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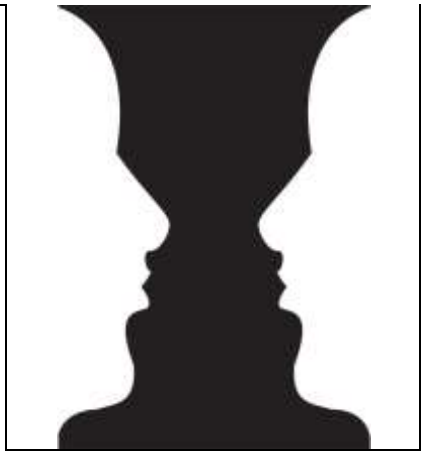

Reason giving, city icons and the culture of cities: data from a radical interpretive perspective

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Abstract
From a radical interpretive perspective, the distinction between primary and secondary data is itself secondary. Taking as a case study sample newspaper accounts for the motive behind the famous hockey venue move in Montreal (from the Forum to the Molson Centre), this paper will demonstrate what is involved in treating this talk as a discourse. By testing these newspaper accounts, the paper will show that a sole focus on the empirical accuracy of such motive characterizations can fail to take up the way the accounts, when understood as a discourse, are themselves ways of accessing how social phenomena emerge as objects in the world. The latter analysis, it will be claimed, makes for a more grounded understanding. Specifically drawing on Blum and McHugh's (1971) analysis of motive talk, the paper will demonstrate the insights into the culture of cities that a radical interpretive perspective can make in this case.

Keywords
Radical interpretive sociology, analysis, motive, primary versus secondary data, culture, cities, Montreal Canadiens, Montreal Forum (Montreal, Quebec), The Molson Centre (Montreal, Quebec)

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> "It is elliptical to assert that motive describes only and simply a state of mind, when instead it serves to demand an explication of the circumstances which confer upon this putative state of mind its reasonableness as an account. Because such an explication amounts to a theory or formulation, it would be more correct to say that the quest for a motive (why did he kill her?) is a request for a theory." (McHugh et al 1974: 28)

> "The voices of the city appear then, as claims to speak about the city, which we engage as part of the meaning of the city as an object of analysis…. The city might appear to belong to those who can call it their own, to those who reside in its precincts and seem entitled to speak of it as 'my place,' or my home, but for inquiry, such voices always raise the question of what kind of place or home it is, and of the differences between and among 'mine' and 'yours', the 'us' and the 'they', as varying and contested claims to possess the city as an interpretive object…. This is how we can say that theorizing makes problematic the question of the voice of the city through its desire to recreate this object (the city) as a terrain of many voices." (Blum 2003: 47)

How does a researcher get access to the culture of places like Montreal and Toronto[i]? As large modern cities, they are complex and multifaceted objects. In what way is this complexity amenable to theorizing? For some, the city is so complex and diverse, that to speak of the 'culture' of Montreal as against the 'cultures' of Montreal is misleading, and essentialist. Some go further and say it is misleading to talk about the cultures of a place like Montreal since it is only a sign for many geographical, class, race, religious, and other forces (Blum 2003: 24 – 49). It what way can it be said (if at all) that the culture of Montreal appears in speech? For example, in what way does the debate in the newspapers over the move of Les Canadiens from the Forum to the Molson Centre provide some access? And if it does provide access to the identity of Montreal what method allows us to demonstrate this? Do we need to do a comprehensive survey of the debate and then codify the results to see what pattern emerges in order for the claim about a culture to be compelling?

For example, in regard to the prospect of the move, back in August of 1989, Jack Todd, a sports reporter for the *Montreal Gazetter*, stated the following:

> Before every tavern-fly in town starts crying into his stein about the loss of the place where Frank Selke and Toe Blake and Maurice Richard and Jean Beliveau plied their trade, however, it must be said that the move is probably necessary…Compared with such sites as Calgary's Saddledome, the Forum is already too small, and the constant demand for more seating left [Club President Richard] Corey with no choice but to renovate or move (*Montreal Gazette* 25 August 1989, p. A3).

