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## Surprise As an Interactional Achievement: Reaction Tokens in Conversation\*

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*The expression of surprise—at something unexpected—is a key form of emotional display. Focusing on displays of surprise performed by means of reaction tokens (akin to Goffman’s “response cries”), such as wow, gosh, oh my god, ooh!, phew, we use an ethnomethodological, conversation-analytic approach to analyze surprise in talk-in-interaction. Our key contribution is to detach the psychology of surprise from its social expression by showing how co-conversationists collaborate to bring off an interactionally achieved performance of surprise. Far from being a visceral eruption of emotion, the production of a surprise token is often prepared for several turns in advance. We also show how surprise can be recycled on an occasion subsequent to its initial production, and how surprise displays may be delayed by silence, ritualized disbelief, and other repair initiations. Finally, we consider some of the uses of surprise as an interactional resource, including its role in the reflection and reproduction of culture.*

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Surprise—the emotion experienced when encountering “unexpectedness” (Reizenzein 2000) or “expectancy violations” (Scherer, Zentner, and Stern 2004)—is commonly regarded as a fundamental human emotion (Ortony and Turner 1990; Strongman 2003). Like other “basic” or “primary” emotions—happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust—it is typically inferred from characteristic facial expressions, bodily postures, and vocalizations (Tomkins 1962). Raised eyebrows, open mouth, upflung hands, and gasps and exclamations are com-

mon expressions or displays of surprise (Plutchik 1980).

Social psychologists typically have theorized such displays with reference to one or the other of two distinctive frameworks, sometimes called “organismic” and “interactional” (Hochschild 1979). In organismic approaches, rooted in Darwin’s ([1892]/1998) classic evolutionary theory, emotion is understood as fundamentally biological, and displays of emotion are seen as inadvertent manifestations of individual bodily processes. For Darwin, emotions are innate and instinctual physiological responses with functional significance; emotion displays are designed in the first instance not to communicate emotions but to serve adaptive purposes. According to Darwin, expressions of surprise, graduating into “astonishment” and thence to “stupefied amazement” (p. 178), originate in the biology of the “startle” response (although some subsequent researchers have argued that the startle response is more reflex than emotion: see Ekman, Friesen, and Simons 1985). In Darwin’s classic account, in the face of an unexpected event or a violated expectation, raised eyebrows enable “the eyes [to] be opened quickly and widely” (p. 278) and the

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“open mouth of a man stupefied with amazement” (p. 284) is “so as to draw a deep and rapid inspiration” (p. 97). The vocalizations characteristic of surprise (“a deep oh” or “a blowing, hissing, or whistling noise” such as “*whew*” (pp. 285–86) are a consequence of position of the mouth in interaction with the timing of expiration (p. 97). Organismic approaches, then, conceptualize emotion as “unbidden and uncontrollable” (Hochschild 1979:551); emotion displays are viewed as “visceral” eruptions, the involuntary overflowing of internal states. Emotional expression is not considered to be intentional or primarily communicative (although a “signaling” function is clearly adaptive in evolutionary terms). Rather, it is a by-product of physiological responses within the individual.

By contrast, interactional approaches, such as social constructionism (Averill 1982; Harré 1986), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), and discursive psychology (Edwards 1997; Potter 1996), conceptualize emotion as fundamentally social or socially constructed rather than biological, and displays of emotion are viewed as intentional communications rather than as involuntary exusions. From an interactional perspective, “[e]motions are not something which just happen to an individual; rather, they are acts which a person performs” (Averill 1974:182). Interactional approaches, while not denying individual experience, focus on the intrinsically communicative function of emotion, particularly the interactional uses and interpersonal “management” of emotion displays (Cahill and Eggleston 1994; Hochschild 1983; Parkinson 1991). Work in this tradition focuses on the way in which the expression of emotion is interactionally organized and attuned to others in the social world: for example, how facial expressions of elation or disappointment are directed to an audience rather than occurring in direct response to a precipitating event (Kraut and Johnston 1979), or the way in which displays of empathic pain are inserted into an interaction sequence (Heath 1989). The emotional expression of surprise may be used as a “social signal” in play between mothers and infants: mothers were found to exclaim at a higher pitch when their children did not show a surprise facial expression at a jack-in-the-box than when

they did so (Reissland, Shepherd, and Cowie 2002). Interactional approaches, then, conceptualize emotion as “social through and through” (Parkinson 1996:672), and emotion displays are regarded as primarily communicative.

Whereas the organismic approach seeks to uncover the physiological underpinnings of emotional expression, the interactional approach—most markedly from the social constructionist perspective—focuses instead on why and how (Western, modern) people conceptualize emotion in organismic terms, and perform it accordingly. Averill (1974) suggests that we understand emotions as visceral because of centuries of “psychophysiological symbolism,” associating emotions with primitive, animal-like parts of the nervous system: the “visceral brain” and the guts. This, in turn, has informed the prevailing discourse of emotion: “[w]e are ‘gripped,’ ‘seized,’ and ‘torn’ by emotion; we act ‘uncontrollably’” (p. 152). As Harré (1986:5) puts it, the notion of an emotion as “a response suffered by a passive participant in some emotive event” is itself one of “the social strategies by which emotions and emotion declarations are used by people in certain interactions.”

The research reported here contributes to the interactional tradition, building specifically upon the work of Goffman (1978). Goffman theorized the interactional uses of the visceral understanding of emotion in his important paper on “response cries”: “exclamatory imprecations” (p. 798), which function as “exuded expressions, not intentionally sent messages” (p. 800). Akin to (some kinds of) emotional display, response cries are “a form of behavior whose very meaning is that it is something blurted out, something that has escaped control” (p. 799): they include pain cries (*ow, ouch*), “spill cries” (*oops, whoops*), revulsion sounds (*eeuw*), surprise sounds (*eek, yipe*), and lexicalized items drawn from religion (*hell, heavens*) and taboo domains of bodily function (*shit, fuck*).

According to Goffman, social members understand response cries as visceral eruptions of spontaneous emotions: “a natural overflowing, a flooding up of previously contained feeling, a bursting of normal con-

straints, a case of being caught off-guard" (p. 800). Regardless of their lexical (or paralexical) identities, what these response cries have in common is that they "externalize a presumed inward state" (Goffman 1978:794) and convey the sense of having been blurted out spontaneously, the involuntary exuding of a psychological state rather than an intentional piece of communication. Goffman claimed, but did not provide systematic data analysis to demonstrate, that these apparently "blurted out" imprecations are fundamentally interactional events, "creatures of social situations" (p. 814). He made various provocative suggestions as to how response cries might work socially, but without analyzing any actual instances of their use.

In this article we use a conversation-analytic approach to investigate a subset of response cries—we call these "reaction tokens"<sup>1</sup>—used analyzably to perform surprise, as they occur in naturalistically collected data. We will refer to these as "surprise tokens," or, when making analytic points that locate them in the field of reaction tokens more generally, as "(surprise) reaction tokens."

The research presented here is part of a larger study in progress, in which we are exploring the interactional use of reaction tokens based on a recorded corpus of (so far) around 600 instances in English-language talk.<sup>2</sup> We build on previous conversation-

analytic work (in particular, Freese and Maynard 1998; C. Goodwin 1996; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987, 2000): instead of treating reaction tokens as eruptions or leakages of internal, individual, physiological, or psychological states, we explore them as *interactional* strategies in social contexts. Our aim is to rescue reaction tokens from the "implacable familiarity" (Schegloff, cited in Heritage 2003:17) of mundane everyday understandings, to situate them firmly within social action, and to analyze their deployment as specifically sociological phenomena.

The key contribution of this article is to detach the psychology of surprise (the emotional experience of encountering the unexpected) from the social expression of surprise (the public display of finding something counter to expectation). We show empirically that expressions of surprise conveyed through surprise tokens (*o::h!*, *wow*, *golly*, and so on) are not involuntary spontaneous emotional eruptions but interactionally organized performances: that surprise is an interactional achievement. We also examine, particularly in the final section, what is accomplished socially by displays of surprise: that surprise is also an interactional resource. We show that actions accomplished by the performance (or withholding) of surprise include the reflection and reproduction of culture; the production and reinscription of membership categories; affiliation and disaffiliation; and management of the local moral order. In these ways, then, we contribute to the interactional account of emotion, specifically surprise, as a fundamentally social phenomenon.

## SURPRISE TOKENS

People display surprise in many ways other than producing surprise tokens, including prosodic marking on questions and repeats of prior turns (Jefferson 1972; Selting 1996), facial expression (Ekman 1992), and

<sup>1</sup> The term *reaction tokens* is intended to capture their *reactive* nature (some reaction or response is indelibly intricately into them); their bounded format (they are units that are not infiltrated into a turn in the way that laughter or other prosodic features may be, and are not grammatically part of it); and their minimal quality in that (unlike, for example, other displays of surprise such as "Are you serious?!" or "He didn't!") they do not function as initiating actions, which make relevant further talk from the producer of the surprise source turn. The choice of term also differentiates our collection from Goffman's (1978) somewhat differently defined version of the phenomenon. Goffman also included, for example, filled pauses (such as "uh," "um") in his collection of "response cries"; these are not included in our collection of "reaction tokens."

