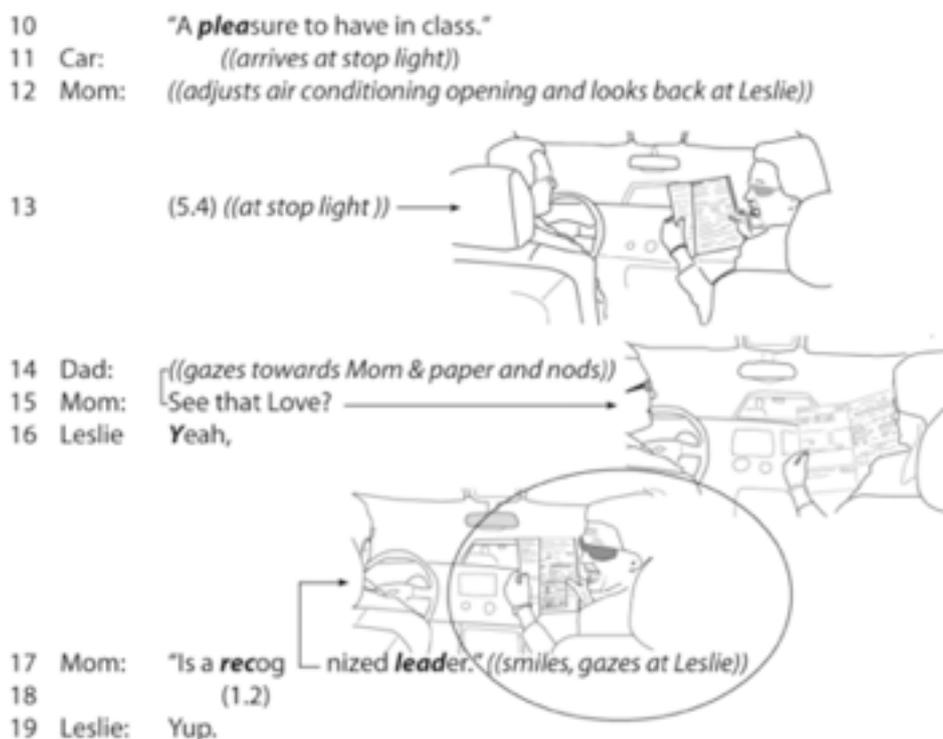

Figure 5, mother reading a school report in the car (M. H. Goodwin & C. Goodwin 2012: 263)

What may not be obvious at first is that the sketch, rather than being produced from scratch as would the be the case for comic art, is traced from a frame grab from the video recording. As a tracing, it is then a special kind of sketch: it preserves the lines and the layout of an original image while losing colours and details. Tracing work serves as an extension of the idea of transcription and

of a factual recording, by both preserving and copying details of an original. Tracing is nevertheless also more clearly constructing the phenomenon than a frame grab by directing the reader's attentions to certain features, as is also the case for textual transcription (Ashmore 2000). In the tracing in figure 5, on line 13 it is the mother and the report that have thicker lines, while they fade slightly in the second tracing at line 15 where the father is picked out in heavier lines and in the final illustration in line 17, the mother and report are circled as the objects of our visual attention. To further clarify what should be the object of the reader's closer scrutiny the Goodwins have circled an area of the final sketch.

The example in figure 5 brings elements of the 'scene' of words into our view as we see where people are talking, who is talking to whom, what each party is doing while the other is speaking (where listening is only one amongst a wider range of possibilities and may be part of those other activities). While we suddenly have a great deal more resources to understand what was happening in the original event, what seems to have slipped away is the temporality of the visual materials that the time series in geography brought to us. However, the Work Interaction and Technology (WIT) group have pioneered presenting transcriptions which foreground the timing of visible actions (Luff & Heath 2014). They begin by drawing actions as timelines in parallel with the unfolding talk on large pieces of graph paper in landscape orientation. It is only as they finalise them for presentation they then select which particular framegrabs to insert and whether to insert them down-wards (as in fig 5) or sideways across the page (fig 6).