In what way should this statement be approached? As anecdotal? As the opinion of one opinionated columnist? Does it reflect Jack Todd's state of mind and if so in what way? Is it Todd's attempt to be provocative or is it his way of describing Montreal's need for a new venue. And on what basis could it be known which it is? It is a colourful

description. We have the description of the 'tavern fly' who is sentimental about his connection to the history of the arena where his team plays and the apparently forward-looking approach of the Club President, Richard Cory. There is no claim to objectivity in this statement, and from the epistemological perspective of empiricist science, it would represent a subjective, biased, and private statement. However public the newspaper forum is, it cannot be claimed that this opinion is representative, and any attempt to seek a truth claim about the culture of Montreal on the basis of this statement alone would, from an empiricist perspective, lack validity and reliability.

Both quantitative and qualitative social science approaches to this very particular statement by a sports commentator would not see this as authentic primary data but rather as secondary and even corrupt data. It is precisely this agreement on the distinction between primary and secondary that makes the mixed method approach so compatible. Valid survey methodology data and qualitative methodology data follow from a discovery epistemology, which posits the world and the mind as independent of each other. Reality, even socially constructed reality, is external and arrived at through accurate observation. It is in this sense that this newspaper opinion is not real data, as it is not the outcome of rigorous observation (Goldenberg 1992; Bonner 1997).

The epistemology shared by more radically interpretive positions in sociology (for example, phenomenology, hermeneutics, post structuralism, analysis) is very different (see Bonner 1997: pp. 71 – 106 for this literature). Here, mind is not seen as independent of reality, but rather as interwoven with reality. In particular, the world and consciousness are joined together through language. Following from this principle, everything known requires a knower and all knowledge (including knowledge made available through rigorous discovery observations) is colored by a perspective. To understand any knowledge claim requires recovering the perspective that made it possible. Epistemologically speaking, there is no pure data. All data is made possible by a production process, whether survey data, interview data, ethnographic data, and so on. As Peter McHugh (1971: p.332) states, 'nothing – no object, event or circumstance – determines its own status as truth, either to the scientist or to science. No sign automatically attaches a referent, no fact speaks for itself, no proposition for its value.'

From a radical interpretive perspective, the empiricist solution to the need for meaningful data is itself narrow. It is narrow because, as Charles Taylor (1971) demonstrated in a classic paper, it is required to leave out intersubjective understandings that in a taken for granted way support all social action. In this case, the claim of Jack Todd about the move of the Montreal Canadiens is a claim that needs to be understood in light of the taken for granted significant intersubjective understandings that surround the issue of the move, including understandings of the culture of the city and how the move happens in the horizon of this culture. Moreover, as McHugh, Blum, and their colleagues have also demonstrated, treating the claims of the newspaper reporters as private, subjective, and unreliable itself relies on 'common sense' understandings that need to be examined. As McHugh et al. (1974: pp.30-31) state,

> the surface performance which is displayed by the use of motive might be that of offering a reason, goal, or intention, but to provide an account of motive in these terms is to ignore the deep structure which makes the surface display possible at all.… These accounts pose the problem of motives as a factual rather than a grammatical one, which leads easily to the trap of treating motives as causes, as states of persons, and as concrete speech-acts such as reason, accounts and justifications. And these accounts treat motives as raising a concrete, factual question of "why?" rather than as attempts to formulate the socially organized conditions under which such a question is sensible to those who raise it.

Blum and McHugh (1971: p.98), through their analysis of motive, provide a way to see how the stretch of talk by Jack Todd is based on conditions of knowledge made possible by the way 'ordinary societal members manage their ordinary routines.' From this perspective (and ironically), the empirical research procedures described above actually take on board the conditions of knowledge that members must follow if they are to be recognized as doing the kind of intelligible reason giving talk that Jack Todd is seen to be doing. For example, whatever suspicion might be raised about his dismissal of the tavern fly crying into his beer stein, we do not question that it is intelligible motive talk in the way such questions would be aroused if, for example, Todd said that Les Canadiens had to move because Richard Cory is a lunatic. The latter claim would raise the question of the intelligibility of the talk and require that we examine the strangeness of the account.

The statement by Todd can serve as data when it is examined in light of the conditions of knowledge that makes the statement possible (or, to use a Foucauldian term, the conditions of the discourse). That is, Todd's claim about the move to a new arena is a recognizably intelligible way of accounting for the move. Therefore, the question about the conditions of knowledge that render an account intelligible is more fundamental than the question about the accuracy of the account. In other words, the very recognisability of the account, that it is accepted as grammatically understandable in itself, points to a taken for granted ground that makes its intelligibility possible. We are given an image of Richard Cory the sports businessman, and we are given an image of some Canadiens fans, the tavern flies. It is the *possibility* of this intelligibility that, in turn, is also taken for granted by both survey research and interview research in their search for more primary data to measure truth.