<sup>2</sup> The data from which these instances are drawn are Kitzinger's Birth Crisis Calls (BCC) and Home Birth (HB) corpora; Wilkinson's Breast Cancer Patients (BCP) corpus; some ad hoc personal recordings; and the immense corpus of British and American audio and video recordings now available to

researchers in conversation analysis, transcribed primarily by Gail Jefferson. When the audio data have been available to us, however, we have undertaken some retranscription. We are particularly grateful to Doug Maynard and to Victoria Land for making available to us the audio data for fragments 2/31; and 1, 19 and 20, respectively.

gesture and body deployment (C. Goodwin 2000). Nonetheless, people can and do display surprise, and are understood by co-interactants to be doing so, even when they are not visible to one another (as in the telephone conversations that constitute the majority of our data), using *only* surprise tokens. Although we are not claiming, then, to be documenting the range and variety of ways in which human beings display surprise to one another, we provide detailed analysis of one such means of display.

We did not stipulate in advance any definitional features of surprise tokens except that they should be used analyzably to perform surprise: that is, to display that some prior talk or event in the world<sup>3</sup> is unexpected or counter to expectation. The warrant that this is so is based on the interactional data analyses that constitute most of this article. It so happens that a wide array of different reaction tokens was used in our data set to display surprise, including *wow*, *gee*, *gosh*, *jesus christ*, *my goodness*, *oh my word*, *oo:h!*, *oh:!*, *good gracious*, *oh my god*, *oh shit*, *blimey*, and nonlexical tokens such as whistles and gasps. The lexical (and paralexical) items used to perform surprise also can be, and are, used to perform very different reactions. In our data set, for example, *(oh) (my) god* is analyzably deployed to perform, in addition to surprise (see fragments 12, 18, 19, and 24), disgust (at bags of rotten potatoes)

and sympathetic dismay (about a dying mother). Another way of putting this is to say that reaction tokens are both context-free and context-dependent:<sup>4</sup> that is, a single reaction token can be used flexibly across many different contexts. The particular reaction it performs on any given occasion depends upon the deployment and calibration of prosodic features and upon its local sequential context. Specific reaction tokens are selected in part with reference to vernacular poetics (Jefferson 1996; Schegloff 2002) and in part to display both the *extent* of the surprise (from mild puzzlement to deep shock) and its *valence* (from very positive to very negative), such that particular combinations of lexical and prosodic usage convey anything from awed amazement to horrified disbelief, from delighted astonishment to carefully neutral surprise (Bollinger 1985: 48).

In English, intonation makes an independent contribution to the meaning of an utterance. Early work focusing on the prosody of surprise suggested that pitch register, pitch movement, and relative volume were characteristic of “surprised” utterances, especially a rise-fall (Roach 1983:119) or rise-fall-rise (Bollinger 1989:286) intonational contour. Evidence in support of these early (and many subsequent) claims, however, has relied on analysts’ intuitions, remembered overhearings, and informants’ judgments about scripted dialogues in laboratory settings (for

<sup>3</sup> In this article we discuss only reaction tokens responsive to preceding talk, and not those responsive to events in the world, because the former constitute the majority of instances in our data. Two examples of the latter are shown below. In the first, Barbara’s *my goodness* is a surprise token responding to the tactile sensations of picking up a prosthetic breast for the

first time (she has recently undergone a mastectomy). In the second, Loretta’s *oh my gosh* responds to events she is watching on television, which are not accessible to her recipient. The latter, as established in the immediately preceding sequence, is not watching (Daktari on TV.) For the key to the symbols used in transcription, see the appendix.

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[RT193: Wilkinson: BCP2: 7:6-8]

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01 Bar: My goodness it feels so ni:ce. °huh-huh ←  
 02 huh huh huh° .hhh \$ It even feels wa:rm. .h-huh!

[RT367 Trio III]

---

01 Lor: Oh my gosh Officer Henry is (.) ul-locked in the ←  
 02 ca:ge wi- (0.3) with a lion.

Surprise tokens, and other forms of reaction token, are also very common in reported speech. These are the focus of a forthcoming analysis and are not discussed here.

<sup>4</sup>See Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974:699, Note 8) for a discussion of this phenomenon in relation to the turn-taking organization for conversation.

example, Levis 2002). We know of only two phonetic analyses of surprise based on empirical analysis of actual talk-in-interaction (Local 1996; Selting 1996; also see Freese and Maynard 1998, whose analysis of the prosodic features of news delivery includes surprise).

In Selting's analysis of German conversation, repair initiations (such as *was* [what] and *bitte* [pardon]) were found to be differentiated prosodically between those understood by recipients to convey problems of hearing or understanding (as displayed through speakers' repetition of prior turn), and those understood by recipients to convey "surprise" or "astonishment" (as displayed, for example, through speakers' accounting for what is thereby treated as an unusual circumstance that runs counter to expectations). The latter are characterized by increased pitch and extra loudness in comparison to surrounding units (Selting 1996).

In Local's analysis of British and American English conversation, *oh*-tokens likewise were found to be differentiated prosodically between those understood as straightforward "news receipts" (thus "not necessarily associated with the degree to which an answer is unexpected," Heritage 1984:309) and those which functioned as "surprised" receipts (Local 1996:202), signaling the unexpectedness of the news imparted. On the basis of his analysis of surprise *ohs*, Local identifies particular pitch configurations (high, wide-range, rising-falling) characteristic of displays of surprise, but cautions against "a simplistic assignment of meaning to pitch contours independent of the interactional, lexical and grammatical environments in which they occur" (Local 1996:206).

The contribution of these two studies to linguistics is to show that prosody does not operate independently of its local interactional, lexical, and sequential environment. Their contribution to conversation analysis (CA) is to describe some of the features of

prosodic marking without which some of the ways in which speakers perform surprise would not be hearable as such, even with their local environment otherwise fully accounted for. Nonlexical reaction tokens (such as *oh*), are constituted as surprise reaction tokens largely through being "punched up" prosodically (represented in conventional CA transcription notations as, for example, *O ↑:::h!*).<sup>5</sup>

Our collection of surprise tokens, then, consists of that subset of items, from our larger collection of reaction tokens, which register the unexpectedness of information conveyed in a prior turn at talk (whether the unexpectedness is valenced positively, neutrally, or negatively). As such, surprise tokens are differentiated from:

Reaction tokens performing emotions other than surprise (such as disgust, pleasure, or sympathy; see Wilkinson and Kitzinger forthcoming a);

"Oh" as a simple news receipt (see Heritage 1984; Local 1996);

Other vocalized ways of conveying surprise that are not "tokens": for example, newsmarks and news receipts initiating new sequences ("Did he really?!", "You're kidding," Heritage 1984; Jefferson 1981; Maynard 1997; also discussed in the section on "ritualized disbelief" below); claims to be surprised ("I *am* surprised at that"); and assessments of events as surprising ("That's amazing," see fragment 3 below). As we will see, these other methods of conveying surprise often occur in the same environment as surprise tokens, and to some extent shade

<sup>5</sup> Participants' orientation to the prosodic distinction between news receipts and surprise tokens can be seen in Lesley's report of reactions to her announcement that a burglary suspect had "looked suspiciously at [her] dining room." She reports the classic facial expression of surprise (their "mouths all dropped open"), repairing the prosody on "oh" (line 3) so as to transform it from a news receipt to the surprise token more fitted to the open-mouthed reaction.

[RT202N: Holt X(C) 2-1-6]

01 Les: [When ↑↑I walked in that post office  
 02 'n--:: said oh 'e looked suspiciously at my dining room  
 03 their mouths all dropped open.  
 04 (0.3)  
 05 Les: An' they said oh- ↑Oh: were ↑you bur:gled, too:;hh ←

into them at the edges of our collection. Nonetheless, as we will show, these tokens constitute a distinctive set of practices that perform surprise (instead of merely claiming it) and do so in an as-if-visceral way.

### SURPRISE TOKENS IN CONTEXT

Surprise tokens are commonly produced after some talk (typically a news telling,

announcement, or informing) designed to elicit surprise from the recipient. Not all news is designed by its teller to elicit surprise. There is a clear distinction between talking so as to be heard as simply imparting new information (as in fragment 1 below) and talking so as to be heard as imparting *surprising* information: that is, new information counter to expectation (as in fragment 2 below).

---

#### Fragment 1: Pregnant Again

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[Land: YU9: 30:48]  
 01 Pau: So:: .hh But- oh Alison's pregnant. Again.  
 02 Chl: Oh ri:ght. Yeah.  
 03 Pau: Which I heard today as well when I popped into ( )  
 04 an' she's like (going) [( )]  
 05 Chl: [.hh So]there'll be quite a big gap  
 06 betwee:n (.) them.  
 07 Pau: Four. (.) Four yeah four.  
 08 Chl: yeah  
 09 Pau: So: uh four year[s.]  
 10 Chl: [Oh] right. Not as big as I thought. Yeah.  
 11 [Yeah.]  
 12 Pau: [And ] um Sally's just had a baby girl. [And ]  
 13 Chl: [.hhh] They're  
 14 sproutin' everywhere. My colleague at work her sister's  
 15 just had one.