SA:	(Three two) to B<u>ase</u>↑		(1.2)		
	(1.2)	SA:	Thanks Michael could		
SS:	Yes er(m)::: (0.4) the		you just keep an eye on		
	supervisor's coming		the Westbound for us?	(1.2)	
	<u>now.</u>		We might need	SS:	Alright then.
			(to/some) erm: (0.4)		(1.0)
			station control if it goes	SA:	(Thank you)

Figure 6 Transcript emphasizing timing and shift in gaze direction (Luff & Heath 2014)

In these transcripts the framegrab or sketch has been selected not by a temporal criterion (e.g. at the point where an action started or ended) but from a point at mid-way through an action. In fig 6 when the person's head has turned, not when it begins to turn (visible on video but invisible in a framegrab). What the WIT group's artful presentation of transcripts highlights is how images and sketches have two purposes: A. to represent a longer trajectory of an action; B. to show how that action was timed in relation to talk or other unfolding elements of the event. A tends to select the middle of an action while B may require selecting the beginning or end when that action is no longer obvious in the image. While these composite transcripts are rich, in attempting to preserve precise timings they can create an 'opaque' transcript (Bogen 1999) that then requires a dexterous reading, accompanied by instructions from the author to recover timing and rhythm. What I will propose does not solve that problem and possibly compounds it because the graphic transcript is instead a response to Bogen's (1999) complaint over the opacity of the CA transcript.

The Graphic Transcript

As I have noted earlier the graphic transcript hybridises the comic strip as a narrative (be it fictional or documentary) and the transcript as record of an earlier event. This has a number of consequence, the most significant being that the original recording has already constructed the data in various ways (Ashmore 2004) and thus provides a proto-analytic perspective (Mondada 2013; Luff & Heath 2012). If we look at an example of a graphic transcript in figure 7, the set-up of the cameras within the car means that even though we might be interested in the perspective of the backseat passenger, at the transcription stage we cannot shift the visual perspective to provide a better view of the rear seat passenger. Even with the limits posed by camera set-ups the graphic transcript provides an array of constructive and analytic resources: *camera selection, frame–grab selection, frame–grab sequencing, image cropping, captioning, balloon placement, balloon selection, balloon text manipulation, motion lines, and sound effects.* In this brief review there is only the space to provide a few examples of these resources in use and some of their analytic consequences.

The arrangement of panels and gutters that is central to assembling the comic strip now offers similar possibilities of montage for the transcript (Gallacher 2010; Dittmer). In the first panel of figure 7 a frame grab from one camera is used to establish the road ahead for the car travellers, while the second panel from the other camera is of the occupants of the car. The pairing (montage) of these two panels creates a point-of-view image and then whose point-of-view it is. Captions accompany the first and third panels, adding details from the original video recording, for example in figure 7 in where the car is and what it is doing (e.g. accelerating around the roundabout). In the final two panels the transcript no longer provides views out the window as the analyst's focus shifts to what is happening in the interior of the car. Using motion lines the graphic transcripts can then make visible the effects of the change in g-force as the car exits the roundabout.

Fig 7 Approaching and driving around a roundabout (source: author)