As a case study, I now propose to demonstrate the way Todd's claim can be analysed by examining it in terms of the conditions of the discourse of motive talk, as been laid out by McHugh et al. (1974: pp.28 – 43). This case demonstration seeks to provide an example of the way a newspaper account can be seen as more than adequate as data, insofar as it is, in an obvious and taken for granted way, understood to fulfil the conditions of the discourse for intelligible reason giving. [ii]

What is it about that stretch of talk that demonstrates the way Todd, as an observer of the Montreal scene, shows himself to be observing the rules that determine the discourse of the ordinary everyday request for an account when an event occurs? We can see that his statement is an answer to the terrain of many voices swirling about the

city about the possibility of the move to a new arena (Blum 2003 p. 47). A statement does not happen in a vacuum, but rather is ground in and sustained by a discourse (in this case, a discourse about adequate reason giving with regard to a city icon). Todd's formulation is an instance of the way members of society in ordinary, everyday ways formulate themselves and their environment. Events, such as the moving a hockey team from its storied venue, The Forum, to a brand new hockey arena are a good example of ethical collision (Blum 2003), and one of the requirements of competent common sense membership is to formulate such events according to the conditions of knowledge for adequate account giving. The *Montreal Gazette* writer, Jack Todd, in effect is saying, that moving the *Montreal Canadiens* is an event that that the ordinary, taken for granted activity of offering a reason can make sense of. As McHugh et al. (1971: p.33) state, 'to say that some rule is available [to the everyday member] is to remove the sociological habitat of motive from the object [Todd, tavern flies, Richard Cory] to discourse about the object.' The objects of the talk are now constituted through the very specific rules required by the discourse in order for intelligible talk about the move to be actualized. The talk itself is an accomplishment of the rules for accomplishing reason giving, and so itself needs to be the focus of analysis.

The discourse of reason giving is so pervasively mundane and so fine grained in our culture (Sacks 1974) that it is difficult to recognize the activity. Its ordinary pervasiveness, as Garfinkel (1967) points out, makes our imagination sluggish (hence the need, Garfinkel says, for breaching experiments). We need to imagine, for instance, a possible answer to the question of how the Canadiens ended up in the Molson Centre that is so absurd that it points to members' inability to formulate themselves and their environment. If one were to say, Les Canadiens were just beamed in (a la Star Trek style) or the gods arbitrarily brought the move about, then the observer would in effect be saying that motive rules cannot be invoked. Of course, as Garfinkel shows, this would raise issues about the competence of the member. When, apocryphally speaking, Newton queried why the apple falls from the tree and through that developed his theory of gravity, he did not invoke the rules for the ascription of motive talk to explain the event. Yet, we can imagine another more traditional culture where motive talk would be invoked in such a situation; for example, the spirit of the tree released the apple. To offer a reason for an event, as Todd is doing, is to formulate the event of the move as an instance of social action and not behaviour in Weber's sense. (Weber 1978)

This already tells us that the culture that invokes reason giving as an explanation for an event in the world has very specific ways of organizing understanding, and as we shall see, it is not unrelated to the dominance of empiricism and science as paradigmatic ways of explaining phenomenon. When Todd formulates Montreal tavern regulars as tempted to resist the move from the Forum and Cory as deciding to make room for more customers, he shows himself to be a competent, common sense member. Blum and McHugh's description of the structure of motive can be used to analyse Todd's reason giving talk to explain how Les Canadiens ended up playing in the Molson Centre. The issue for this data or usage is not Richard Cory or tavern regulars as 'empirical actors' out there in the 'real world' and Todd's statement as a flawed and biased description of what

these actors are doing; rather, Todd's claim reveals itself as one of the fertile responses to the 'collective force' (Blum 2003: p.14) that is the city of Montreal. The task of the theorist is not to offer another opinion confirming or denying Todd's opinion, nor to dismiss it as impure data, but to formulate the grounds that make Todd's speech possible. Along the way, the paper will show how such formulation shows the way the culture of a city makes an appearance or 'comes into being' in speech.