---

In fragment 1, the teller (Paul) imparts two pieces of information marked as news (something only “heard today,” line 3; something that has “just” happened, line 12), but not as surprising in any way. Surprise involves finding some object or event contrary to expectation. The turn-terminal “again” (line 1) treats the news of Alison’s pregnancy as rather to be expected (even though, it seems, it is four years since her last pregnancy); Chloe receipts the news with an “oh right” (a simple news receipt) rather than with any expression of surprise. Even more markedly, Chloe treats the further news that “Sally’s just had a baby girl” (line 12) as utterly unsurprising; she invokes a context in which every-

one apparently is having babies, rendering Sally’s (and Alison’s) doing so entirely to be expected. Paul and Chloe are aligned in not being surprised, thereby producing themselves as co-inhabitants of a world in which pregnancies and births are commonplace (even though the only further instance Chloe offers is at some remove: the sister of a colleague, line 14).

By contrast, fragment 2 (also see the earlier analysis by Maynard 1997) represents an interaction in which a speaker *designs* her talk to elicit surprise, and her recipient duly produces a surprise token: *oh my goodness* (line 9, arrowed).

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#### Fragment 2: Speaking of Bottoms

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[RT513: PND3:18 (from Maynard 1997)]  
 01 Andi: .hhh well: (.) speaking of bottoms are you sitting  
 02 dow:n.  
 03 Betty: Ye:ah.  
 04 Andi: Well (.) we have some news for you:.  
 05 Betty: What.  
 06 Andi: .hhh th' t (.) may come as \$ a bit of a surpri:se. ehhh!  
 07 Betty: I see- \$what are you telling me.\$=  
 08 Andi: =hhh! Bob and I are gunna have a baby.

09 Betty: <°O:h my: go:od↑ness°> hho- (0.5) did you have a ←  
 10 reverse- he have a reversal?  
 11 Andi: Yeah.

Here, Andi clearly designs her telling as a surprise source: first via the elaborate pre-announcement heralding “news” (line 4) that might possibly (it is implied) cause her recipient to faint, or at least go weak at the knees, with the shock of it (“are you sitting down,” line 1). After a go-ahead (“what,” line 5), which specifically invites the projected telling, she postpones telling the news by producing an increment to her prior turn, specifically labeling the news as “a bit of a surprise.” Immediately after the news announcement (“Bob and I are gunna have a baby,” line 8) Betty produces her surprise token, *oh my goodness*, and immediately inquires about precisely that aspect of the announcement which generates the “surprise”: Bob, it seems, is known by Betty to have had a vasectomy (lines 9–10). Andi’s surprise source turn is designed precisely for a recipient with some prior knowledge (that Bob has had a vasectomy) but without other knowledge (that he subsequently has had it reversed). In the design of surprise source turns, speakers display what they expect their recipient already to know and take for granted, as well as what they do *not* expect them to know and hence what will come as a surprise. This may be knowledge specific to an individual (as in fragment 2), or more general cultural or sub-cultural knowledge (as in many of the examples that follow).

Fragment 2 is typical of the surprise exchanges in our data in the following ways. First, as in the majority of cases in our collection, the surprise token is responsive to an interactant’s prior talk, and not to direct sensory impressions of the world (see notes 3 and 7 for instances of the latter). Second, two people collaborate to bring off the production of surprise: one produces something surprising; the other produces the surprise reaction. A more formal way of putting this is to say that the turn containing the surprise source and the turn in which the surprise token is produced are in a structurally “preferred” relationship (Sacks [1973]/1987, 1995) to one another. That is, the surprise source turn is analyzably designed precisely to elicit the sur-

prise duly performed in next turn, and the action of a speaker producing a surprise token aligns with the action of the prior speaker whose talk was designed to elicit it.

This, at least, is the normative form of these interactions and also numerically the most common in our data. It contrasts with instances in which speakers react with surprise tokens to prior turns at talk *not* analyzably designed to elicit surprise (see fragment 9, below) and with instances in which speakers withhold surprise tokens to prior talk analyzably designed to elicit them (see fragment 10 below). Both of these latter instances are “dispreferred” in the structural sense of displaying a misalignment between speakers (Pomerantz 1984), and thus are nonnormative (as well as relatively rare in our collection).

### *Surprise Source Turns*

In each of fragments 3 through 8 (below), speakers produce surprise tokens in response to prior talk analyzably designed to elicit surprise. In each instance, a surprise source turn informs a recipient about some event or experience, designing that telling so as to highlight the contrast between what might be expected and what actually turned out to be the case. In each instance, the recipient responds with a surprise token that embodies, and claims to share, the prior speaker’s conveyed understanding that something unusual or counter to expectation has been described.

As would be expected on the basis of the well-established finding that turns in a structurally preferred relationship are contiguous with one another (Sacks [1973]/1987), these surprise tokens are produced without delay, usually immediately following the projectable end of the surprise source turn (as in fragments 3–6) or with slightly early onset, in overlap with it (as in fragment 7). (We have marked the surprise token line with an arrow in each case.)

In fragment 3 (from a call to a birth crisis helpline), the call-taker’s *ooh!* (line 3) is well fitted to Eve’s account of her labor at this point in her telling.

## Fragment 3: No Pain

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[RT114N: Kitzinger BCC 103:11]  
 01 Eve: I w- got to six centimeters and I hadn't had no  
 02 pain at a::ll.  
 03 Clt: Oo::[h! ] ←  
 04 Eve: [U:m] [a:nd ]  
 05 Clt: [That']s amazin[g.]  
 06 Eve: [ I ] know.

---

Eve has designed this part of her telling to embody a stance towards having been six centimeters dilated and pain-free. She is not simply recounting a fact, but treating it as surprising. As a negative observation, her report treats the absence of pain as a noticeable departure from what might otherwise be expected (Schegloff 1988). "At all" is an extreme case formulation" (Pomerantz 1986), produced with exaggerated emphasis which further underscores the absence of (even mild) pain. The call-taker treats the situation Eve describes as "amazing," across two separate units: her surprise reaction (*Oo::h!*, line 3) and her assessment ("That's amazing," line 5). At line 6 Eve confirms that

indeed she had intended to convey how "amazing" her experience was, and "knows" it to be so.

Negative observations, and extreme case formulations are common components of turns treated as surprise sources. Other examples of extreme case formulations in turns treated as surprise sources by recipients (via their production of surprise tokens) include "extreme case proportional formulations" (Pomerantz 1986:228), such as "all" (fragment 4) and "only" (fragments 5 and 6) as well as intensifiers such as "just" (fragment 24) and "very" (fragment 27); also see "even" (fragment 22).

## Fragment 4: All-Night Party

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[RT62: Holt: Sept-Oct 88:1:11]  
 01 Les: [Oh:] I I say Gordon's jus'  
 02 come home he's bin itta party all night.  
 03 Mum: O[h: good gracious=Has he got a fat head ←

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## Fragment 5: Horse Hair Factory

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[RT327: Holt:X(C)1:1:1:7]  
 01 Les: He wz a (0.2) .p a ↑buyer for the hoh- i-  
 02 the ↑only horse hair fact'ry left in  
 03 England. ←  
 04 Mum: Good gracious.  
 05 (0.3)  
 06 Les: And he wz their buyer,

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## Fragment 6: Twins

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[RT584: Kitzinger BCC 217]  
 01 Clt: I only learnt six weeks before when I was having twins.  
 02 Jen: °°Oh my goodness!hhh° ←  
 03 Clt: And d'you kno:w (.) what my m- what my doctor  
 04 said.  
 05 Jen: Wha(h) (h)t.  
 06 Clt: A- She was taking an awfully long time examining me  
 ((continues))

---

Extreme case formulations also are constructed recurrently with numerical values, displaying, for example, duration

(fragment 6), age (fragment 7), and weight and size (fragment 8). Notice, too, in fragment 7, the pre-announcement that Pat

uses in line 1: it seems to rely on Meg's presumed inability to deduce Pat's age by looking at her, and hence adumbrates a

contrast between appearance and reality which constitutes part of the surprise source.

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Fragment 7: Seventy-Five

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[RT194: Wilkinson BCP8:32:46-33:08]

01 Pat: =D'you know old I a:m.  
 02 (.)  
 03 Meg: No:: I've no id[ea. ]  
 04 Pat: [\$I'm] seventy fi: [ve.\$]  
 05 Meg: [G o:] shh! ←  
 06 huh huh [ ° huh huh huh °]  
 07 Pat: [\$Going on seventy ] SI: [X!\$]  
 08 Wyn: [ ha]h-hah-hah  
 09 Meg: m[m!]  
 10 Pat: [ B]ut I don't fee:l it.

---



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Fragment 8: Ten-Pound Baby

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[RT30: TG: 19:08]

01 Bee: She had it yestihday. Ten:: pou:nds.  
 02 Ava: °Je:sus Christ.° ←  
 03 Bee: She ha[dda ho: (hh)rse hh .hh]

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In producing designed surprise source turns, speakers commonly rely on recipients' being co-cultural members with shared knowledge that (for example) the pain-free early labor (3) and the ten-pound baby (8) are not normal, ordinary, taken-for-granted events in their culture. In producing a surprise reaction to a designed surprise source, a recipient endorses a speaker's stance that some normative expectation has been breached. Conversely, when a turn is *not* designed as a surprise source, and a recipient does *not* treat it as such (as in fragment 1: "Pregnant again"), co-interactants likewise confirm for each other a world held in common with no expectations breached. In aligning about what is and what is not surprising, speakers and recipients invoke and reproduce mundane understandings of what is normative for their culture.