The montage between the view out of the car and the view into the car raises additional problems for the preservation of relationships of timing. At one level the very visibility created by time-series images disappears because the continuity of perspective is interrupted. At a further level, like the comic strip, the graphic transcript 'braids' (Gallacher 2010) two durations: one that emerges from panel-to-panel which we have already established has a variable metric; the second is the variable duration of each panel according to the speech bubbles that feature within it. The frame grab of the absence of speech in the first panel of figure 6 makes it into an instant, whereas the next panel with a person speaking has the duration of the speech in the bubble (McCloud 1993). At a still further level the guttering that is necessary to split the images between panels 2, 3, 4 and 5 creates a sense of pauses in speech. In figure 7 these are then indeed used where there are pauses but clearly this is not always possible, though there are solutions such as allowing the speech bubble to cross the gutter (fig. 8). Moreover sense of the duration of the series of images can be altered by altering the width of the panel (fig 8). Cropping of the original screen grab can be used to focus the reader's attention on certain details (see also Luff 2014). Figure 8 provides a sense of this: the frame grab from the video game screen capture has been cropped to fix on the salient details of rotation of the camera angle in the game.
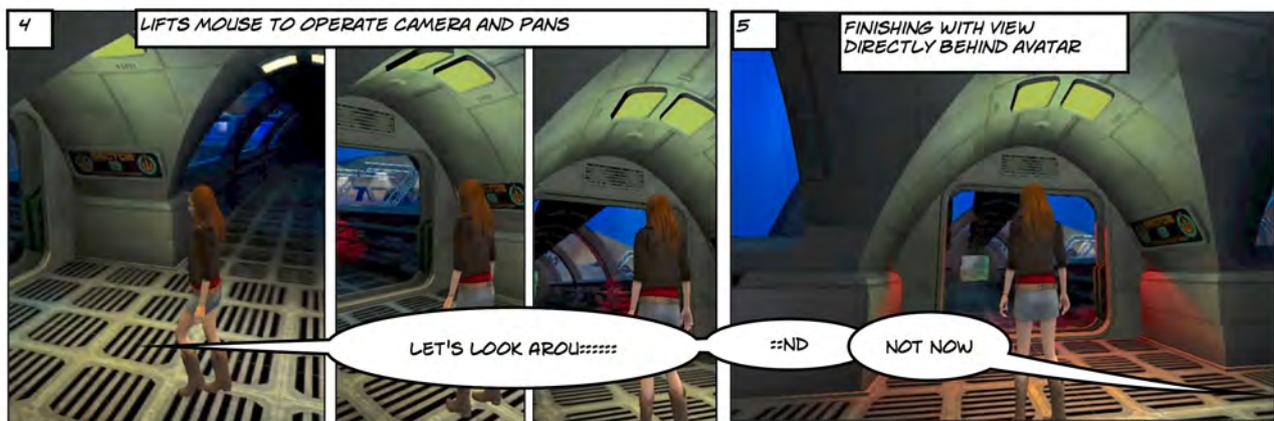

Figure 8 Setting up a perspective in a computer games (Laurier & Reeves 2014)

The marking of pauses, silences, delays and so on in the graphic transcript require care in preserving their occurrence from the video recording. The en-textualisation of these features in the CA transcripts is partly abandoned in accepting the simple text conventionally used in speech bubbles. Speech bubbles do provide other resources do provide other resources for preserving hearable features of talk. They can be used to mark overlapping speech by overlapping the bubbles (fig 8 & 9). The bubbles lose quite when the overlap begins, so while we can still make an interruption apparent, finding quite when it begins from the graphic transcript may not be possible. The bubbles themselves can be given broken outlines or jagged lines to indicated whispering or shouting (see figure 9). Other features of talk commonly marked in CA transcripts such as audible in-breaths or out-breaths can be marked with what are called 'cat's whiskers' (see figure 9).

Figure 9 – Bedside care. (source: author)