As stated, this stretch of talk is one example of the way members formulate themselves and their environment, and so is analogous to the conditions of knowledge for motive talk. As such it formulates the possibility of moving the city hockey team from the Forum as an instance of social action. Weber (1978: p.4) defines social action as action that takes into account the behaviour of the other and is 'oriented in its course.' Todd's statement formulates two such actors, the tavern regulars and Richard Cory. Both are formulated as oriented actors. Both motivated objects are formulated as actors who know what they are doing. Crying in one's beer over the loss of an iconic place or seeing that place as too small for more customers are, sociologically speaking, oriented actions. Cory is formulated as taking into account the demand for more seats and the 'tavern flies' are formulated as taking into account the potential loss of an iconic place.

Note that for Todd's formulation of the tavern flies and of Richard Cory as motivated objects to be intelligible, insanity and brutishness are necessarily excluded as possible explanations for the event of the move or the reaction to it. This is not to claim that Cory or the sentimental Canadiens fans really are, in some empirically measurable sense, sane. Rather, the discourse requires that they be understood as oriented if Todd's reason giving is to make sense. Cory, formulated in this usage as a rational instrumental actor (in Parsons sense), can take into account demand for seats, recognize that the Forum is too small to meet that demand, and orient actions accordingly (renovate or move); the tavern flies, as expressive actors in Parsons' sense, can recognize the loss of a favourite place and orient actions accordingly (cry in their beer steins). In effect, the talk formulates both as members of a community of common sense actors when reasons are given to explain the event if, in essence, it formulates both Cory and the sentimental fans as common sense members of the everyday culture of Montreal. Cory is not moving the Canadiens because he consulted a spiritualist in a séance or, like Cassandra in the *Illiad*, the gods came to him in a dream warning him of a disaster if he failed to move the team. The sentimental fans are not crying in their beer steins because the barman is cutting onions in front of them or because of exposure to tear gas.

The stretch of talk shows an observer, Jack Todd, formulating himself and his Montreal environment, and as reason giving, the sentimental fan and Cory are formulated as competent common sense members of the world of Montreal everyday life. Such membership is not acknowledged by some membership card; rather, it is a membership constituted by the grounds of the talk, as shown through the talk itself. Excluded from membership are various other kinds of actors who cannot be recognized to be oriented in Weber's sense; the insane, the brute, the infant, and even possibly Schutz's (1944) version of the stranger. Todd's talk formulates motivated objects as theorizers of their environments which, as Blum and McHugh articulated, is a condition

of intelligible motive talk. While empirically speaking, the brute and the infant are physically and legally part of the community of common sense membership, reason giving as motive discourse in essence says that the formulation of oriented actors requires that they be excluded. In other words, if the move is formulated as happening because Cory is crazy, then we no longer have oriented action and no longer need to search for an intelligible reason. The event can be explained by drawing on external, causal reasons, and so surrendering the discourse to science and causal talk. As McHugh et al note in their addendum to the Motive chapter, such surrender itself is a display of a kind of theorizing that is in the grip of an enigmatic relation between words and language (45).

I will reflexively note here, then, that the researcher/analyst for this stretch of talk is not offering another motive – for example, why Jack Todd said what he said. The sociological analyst does not offer another interpretation of the talk but rather recovers the ground that makes Todd's or any interpretation possible. Just as Cory and the sentimental fans are being constituted as oriented actors by this discourse, and as Todd is invoking observer rules according to the conditions of knowledge of such rules, in such a way that neither is seen to be acting or speaking willy nilly, so too is the reflexive sociologist. Note, too, that this small stretch of talk is all the data that is needed. What remains needed on the part of the researcher/theorist, on the other hand, as Peter McHugh used to say, is discipline and imagination.

A third element that makes Todd's reason giving an ordinary, recognisable, and intelligible activity is the way it shows a grammar, which is to say that the speaker (Todd) has a way of collecting the event with 'the available corpus of designations' (Blum & McHugh 1971: p.105). Grammar, in this case, draws on what Schutz (1953) calls the common stock of knowledge presupposed by ordinary common sense actors as they competently organize their everyday actions. Jack Todd's reason giving, as a discourse, formulates Cory and the fans as actors with a set of owned experiences (owner and fans of the Canadiens) that are available to ordinary members as part of the common stock of knowledge; in turn, Todd's reason giving, as the observer, shows this speaker to be a competent ordinary member of Montreal society, drawing on the common stock of knowledge to collect the event of moving with more specific oriented actors. The reason giver (Todd) selects from the actors who circulate around Montreal and its hockey team such aspects of a conceived set of owned experiences that would common sensibly bring together the event with the actors. Thus, whether Cory or the fans are parents, educated, immigrant, single or married, play golf or bowling, and so on, are not seen as relevant to the event to be explained. That he is president and owner of the hockey team is seen as relevant for connecting the event with biography, as is the fact that the fans are formulated as loyal. That is to say, adequate reason giving shows awareness of the culture's rules of relevance; that is, it shows what designations are relevant to connect with what events. Owner and team moving, fans and crying in their beer, are relevant membership categories (Sacks 1974). If one were to ask why did Richard Cory drop his kid off at daycare, for example, then the set of owned experiences formulated as a biography would be more likely to select *parent* rather than *team owner* as a membership