### Two Deviant Cases

In the instances presented so far, surprise sources and surprise tokens have been in a preferred, or aligning, relationship: that is,

surprise tokens have been produced in response to surprise source turns designed to elicit them. We end this section with some counterexamples: instances in which surprise sources and surprise tokens stand in a dispreferred, or non-aligning, relationship.

In fragment 9 below, a recipient *produces* a surprise token even though the speaker has not designed a prior turn to elicit it. In fragment 10, a recipient *withholds* surprise following a surprise source turn designed to elicit it. In producing a surprise reaction to a turn *not* designed to elicit it (as in 9), or in *withholding* surprise as a reaction to a turn designed to elicit it (as in 10), recipients display some alternative stance towards what can be expected in the normal course of things.

In fragment 9, Ted is doing nothing surprising in giving Fran (who has asked for it, line 1) his telephone number, nor does he treat his own telephone number as in any way unusual or counter to expectation. Her surprise reaction (*jesus christ*, line 11) is clearly *not* something he is seeking to elicit.

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## Fragment 9: Telephone Number

[RT378: NB:III.1]  
 01 Fra: [...] you(h)'d be:tter give me yer nu:mb<sub>er</sub>.=  
 02 Ted: =↓Q:kay,  
 03 (0.3)  
 04 Ted: Sev'n one four,  
 05 Fra: Se::ven o:ne fou[:r].  
 06 Ted: [.t It's six sev'n three:~,  
 07 Fra: Si::x sev'n three.  
 08 Ted: Six two,  
 09 Fra: Six two.=  
 10 Ted: =Sev'n sev'n.  
 11 Fra: Se:v'n sev'n.=Jesus Chr(h)i(h)st? wh(h)at (h)a lo:ng ←  
 12 nu:mb<sub>er</sub>.=  
 13 Ted: =mWe:ll, (.) You wouldn'haftuh dial the sev'n one  
 14 four if yih git down, .hhh[hh et least ruh the eh-]  
 15 Fra: [But e v e n so : : . ]  
 16 (. )  
 17 Ted: Et the end'v Harbor Boulevh(h)a(h)rd?=  
 \_\_\_\_\_

As this interaction illustrates, a surprise reaction can be produced in inauspicious circumstances, the interactional equivalent of being cast upon stony ground in place of the fertile soil prepared for it by a designed surprise source.<sup>6</sup> One distinctive feature of the surprise token turn is particularly worth noting: Fran's surprise token, *jesus christ* (line 11), is immediately followed by talk locating its source (the "long number," lines 11–12). This is unusual in our data corpus: compare, for example, Ava's unelaborated *jesus christ* in fragment 8: "ten-pound baby" (and indeed the unelaborated surprise tokens in all of fragments 3–8). Ava's *jesus christ* (like the other surprise tokens in 3–8) is produced in response to an immediately prior turn analyzably designed to elicit it; surprise tokens in such environments are not normally followed by any additional talk designed to locate their source. Rather, interactants are assumed to understand the source of the surprise by virtue of the proximity of the surprise token to the prior turn produced in order to elicit precisely the kind of reaction its recipient has provided.

In our deviant case instance ("telephone number"), by contrast, Fran displays her analysis of the prior turn as not having been designed as a surprise source by following her surprise token *jesus christ* with informa-

tion locating its source. She thereby conveys her expectation that Ted might have difficulty making sense of her reaction without some indication of what could have occasioned it. This analysis is confirmed by Ted's subsequent turn, in which he accounts for the feature of his prior talk which Fran has located as the surprise source (the length of his telephone number). Thus our academic analysis that Bee's talk in fragment 8 is designed as a surprise source, whereas Ted's talk in fragment 9 is not, is also the analysis displayed by the co-interactants.

The surprise token turn in fragment 9 bears a strong family resemblance to a phenomenon previously described by Charles Goodwin (1996:394–5) as an "elaborating sentence," which "explicitates the reaction that prefaced it."<sup>7</sup> Relatively few of the reaction

<sup>7</sup> Goodwin (1996) cites three examples of this phenomenon (one produced in response to an event in the world; the others produced as part of reported speech). In his key exemplar, the speaker, working in an airline operations room, responds to images on a monitor array: her reaction token ("Uhoo::eh::") alerts the other workers to some reactable feature of the environment, and her elaborating sentence ("It's covering half of the ai(h)rpl(h)ane") formulates its source. Some additional instances are displayed in Goodwin and Goodwin (2000), also in co-present interaction in which the recipients' access to the observable feature of the world targeted by the reaction token has not yet been established. We suggest, then, that Goodwin's "elaborating sentence" is specific to contexts in which the surprise source is treated as not accessible to the recipient, and that the pattern we identify here is otherwise normative.

<sup>6</sup> Fragments 19 ("pregnant sister") and 24 ("banana leaf") provide further examples of surprise reactions to turns not designed to elicit them.

tokens in our collection overall are followed by “elaborating sentences”: the exceptions are either non-aligning (as in Fragment 9; and Fragment 19 below), or are responsive not to a prior utterance but to an *extra-linguistic* event accessible *only* to the speaker (see the examples in note 3).

In our second deviant case, fragment 10

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Fragment 10: Big Babies

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[Kitzinger BCC7: 5:17-7:13]

01 Gil: um (.) VErY long: (.) well co(h)mpa(h)ra(h)tively  
 02 >anyway< (.) It was about thirteen hours first  
 03 stage..hhh Two hours second stage. .hh Um:  
 04 an[d-]

05 Clt: [Th]at is long isn't it for a second  
 06 bab[y. mm.]

07 Gil: [Yeah. ] Well my first-  
 08 Marilyn was nine pounds.

09 Clt: mm hm

10 Gil: ((swallows)) Christian was nine pounds twe:lve.  
 11 (.)

12 Gil: So he was quite big. <But the second stage I felt  
 13 was the bit that DIDn't go brilliantly well but  
 14 .hhhh I felt quite compromised on what position  
 15 I was in.  
 // ((about 1 minute later))

90 Gil: And he was born.  
 91 (.)

92 Gil: And um (0.2) he was nine pounds twelve so(h) he  
 93 was quite big.

94 Clt: \$ We:ll you have very healthy big [bab]ies.  
 95 Gil: [yes]

96 U:m (0.5) I had a physiological third stage  
 97 which I think (.) didn't go brilliantly well  
 98 as well ((continues))

---

At line 8, Gill provides the information that her first baby weighed “*nine pounds.*” The average full-term birth weight (in the U.K.) is around eight pounds. This cultural knowledge, here presumed to be shared, in part constitutes the weights in lines 8 and 10 as surprise sources. The call taker, however, merely offers a continuer (“mm hm,” line 9). Gill then “ups the ante,” pointing out that her second baby was even larger (“*nine pounds twelve,*” line 10). In the absence of any reaction from the call taker at line 11, Gill offers her own assessment of the baby’s weight (“he was quite big,” line 12), before continuing with her story. About a minute later, Gill’s narrative reaches the birth itself (line 90), and she reiterates both the baby’s birth weight (line 92) and her assessment of it (“he was quite big,” lines 92–93). This time the

(taken from a call to a birth crisis helpline), Gill reports surprise sources her babies’ birth weights. Here, surprise reactions (from the call taker) are relevantly missing. As the fragment opens, Gill, who is pregnant for the third time, is explaining her concern about her forthcoming labor with reference to the length of her previous one.

repeated information does elicit a turn from the call taker, but she does not align with Gill on the issue of size. The call taker (again) refuses the opportunity to marvel at the babies’ birth weights, substituting an emphasis on their health (line 94). A surprise reaction is therefore still hearable as relevantly missing, and after a short delay (line 96), Gill continues with her narrative. It is likely that the reason for the call taker’s refusal to align is that Gill is offering size of baby as an account for length of labor. Displaying surprise at Gill’s unusually heavy babies might be heard here as endorsing this claim of causality, a claim explicitly challenged by the call taker later in the call.

In this section, then, we examined the design of surprise *source* turns, and showed that participants themselves orient to such

turns in accordance with their design. In all of the data we presented (with the exception of fragment 9), the turns at talk preceding the surprise token were analyzably designed to elicit surprise, and (with the exception of fragment 10) succeeded in doing so. Recipients' surprise tokens in these auspicious interactional environments align with speakers' own surprise in treating some feature of the world as unexpected.

We outlined some design features of surprise source turns (such as pre-announcements, negative observations, extreme case formulations). We also began to consider not just *how* people perform surprise, but also *why* they do so: what these surprise performances achieve in their local interactional environments. By performing as-if-visceral surprise reactions to talk designed to elicit it, people confirm for each other a shared, taken-for-granted world defined by a set of norms, values, and expectations of which the "surprising" behavior, event, or whatever constitutes a breach.