Having begun to sketch out what is possible with a graphic transcript which borrows heavily from the comic strip. There are other more experimental possibilities, the comic strip itself is pushing against its own conventions, as Dittmer (2010) has shown, but so also are transcribers with an interest in different phenomena. In trying to understand practices such as walking, driving and cycling, sketched plan-views, floorplans, street maps and so on, to provide a further resource in making sense of settings that their mobile subjects are travelling through (Haddington & Keisanen 2009; McIlvenny 2013; Weilenmann et al. 2014). One such example is McIlvenny's (2013) hybridisation of the road map with comic speech bubbles (fig 10) to create a 'chronotopic transcript'. The left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading of the transcript is borrowed to then also animate the movement of the icons of the bicycle riders. In figure 10 the cyclists approach and then rush through a set of traffic lights before they turn red. Actions are put into caption boxes which are then also read through the same conventions as happening at certain points in the onward movement of the bicycle riders. McIlvenny's graphic transcript foregrounds an analytic orientation toward the features of the road and the evolving arrangement of the cyclists talking and manoeuvring their way through those features.
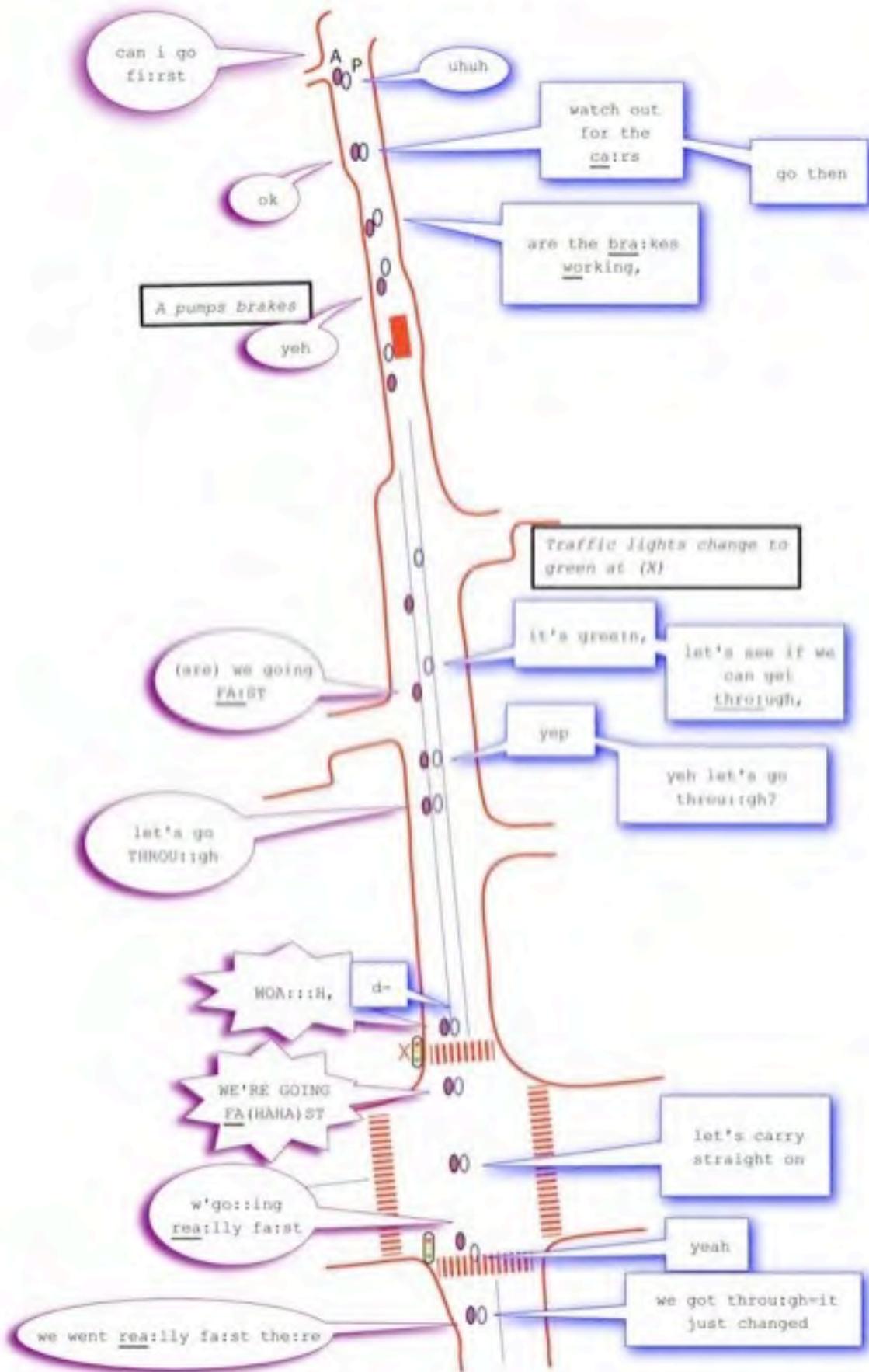
Figure 10 Cyclists approaching a junction. By kind permission of Paul McIlvenny

When we should use a graphic transcript

We should *not* use graphic transcripts when we are still in the midst of analysing video recordings of earlier events. At that more exploratory stage, all that is needed is a transcript dialogue and non-verbal actions. It is only once the author wishes to present their analysis that they should turn their efforts toward consider how they will present their recordings as a graphic transcript. What has hopefully become apparent from the examples presented earlier is that while it easier to see what the analyst would like us to see in their analysis they are not as open to alternate analyses as, for instance, CA transcripts. The graphic transcript offers the possibility of sustaining the transcript as a record of an event while also helping sensitise us to the timing and spacing of the verbal, visual, embodied, environmental, material and kinaesthetic aspects of that earlier event.

It is still early days in figuring out how to combine or translate existing transcription conventions and time-series images with or into those of the comic strip, the diagram or indeed the map. The task I would propose on the basis of this brief review is to use them to use them to orient our attention to the settings in which we find talk and which are organised in and through that talk. In other words to better understand Philo's (2011) scenes where words are spoken, heard, written, read and the constitution of those scenes by speaking, hearing, writing and reading those words.

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