category. If the next day, the tavern fly goes to his job on the docks, then *working class* would be a relevant membership category.

Note, the requirement for sociologists, as ethnomethodology has demonstrated, to be disciplined with regard to the conditions of knowledge the talk invokes. While lay and professional sociologists (to draw on Garfinkel) can and do offer other interpretations for the event, what distinguishes the analyst is his/her focus "on the ways in which interpretations are done." (Blum 2003:15) Note also, the sense of the culture of Montreal is now getting richer. Being an owner is obviously a relevant membership category in a culture of modern capitalism where teams are owned by businesses as against some other possible cultures (for example, Ireland) where a team is a locally based part of an amateur sports organization. Being an emotional fan of a hockey team is obviously a relevant membership category in the culture of a city where the history of a team has played such a major role.

Intelligible reason giving requires invoking relevant membership categorization, which, in turn, reveals a culture that counts certain categories as relevant. Here, the idea of a demand for seats, the business of selling to customers, the business of sport is, in ordinary and taken for granted ways, seen as a relevant way to make sense of the event of moving, which itself says something about Montreal. Similarly, the idea of loyal fans who have personal memories of the great players for the Montreal Canadiens (Richard, Belliveu) and who cry in their beer stein at the thought of the loss of the Forum, is also saying something about the culture of Montreal. As Blum and McHugh (1971: pp.106) characterize it, the grammar of motive includes

> some collection of owned experiences which can be allocated to the agent of the act, and some rule(s) for showing the related character of the event and the collection of experiences…thus when users formulate the biographies called [owner, the fan], the relevance of which to the event [team moving, crying in your beer] is decided through a formulation of circumstances and characteristics such as [profit making, team loyalty], they are formulating the biographies [owner, fan] as the type of persons whose [interest in profit making, preserving a relation to what has given emotional pleasure in the past] could produce the event [of the moved team, the crying].

That is, this particular stretch of reason giving is ordinarily intelligible in the way it formulates Cory and the fans as the type of persons (a good businessman, over-sentimental fans) who would move a team from its iconic place for reasons of profit or respond to the move with intoxicated grief. All reason giving for social action formulates the type of person who would do a particular act; in this case, it formulates the types of person for whom it makes sense for the event to happen (in the culture of Montreal as a modern city in a capitalist society and as host of a famous hockey team): a team owner as oriented to the demands of capitalism and the fans as oriented to the pleasure of past experiences.

Note, that I am not doing a report or description of empirical people called Todd, or Cory or loyal Canadiens fans but I am formulating the grounds of that make this

reason giving an intelligible response to an interest in formulating the event of the move from a historic hockey venue in the Montreal environment. Thus, it is not to claim that Jack Todd is accurate in his ascription, but rather, it is an example of how adequate reason giving works. As Blum and McHugh (1971: p.106) note, 'type of person … explicates the circumstances and understanding required to assert the relevance of any biography for the event.' The community of common sense members is peopled with the idea of persons, where to make sense of events through motive talk (why is he moving the team, why is he crying in his beer) requires a formulation of the types of persons who would do such acts. If, for example, Todd had said that Cory wants the fans of the team to have more comfortable seats, then that stretch of talk formulates Cory as the type of person who cares for the comfort of his customers. If he had said that loyal fans, though they are not legal owners of a team, nevertheless have a stake in the team and where they play (that is, they are more than mere customers), then that would formulate the fans as oriented stakeholders in the team. When professional social scientists explain the move of the hockey team in terms of the movement of global capitalism (Belanger 2002), they are necessarily drawing on the way common sense members construct and sustain a world where that is seen as one possible reasonable explanation.