In the final section of this paper we offer a more substantial discussion of the interactional uses of surprise. First, however, we provide empirical evidence to support our claim, following Goffman (1978), that reaction tokens are not spontaneous, visceral eruptions, but rather are designed to appear as-if-visceral; that they are little performances of viscosity. In the next two sections we show that people can produce a *second* as-if-visceral surprise reaction to the *same* surprise source (recycled surprise); and that some other action, adumbrating or performing surprise in its own right, can intervene between the surprise source and the as-if-visceral surprise token (delayed surprise). The

data analyses presented below show how speakers actively extend surprise reactions over multiple turns at talk and create slots for the subsequent production of surprise tokens in the ongoing talk. A visceral eruption (whatever its interactional significance turns out to be) cannot, by definition, have been designed by its producer to achieve some interactional effect. In showing that reaction tokens are constructed to be as-if-visceral, we lay the groundwork for exploring further the interactional work that surprise tokens are analyzably designed to perform.

### RECYCLED SURPRISE SEQUENCES

Surprise is not necessarily a one-shot performance: it can be revived and recycled on subsequent occasions. An as-if-visceral surprise reaction can be "blurted out" multiple times to the same surprise source without apparently thereby losing its spontaneous and impulsive character. In this section we display some examples of "recycled surprise": instances in which a surprise source is produced and a surprise reaction to it is performed appropriately, only for the whole sequence to be recycled a little later in the interaction.

Fragments 11 and 12 are taken from a telephone call between Lottie and Emma, and are separated by about 50 seconds. In the first, very near the beginning of the conversation, Emma topicalizes her recent trip (line 1). She answers Lottie's question about the heat (lines 3–4) with a surprise source turn giving the temperature (line 5), to which Lottie, in appreciation of its extremity, reacts with a surprise token, *oh gosh* (line 7).<sup>8</sup>

Fragment 11: A Hundred and Fifteen (I)

---

[RT384: NBII:3:R:1]

01 Emm: .hhh We BEEN tuh PA:LM SPRINGS.  
 02 (0.2)

03 Lot: Oh: Qod ah be't it's  
 04 [ho:[:t.

05 Emm: [.hh[hunderd'n fiftēe:n.h ← surprise source  
 06 (0.2)

07 Lot: Oh:::go::sh. ← surprise token  
 08 (.)

09 Emm: ↓Gu:ys th'guys played go:lɸ over there about a  
 10 hunderd'n fifty of'm ((continues))

---

<sup>8</sup> Note that a short silence intervenes here between surprise source and surprise token. We discuss this feature in the next section.

In the second fragment, Emma checks out with Lottie the temperature back home, before recycling the surprise source turn (line

98) and again eliciting from Lottie a surprise reaction (*oh god*, line 99).

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Fragment 12: A Hundred and Fifteen (II)

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[RT385: NBII:3:R:2]

91 Emm: Oh it f<sub>ə</sub>:lt ni:ce tih come down  
 92 guess ih wz ho:t heeere yesterday  
 93 wasn't it..h=  
 94 Lot: =Teah it was ri:l ril ni- yesterday  
 95 morning it wz ri:l fo:ggy.  
 96 Emm: Wa: it. I thought it wa:s becuz ih  
 97 wz kahna ha:zy out ther-=.hh  
 98 'mA::gine a hunnerd'n fifteen ← recycled surprise source  
 99 Lot: Oh:: Go:d.= ← recycled surprise token  
 100 Emm: =En ar air conditioner went out. ((continues))

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Between these two interactions, Emma, who apparently was launching a telling about her trip, interrupts herself and offers to hang up because Lottie has “got company” (background voices are audible in this call). It is only after Lottie says goodbye to her companions, and reassures Emma that she is not “busy,” that Emma relaunches her telling, selecting her (already successfully produced) surprise source turn to do so. In fragment 12, then, the surprise source is recycled as a first part of a telling; in producing a second sur-

prise token, Lottie aligns as recipient for that telling.

In a different conversation between these two women, it is Lottie (again the producer of the surprise token) who recycles the surprise source turn originally produced by Emma. In fragment 13, Emma replies to Lottie's personal state enquiry (a version of “howareyou,” line 1) with bad news about her experience at the dentist (the surprise source turn, lines 2–9), and Lottie aligns to produce dismayed surprise (*oh shit*, line 10).

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Fragment 13: Gold Bridge (I)

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[RT386: NB:II:5:R]

01 Lot: Wt's new with you:.  
 02 Emm: .hhhh Qh:: ah wen'tih th'dentis'n  
 03 [uh:: G]od'e wantuh pull=  
 04 Lot: [Ye:ah?]  
 05 Emm: =a tooth 'n [make me a] new go:ld  
 06 Lot: [ . h h h ]  
 07 Emm: uh: .hhhh (.) bridge fer  
 08 (.)  
 09 Emm: EI:GHT HUNDER'DOLLARS. ← surprise source  
 10 Lot: °Oh:: sh::i[:t.° ] ← surprise token  
 11 Emm: [ Shi:t.  
 12 (0.2)  
 13 Emm: Is ri:ght.  
 14 Lot: Tha:t's a big (.) Tha:t's a big uh:::=  
 15 Emm: =.p.hhh=  
 16 Lot: =[gimmick.-]  
 17 Emm: =[He wo:n't]ry: tuh sa<sup>↑</sup>:ve this tooth this's  
 18 a new de:ntis'he said it's go:tta d-in  
 19 doesn'hu:rt me et A:LL ((continues))

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Less than a minute later, Lottie (the original recipient) recycles the surprise source turn as a candidate understanding (line 52).<sup>9</sup> On receiving confirmation (lines 53–54) she produces another sur-

prise token (*oh shoot*, line 56). The downgraded version of the original *shit* perhaps was selected to avoid having Emma repeat quite so emphatically an obscenity that Lottie herself had delivered sotto voce.

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Fragment 14: Gold Bridge (II)

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[RT387: NB:II:5:R]  
 51 Lot: =°N thā:t's a bunch'v moneŷ-°  
 52 Ei:ght hundred dɔ:l[ɑ r s ?] ← recycled surprise source  
 53 Emm: [↑Ihn th]at  
 54 t@RRIFIC?↑h  
 55 (0.2)  
 56 Lot: °Oh:: sh::qot° I: 'd go tuh ← recycled surprise token  
 57 sɔmebuddy @[: l s e.]  
 58 Emm: [I'm goan] bɑ:ck tih  
 59 my ɔthə dentist,h  
 60 (1.0)  
 61 Lot: °O[h::: °<]  
 62 Emm: [En I'm] not gonna hæv this:  
 63 tɔθ pʊləd? iz not ↓b:ɔ:θern me↑:?

---

Between these two interactions, Emma continues her complaint about her dentist's insistence on extraction, saying that she “wasn't ready to have [her] tooth pulled”; that he said “Well I don't wanna even fix it”; and that she doesn't “trust him.” Lottie does not align with Emma's position that a tooth which “doesn't hurt” should be fixed rather than pulled, and does not offer even minimal responses until she speaks again at line 51 above. Here she returns the complaint more specifically to the cost of the treatment. This concern is additional to those Emma has just been listing (note the “n” [and] with which she launches her turn), as opposed to whether it constitutes good dentistry. (Emma orients to this distinction too, and reinforces, after the recycled surprise sequence, her own position [lines 62–63]: she wants not just a

cheaper dentist, but one she can trust not to remove a tooth that isn't bothering her.) The recycled surprise sequence, launched by the initial *recipient* of the surprise source, serves here to extricate Lottie from her position as recipient of talk with which she is unwilling to express alignment, and to return the conversation to something on which they can (again) align: the high cost of the dentistry.

Fragments 15 and 16 are taken from classroom interaction and are separated by 20 minutes. In the first of these, a student is in the early stages of her in-class presentation of her project (part of the assessed work for this course). She reports having a collection of “about two hundred” instances (line 1); the professor produces an immediate reaction token (*Ph:::ew!*, line 3).

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Fragment 15: Two Hundred Instances (I)

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[RT94N: SW: class (I)]  
 01 Std: I've got a collection of about  
 02 two hundred= ← surprise source  
 03 Prf: =[Phe:::~::~:w!] ← surprise token  
 04 Std: =[of these (.) ] things. Taken

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<sup>9</sup> Fragment 19 (“pregnant sister”) offers another example of a recipient recycling the surprise source turn and producing another surprise token (lines 19–20). Here, Chloe reproduces the surprising element of Paul's turn, not designed as such (“your sis-

ter's pregnant”), and places her second surprise token (*oh my god!*) contiguously. Thereby she makes clear that it is the pregnancy itself, and not simply the upcoming reconfiguration of Paul's family (line 17) to which she is reacting.

05 from about twenty different data  
 06 sources. So I guess I'm working  
 07 with a rather bigger collection than  
 08 (.) than most of you. At times I've  
 09 felt like I was wading in a morass of-  
 10 of data.

Although the student offers the large number of items in her collection as a possible surprise source, she does not design the turn to be heard as deliberately eliciting surprise. (Compare Mike's laconic introduction of the vintage Cord automobiles in fragment 27 below.) The professor's surprise reaction is produced in overlap with the student's continuing talk. The speech-exchange system here is a "presentation," and he is a member of her "audience." She continues with talk that orients to his intervention (with the modest acknowledgment of having "a rather bigger collection," line 7). This talk, however,

Fragment 16: Two Hundred Instances (II)

[RT217: SW: class (I)]  
 46 Prf: So you've got two hundred ← recycled surprise source  
 47 of these do you.  
 48 Std: Uh yes.  
 48 (.)  
 49 Prf: Good Lo:rd! ← recycled surprise token

We have seen three instances of recycled surprise. In each case, the recycled surprise token performs an aligning action: reestablishing alignment after an interruption ("a hundred and fifteen") and a non-aligning sequence ("gold bridge"); and reissuing praise ("two hundred instances"), although presumably not only for the benefit of the student concerned but also with the pedagogic goal of inspiring other students in the class to make similarly extensive collections. In these dramatic "revivals," then, as-if-visceral surprise reactions to the same surprise source are produced on more than one occasion. They are recycled in new sequences designed expressly to prepare for the apparently spontaneous "blurting out" of an impulsive emotional reaction, which achieves (aligning) interactional goals.

#### DELAYED SURPRISE TOKENS

In producing immediate surprise tokens, and particularly in producing them

is addressed not to him, but to her fellow students (via the "you" at line 8), and it deflects his possible praise by proceeding immediately to treat the size of her collection as problematic ("wading in a morass of data," lines 9–10). Twenty minutes later, at the end of the student's presentation, the professor, an original recipient of the surprise source turn, recycles it as a candidate understanding (lines 46–47), seeking confirmation that the student has 200 instances of the phenomenon. He then performs a post-confirmation surprise reaction (*good lord!*, line 49).

without elaboration, recipients display their understanding that the prior turn was designed precisely to elicit the surprise they have so promptly produced. The surprise tokens that follow such turns produce the effect of being visceral eruptions in part because they appear to be "blurted out" in direct and immediate response to the event they (thereby) target as their source (even though, as we have seen, some of these surprise sources are recycled).

In this section we focus on surprise tokens that do *not* immediately follow (are not contiguous with) the surprise source turn. Our data here consist of cases in which the person who subsequently produces a surprise token does something else first, *after* the surprise source and *before* producing the surprise token. We have found that a very limited set of practices occupies this slot: silence; displays of ritualized disbelief and other repair initiations; and multiple inserts, consisting of combinations of these practices, which considerably

delay the production of the surprise token.<sup>10</sup> We will show that these practices are *also* methods for performing surprise: that silences, ritualized disbelief, and other repair initiations typically are understood by recipients (at least retrospectively, after the surprise token has been enacted) as constituting little performances of surprise in their own right. In these instances, then, the surprise token is not an immediate visceral reaction but rather is an extension, an upgrade, or a confirmation of surprise already produced or adumbrated through other practices.

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Fragment 17: Four Thousand Youngsters

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[RT312: Holt:x(c)1:2:7:9]  
 01 Les: 'N there w'r four h: thousan::d youngsters← surprise source  
 02 in the ↓ha:ll  
 03 (0.6) ← silence  
 04 Mum: >My w@:r[d< ] ← surprise token  
 05 Les: [.hh] An' they were ↑a:ll wearing thei:r  
 06 (0.2) outdoor clothes of course ((continues))

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Fragment 18: Four Bathrooms

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[RT136: NBIV10R]  
 01 Lot: Yeah let's see she's [go:t  
 02 Emm: [( )]  
 03 ( ) : ((sniff))  
 04 (0.5)  
 05 Lot: Four ba:throoms. ← surprise source  
 06 (0.2) ← silence  
 07 Emm: °°Qh my Gohht.°° ← surprise token  
 08 (0.3)  
 09 Lot: e-En:: (.) tshe- eehhh She's a great pers'n nuh  
 10 run arou:n' n:aygid yihkno:w ((continues))

---

Research on preference organization shows that when a response is “preferred” (aligns with the course of action initiated by the prior talk), it is characteristically produced immediately and without delay (Pomerantz 1984). We have found, however, that a substantial proportion of surprise reactions produced *in alignment* with surprise sources designed to elicit them (as in 11, 17,

*Silence*

It is not unusual for silence to intervene between a surprise source turn (clearly designed as such) and a surprise token. We have already shown one such instance (fragment 11, line 6); some further examples are displayed below. In fragments 17 and 18, the speakers design surprise source turns using (emphatically produced) extreme case formulations (like those in fragments 3–8) to highlight the element of their telling that they treat as counter to expectation. In both cases the recipients produce an aligning surprise token, but only after a short gap of silence.

18) are delayed by silence (of up to 0.6 second) without participants treating this as problematic. Rather than understanding such silences as necessarily implying disagreement or dispreference, participants can treat them as little performances of “doing being surprised,” which support the eventual production of the surprise token.

The following observations suggest that silence is not necessarily dispreferred in surprise sequences:

First, short gaps are fairly common before the production of surprise tokens following designed surprise sources (that is, in sequences that otherwise bear all the hallmarks of being preferred): they occur in

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<sup>10</sup>The only other practice we have found between a surprise source and a surprise token is requesting additional information pertinent to the surprise source; in every case in our collection, such requests occur in conjunction with silences, displays of ritualized disbelief, and repair initiations. We show one instance of this in fragment 27: “two Cords.”

around one quarter of the instances in our collection.

In addition, speakers of designedly surprising turns that are followed by silence do not generally modify or preemptively reformulate those turns (Pomerantz 1984; Schegloff 1995:72–75), as speakers typically do when they hear silence as signaling an upcoming dispreferred response.

Further, there is a common cultural understanding of extreme surprise as a visceral emotion that leaves one temporarily speechless such that silence can—and here often does—embody the reaction of being too shocked or amazed to speak: of demonstrating that “the breath has been knocked out of me” or that one is “at a loss for words,” left “open mouthed” (see note 4), “struck dumb,” “dumbfounded,” “stunned,” or “voiceless” with surprise (compare Darwin’s [1892]/1998: 78) “stupefied amazement”).

Finally, even when a surprise source turn is not designed as such, a silence following talk that a recipient subsequently treats as surprising, via production of a surprise token, can be heard retrospectively as an initial performance of surprise (see fragment 19 below).

In the following fragment, Chloe, one of the more dramatic speakers in our data corpora, apparently is so much stunned by Paul’s casually mentioned news of his sister’s pregnancy that her immediate reaction (line 11) is silence of more than a second (a very long silence in conversation). This fragment comes from earlier in the same interaction as fragment 1 (“pregnant again”), in which Paul presents Chloe with news about Alison’s pregnancy and Sally’s delivery of a baby girl; neither of these (as we have seen) is treated as surprising.

Fragment 19: Pregnant Sister

[RT262N+RT590+RT591: Land: YU9: 5:14]

01 Chl: .hhhh Uhm so d’you know what Asraf’s  
02 doin’ for Christmas.  
03 (.)  
04 Pau: He’s stayin’ at ours.  
05 Chl: Right. [Cool.]  
06 Pau: [He’s um] (.) comin’ over [fer Christ]mas=  
07 Chl: [ ‘Cause- ]  
08 Pau: =E:ve ‘cause my sister’s havin’ a party (at ours)=  
09 Chl: =>Righ<=  
10 Pau: =not a big- .hhh ‘Cau:se uh my sister’s pregnant. ← surprise source  
11 (1.2) ← silence  
12 Chl: hhhh!  
13 Pau: Hello::?.  
14 Chl: HUH HUH ↑↑HELLO::[: : : !!]  
15 Pau: [ huh huh] [ huh huh ]  
16 Chl: [↑BLIMEY:! ] ← surprise token  
17 Chl: ↑↑YOU’RE GONNA BE AN UNCLE PAULY::!  
18 Pau: \$ I kno: [w. ‘N that’s- ]  
19 Chl: [↑↑YOUR SISTER’S] PREGNANT OH MY  
20 GOD! Couldn’t they wait til the wedding.

Unlike Andi’s pre-announcement buildup to the news of her pregnancy in fragment 2 (“speaking of bottoms”), Paul’s news (line 10) is not designed as a surprise source. Rather, it is touched off incidentally by his report, in response to a question from Chloe about his boyfriend’s plans for Christmas (lines 1–2), that Asraf will be visiting his (Paul’s) parental home (line 10). Chloe’s silence (line 11) is so extensive that Paul eventually pursues a

response (“hello?” line 13). This elicits an exaggeratedly loud, high-pitched response from Chloe (line 14), before she finally produces a (long-delayed) very loud, very high-pitched surprise token (“↑BLIMEY:!” line 16).<sup>11</sup> This

<sup>11</sup> Chloe’s enactment of surprise is prosodically very marked, both in volume and in pitch. Her mean pitch during this episode overall is 315 Hertz, compared with her normal pitch of around 200 Hertz, and it rises dramatically to 684 Hertz (close to the physio-

is followed by an elaborating sentence (line 17), that locates the source of surprise, foregrounds the pregnancy as a topic in its own right, and identifies it as directly relevant to Paul and his reconstituted kinship network. Given that Paul has not designed his news to be heard as surprising, Chloe offers an account for her treatment of the pregnancy as unexpected: Paul's sister is not yet married (line 20), and therefore, as Chloe later puts it, runs the risk of being "preggers in her dress" (the wedding dress for which fittings have already begun). In addition, as also becomes apparent later in the conversation, Chloe knows that Paul's sister has a fertility problem (polycystic ovarian syndrome). In this fragment, the surprise token comes nearly three seconds after the surprise source.