According to Blum and McHugh (1971: p. 108), 'every kind of showing as a type of person is a method of excluding other possible persons, that the actor as this type of person is selectively doing whatever he comes to.' Everyday reason giving discourse formulates actors who, as types of persons, have methods for making observable their motives – in this case, the interest in having more customers or mourning the loss of a beloved place. Cory is formulated as having a method for making available his interest in profit as a course of action, and moving the team is one possible way of making that interest observable. The loyal fans are formulated as tavern flies who are emotionally attached to the place where the greats of Montreal hockey played, and they are formulated as having a method for making their sense of loss observable; crying in their beer is one possible way of showing loss as an intelligible course of action. Do we not here have images of the culture of Montreal – loyal fans, hard headed businessmen, capitalism and tradition, taverns and tourists, a city that debates its past and its future? These are images that begin to show Montreal's way of dealing with the ethical collision that the loss of a city icon raises.

Clearly, Todd is not a neutral observer in this ethical collision, as can be seen from the way his particular expression of motive talk formulates types of persons. His statement is an intervention in the city as a terrain of many voices, an intervention that calls on the sentimental fan to reflect on the rational, if instrumental, decision the owner has to make. When comparing Montreal's arena with Calgary's he cannot help feel that his is smaller and the loyal fans should not be so self absorbed in their own pity but should instead have some sympathy for the owner who is suffering from a small arena syndrome. Todd formulates Cory as a businessman who has no choice, and thus as one the sentimental fans should have empathy for. Of course, in saying he has no choice, he is also formulating Cory as in 'bad faith,' masking as a necessity what is always a choice (Berger 1963: p. 160). Thus, Todd's particular use of motive talk, betrays a deeper

contradiction, where the conditions of the discourse require that Cory be formulated as an oriented actor, as an actor who knows what he is doing, while at the same time rhetorically portraying Cory as the hard-headed businessman who has no choice but to make a difficult choice. Of course, there is only no choice because the idea that sports is a competitive business is not seen as an option but as a natural environment. Other voices to the terrain of many voices that is the modern city would raise that option as itself arguable and so an ethical collision.

This paper sought to show that locating speech within a discourse is one way of addressing the status of newspaper talk as data, in such a way that the phenomenon being analysed can come into being. That is, this stretch of reason giving in particular shows that capitalism in all its ambiguity is a phenomenon grounded in everyday discourse. Everyday reason giving is how phenomena become real in speech. In Plato's idiom it is how form makes an appearance. In this case, we can see that capitalism is a phenomenon that needs to be understood.

To understand the move of a hockey team from its place as a city icon, the latter gets constituted in discourse as inadequate to the release of imaginary desires. The Forum is formulated as an arena suitable only for a previous, more technologically primitive time – a formulation that takes hold in the discourse of the people, revealed in the ordinary ways the event is made sense of in motive talk. Here, the sociologist has an opportunity to examine the hold that the ambiguity of capitalism (both in its promise and its betrayal of that promise) has in everyday discourse, a hold that itself remains to be examined. Capitalism in this sense is no longer an abstract system working behind the backs of people, but rather an imaginary that is drawn on in ordinary, taken for granted ways in everyday discourse. Blum (2003: p. 231) can be said to follow up on this opportunity in his chapter on Materialism in the *Imaginative Structure of the City.*

> The city which is the capital of the civilized world is the city that centres and exemplifies the power of capital not externally but by linking it squarely to the satisfaction of desire. The power of capital at such a centre is two-sided, residing in its capacity to empower the appearance of a quantitative expansion in the dream of sweetness of living and at the very same time, to arouse theorizing capable of putting into question this very conception of the real order, its concealed powers, qualities and capacities.

[i] I would like to thank Ryan Devitt who took time out from his PhD to work over the Christmas holidays on the formatting of this paper according to journal guidelines. I doubt I would have made the deadline without this help. I would also like to thank Maria Rădan Gorska for her editorial patience.

[ii] This paper does not address the status of the Motive paper in relation to Blum and McHugh's corpus of work, including the Addendum. That has been addressed in Bonner 2001. This paper focuses on the issue of what counts as adequate data, and what counts as an adequate account. Blum and McHugh demonstrated motive talk as 'formulating a type of person' (1974 p. 38) and the quest for a motive as 'a request for a theory' (28). Their work after this paper (1974; 1984), both in collaboration and individually, can be fruitfully read as involved in working out the relation between doing theory and showing a self. But that issue needs to be the subject of another paper.

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