In sum, whether or not a turn is analyzably designed as a surprise source, a recipient who subsequently produces a surprise token may remain silent for some time before doing so, in which case the surprise token itself cannot be characterized as an immediate visceral reaction. And although silence is generally characterized as dispreference-implicative, it may be understood here, at least retrospectively, as constituting part of the surprise reaction itself.

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Fragment 20: Fighting for Breath

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[RT257N: Land:YU8:1:34]  
 01 Dad: We've got firework night with friends  
 02 on Wednes[da:y]we've got [.hh ( )]  
 03 Chl: [Yeah] [At Windha:ll?  
 04 Dad: Uh- No, I d- [well we're not quite s[ure] ← surprise source  
 05 Chl: [ .h h h ! [.uH]HHH! ← surprise token  
 06 .u::HHHH! [hhh hhh  
 07 Dad: [I know I know y- I: 'm fighting for  
 08 breath too at the thought we might not be at  
 09 Windhall

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Chloe's performance is treated unproblematically by her recipient, who claims understanding of and alignment with it ("I know I know," line 7) and reformulates it as "fighting for breath" at the possibility that the family might break with tradition and not engage in their expected behavior that

The use of silence in surprise sequences is also consequential for the production of the surprise token itself. Many are much lower in volume than the talk that surrounds them,<sup>12</sup> even whispered (see fragments 6, 8, 13, 14, 18, 22, 31:9). At least in some cases, this may reflect the social mandate to suppress profanities. Some embody "breathlessness" or "voicelessness" in their manner of delivery: sharp intakes of breath (see fragment 20; compare Darwin's [[1892]/1998:97] "deep and rapid inspiration") and sharp exhalations or whistles (see fragment 15; compare Darwin's [[1892]/1998:285–6] "blowing, hissing or whistling noise." The nonlexical surprise token in fragment 20 is a dramatic embodiment of being struck not-quite-dumb with amazement—of being barely able to speak. Here, Chloe's surprise token (lines 5–6) is provoked by her father's (dispreferred) response (line 4) to her question (line 3) displaying the presumption that the family will, as is apparently their custom, attend the annual public firework display in the grounds of the local stately home ("Windhall"). The surprise token consists of a dramatic performance of breathlessness with three successive gasping inbreaths, each more pronounced than the one before.

Wednesday. The "too" (line 8) produces "fighting for breath" as a characterization of Chloe's performance of surprise by proposing Dad's claim to be "fighting for breath" as identical with (rather than additional to) the action Chloe demonstrated in the prior turn.

In this section we have shown that, counter to what may be expected from classic

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logical maximum for many female speakers) on the surprise token *blimey*. We are grateful to Richard Ogden for these pitch measurements and discussion of them.

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<sup>12</sup> Occasionally, however, they are notably louder than the surrounding talk (see fragments 19:19–20; 31:18).

CA work on preference organization, silence intervening between surprise source and surprise token is not necessarily dispreferred. Nor does it apparently detract from the as-if-visceral surprise token. Rather, silence (as well as displays of inability to speak, or difficulty in speaking) itself may constitute a mini-performance of surprise, adumbrating or enhancing the surprise embodied in a subsequent surprise token.

*Displays of Ritualized Disbelief  
and Other Repair Initiations*

In this section we build on previous work (in particular Heritage 1984; Jefferson 1981; Schegloff, 1995, 1997; Selting 1996) to show how a variety of different turn-types that can be used as repair initiations also can be used to do surprise. Like silence, these turns intervene between surprise source and surprise token, so that the surprise token is not an immediate visceral eruption. As we will show, the intervention of a repair-initiating sequence means that the surprise token is prepared for (by its eventual producer) at least two turns in advance. We also explore some of the interactional uses of surprise, laying the ground for a more extended discussion in the final section of this article.

*Repair* refers to practices for dealing with ostensible problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding talk (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). Repair initiated by the recipient of a turn at talk (other-initiated repair) delays the production of a response fitted to the prior turn by claiming some problem of hearing or understanding which must be addressed so that an appropriate response can be produced. One important commonality across the various types of other-initiated repair is that they single out some or all of the prior talk for special attention, as not meeting the recipient's expecta-

tions in some way (Drew 1997; Jefferson 1972; Schegloff 2000). As is now a well-established finding in the CA literature, these features make of repair initiations and the practices through which they are implemented a resource for adumbrating or displaying dispreferred responses such as disagreements, rejections, or declinations (Schegloff 1995:101). We show here that they are also a resource for implementing surprise: in our data set they are commonly used as such to adumbrate or display surprise following turns that were *not* designed as surprise sources.

In each of the following fragments (21–23), a sequence is inserted between surprise source turn and surprise token, in which a recipient of a designedly surprising prior turn ostensibly checks on its accuracy (in each case confirmed). In each case, the first speaker presents a surprise source: an unexpectedly high number (of home births, 21), or cost (of a cake, 23); the extension of a category-bound activity (breastfeeding) beyond the category to which it is normatively bound (birth mothers), introduced with an intensifier (“even”) to mark its unexpectedness (22). In each case, the recipient then marks the prior turn as surprising, using one or another of the turn-types which can be used for other-initiation of repair, but which also can be used more generally, as here, to mark some utterance or utterance-part as of special interest. These include “repeats or partial repeats, ‘pro-repeats’ (such as ‘he is?’[. . .]), and ‘really,’ all with or without a preceding ‘oh’” (Schegloff 1995:159). Following Heritage (1984:339), we would add “yer kidding.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, in each case, the first speaker produces a minimal confirmation of the surprise source turn (*mm, yup, yah*); its recipient then produces a surprise token (*goodness, my goodness, gosh*).

Fragment 21: Five Home Births

[RT319: Kitzinger HB35]

01 Clt: I've had five at home

02 Ros: Fi:ve, hh

03 Clt: mm

← ritualized disbelief

← confirmation

<sup>13</sup> Two instances of “yer kidding” formulations appear in fragment 27 (lines 15 and 26); also see Wilkinson and Kitzinger (forthcoming b).

04 Ros: Goodness! ← surprise token

Fragment 22: Breastfeeding

[RT: 471: Kitzinger BCC483] (They are talking about breastfeeding)

01 Clt: Even adoptive mothers can do it you know.

02 (.)

03 Clr: °↑Can they° . ← ritualized disbelief

04 Clt: Yup.hh ← confirmation

05 Clr: °My goodness!° ← surprise token

06 Clt: .hhh I:f the:y've (.) I mean it's much easier

07 if they've already had a ba:by ((continues))

Fragment 23: Wedding Cake

[RT82: Holt: M88:2:4:42]

01 Dee: [I] mean hyou're talkin' a hundred pound'v a

02 ↑wedding cake today Mar[k

03 Mar: [.tlk Are you really? ← ritualized disbelief

04 Dee: Ya:h. ← confirmation

05 (0.2)

06 Mar: Go:sh ↑.huhh ↑huh huh huh↑ .hhh ← surprise token

07 (Why don't you all joi:n.) [(sniff)) huhhhh

08 Dee: [We:ll this is it dear ((continues))

Various analysts have drawn attention to turns such as the second turns (the first arrowed turns) in the fragments above, referring to them as “news marks” and “news receipts” (Jefferson 1981; Maynard 1997)<sup>14</sup> or as “ritualized disbelief” (Heritage 1984:339), the term we adopt here. Unlike other surprise tokens, these items initiate sequences: that is, they are regularly understood as making relevant a response (as at 21:3, 22:4, and 23:4, the second arrowed turns above). They also serve thereby to invite the prior speaker to expand the on-topic talk, as previously pointed out by Jefferson (1981), and as Schegloff (1995:151) suggests is the case with *oh reallys* in third position. In each of the cases cited above, that invitation is declined (even though a gap is left for it at 23:5), and the surprise token is produced after the prior

speaker has offered nothing more than mere confirmation. In such instances, the surprise token is produced by a speaker put in the position (through the minimal response by the other) of not yet having aligned sufficiently in relation to the surprise source: the surprise token upgrades an earlier display of surprise. We often find a peremptory character to these (*oh reallys*, repeats, and *yer kiddings*, in that their speakers may not wait for the confirmation they are ostensibly eliciting before producing their surprise reaction. These displays of ritualized disbelief do not so much “ask questions” as convey a stance: that news in the prior turn is unexpected in some way and needs confirmation before it can be otherwise receipted and reacted to. In doing so, they thereby constitute a surprise response in their own right.

Other types of repair initiators (such as interrogatives of various types and candidate understandings) also can be used to launch repair sequences that intervene between surprise source and surprise token, thus delaying the production of the latter. Space constraints permit just one example here: for more, see Wilkinson and Kitzinger (forthcoming b).

In fragment 24 below, the surprise token—the radio program presenter’s *oh my*

<sup>14</sup> Our account bears some resemblance to Maynard’s (1997) and Freese and Maynard’s (1998) analyses (following Jefferson 1981) of the “news delivery sequence,” with the important difference that these previous analyses do not differentiate systematically between items such as *oh god* and *oh my gosh* (what we call reaction tokens) and items such as *oh how lovely* and *oh well that’s good* (assessments). Crucially, as we discuss in the final section, surprise need not involve assessment of an informing as anything other than unexpected.

*god!* (line 7)—is delayed by an inserted repair sequence (lines 3–6), in which the surprise source is reformulated as a candidate understanding.<sup>15</sup> This fragment is taken from a British radio cooking program in which guest celebrities are asked to prepare dishes of personal significance. Just before the fragment begins, the week’s guest, a Balinese dancer/singer living in London, has explained, as she starts to cook, that her dish is typical of an offering to the god of the Gamelan orchestra (playing in the background). The presenter asks (at line 1) where she bought the banana leaves she is using in preparing the dish, thereby taking for grant-

ed that the leaves were purchased. The guest corrects this presupposition, responding that she grows them (line 2). Because this response violates the presupposition the presenter has just displayed in her immediately prior turn, she treats it as a surprise source. The presenter initiates repair: she interrupts the guest’s response to first repeat, and then reformulate, the surprise source, presenting it as a candidate understanding (“Oh you just cut them off the tree,” lines 3–4). After the guest confirms this understanding as correct (“Exactly, yes,” line 5), the presenter produces her postconfirmation surprise reaction (line 7).

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Fragment 24: Banana Leaf

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[RT191: Banana Leaf: BBC Radio 4: 9/06/02]  
 01 Pre: Where did you buy tho:se.  
 02 Gue: I gro:w- I [gro:w-] ← surprise source  
 03 Pre: [Oh you] grow- Oh you just cut  
 04 them off the tree[:: !] ← cand understanding  
 05 Gue: [Ex(h)]actly Ye(huh)s(huh) . ← confirmation  
 06 [huh huh huh]  
 07 Pre: [Oh my go:d!] ← surprise token  
 08 Gue: °huh huh huh° .hhhh In Bali for GOD we do  
 09 everything. [huh huh huh]  
 10 Pre: [huh huh huh] .hhhh Yes I used  
 11 an apt exclamation.

---

In this episode, the guest’s turn “I grow-I grow” (line 2) is produced prosaically, with emphasis designed to perform correction. It is produced only retrospectively as a surprise source, through the presenter’s display of surprise. By reformulating the turn as an understanding check, the presenter singles it out for special attention, thereby setting in motion a sequence that, subject to a confirming response, provides her with a slot to display surprise at the growing and harvesting of banana leaves in central London. This may be done here for the benefit of an overhearing audience, but the practice is not specific to such situations.

We have shown here that several of the turn-types that can be used to initiate repair on prior talk, such as repeats, (*oh reallys*) and candidate understandings, also can be used to

adumbrate or to do surprise: in fact, *oh really* may be at heart a surprise token and only derivatively a repair initiation. These performances of surprise often take the form of a display of ritualized disbelief; in each case, the subsequent production of a surprise token is delayed by the inserted repair sequence. In each of fragments 21 through 24, the incipient producer of a surprise token singles out particular information not designed for special attention by the speaker of the prior turn, initiates repair on it, and on receiving the repair solution, produces an as-if-visceral surprise token. The later production of any surprise token is not an immediate visceral reaction: rather, it constitutes a second (or subsequent) expression of surprise, extending and upgrading the surprise already displayed through ritualized disbelief or other-initiation of repair.

Finally, just as the use of silence in surprise sequences is consequential for the pro-

<sup>15</sup> For a further instance of repair initiated by means of a candidate understanding see fragment 27, line 9.

duction of the surprise token itself (as in fragment 22 and the other quiet, whispered, breathless, and breathy examples cited above), so too are displays of ritualized disbelief and other repair initiations imbricated into the design of surprise tokens; sometimes they are treated as putative surprise tokens in their own right, as in fragments 25 and 26 below.

Just before the opening of fragment 25, Parvati, in an account too long to present here, has been describing her own surprise and disapproval at her Indian relatives' ideas

about how she should conduct her pregnancy and labor. Because she has just reported that her pregnancy is progressing normally, it is counter to (British) expectation that she would have a caesarean section. Thus her report of a (distant) relative's presumption that she might elect to have a caesarean has been built as a source of surprise (and condemnation). The call taker's surprise token (an emphatic *no*, line 3, repeated in line 5) is an expression of ritualized disbelief at Parvati's report. (We analyze this interaction in greater detail in our final section.)

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Fragment 25: Caesarean

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[RT501+RT502: Kitzinger BCC344]  
 01 Par: She said "Oh how are you doing Parvati  
 02 are you having a caesarean"  
 03 Clt: No::! ← ritualized disbelief/ surprise token  
 04 Par: Yes!  
 05 Clt: [No:: ] ← ritualized disbelief/ surprise token  
 06 Par: [That's] the way people ta:lk in India.  
 07 Clt: ((breathy)) Really!hhh

---

In fragment 26, taken from a "chicken dinner" involving two heterosexual student couples, the cook, Vivian, Shane's partner, teasingly reports having given their guest,

Michael, the biggest piece of chicken (line 1). She now offers him the one piece that remains.

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Fragment 26: Biggest Piece of Chicken

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[RT378+RT379: Chicken Dinner:8:2-14]  
 01 VIV: [I gave Michael the bigges' ↑piece- to:.  
 02 (0.9)  
 03 SHA: What? ← surprise token  
 04 (0.7)  
 05 MI?: ° ( [ ] °  
 06 NAN: [Yeh I sa[w tha:]t.  
 07 SHA: [Wha:t?] ← surprise token  
 08 MIC: We know'oo[rates he:re]:.=  
 09 VIV: [Of chicken,]  
 10 SHA: =Is this true?  
 11 MIC: .t ?hh-?hh (0.2) She gaym'the biggis'  
 12 b' ↓ta:y/(potato) the biggis' ↓chicken=  
 13 SHA: =nah ↑ha:h ↑O-kay (ul en w') talk about that later.

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According to Schegloff (1997:541), Shane's *whats* (lines 3 and 7) "appear more to be expressions of shock and outrage at having been short changed by his companion (akin to what Goffman [1978] termed 'response cries') than other-initiated repair." Like reaction tokens more generally, this

kind of *what* is not unambiguously sequence-launching (but see line 9), nor is it followed by a subsequent surprise token. Rather, this item, also frequently deployed in other-initiated repair (Schegloff 2000), is the surprise token.

*Multiple Inserts*

The production of a surprise token can be substantially delayed by multiple insert sequences, which themselves often adumbrate or perform surprise, as displayed in fragment 27. The interaction from which this fragment is taken has been examined extensively by other conversation analysts (notably, C. Goodwin 1996, 2002; M. Goodwin 1980; Schegloff 1987); we draw on their analyses in developing an account of the “shocked, elaborated amazement” (C. Goodwin, 2002:157) displayed by one of the co-interactants.

In the fragment displayed here, Mike is responding to Curt’s earlier question (not shown) about where he might locate a particu-

lar part for a vintage car. At line 9, Curt launches the first of a whole string of post-expansion questions to convey a stance of awed amazement in response to Mike’s report of a guy he knows who owns two original Cords (vintage cars). Between the surprise source (lines 6–8) and the surprise token (line 35), Curt produces one candidate understanding (line 9), four displays of ritualized disbelief (one repeat, line 32; one *oh really*, line 12; and two versions of *yer kidding*, lines 15 and 26), and an information request (line 18). The surprise display is deferred until this supporting information has been elicited (and sometimes receipted and/or assessed), as if to establish the veracity of, and parameters to, the surprise source itself.

## Fragment 27: Two Cords

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[RT117N: Auto Discussion, 15-16]	
01 Mik: [Lemme ask] a guy at work. He’s	
02 gotta bunch a’old clu[n]kers.	
03 Gar: [Y’know Marlon Liddle?	
04 (0.2)	
05 Mik: Well I can’t say they’re ol’ clunkers	
06 eez gotta Co:rd?	← surprise source
07 (0.1)	
08 Mik: Two Co:rd[s], (1.0) [And	← upgraded surprise source
09 Cur: [Not <u>original</u> ,	← cand understanding
10 (0.7)	
11 Mik: Oh yes. <u>Very</u> origi(h)nal	
12 Cur: Oh:: reall[y?	← ritualized disbelief 1
13 Mik: [Yah. Ve(h)ry	
14 <u>origi</u> (h)nal.	
15 Cur: °Awhhh are you <u>shittin</u> m[e?	← ritualized disbelief 2
16 Mik: [No I’m not.	
17 (0.8)	
18 Cur: What’s iz na:me.	← information request
19 (0.5)	
20 Mik: Harry uh (1.0) Schirmer¿ <Schure¿	
21 Cur: [°Jeez I’d [like-	← assessment
22 Mik: [°Schirmer. = [Schirmer.	
23 Cur: Ahhd like t’mee (hh)t da(h)t	← assessment contd
24 gu(h)u(h)y .hhhh	
25 Gar: Has’e [gotta lo:t?	
26 Cur: [ No: kidd[ing?	← ritualized disbelief 3
27 Mik: [Shurer.	
28 (0.5)	
29 Gar: Shu[re?	
30 Mik: [He’s from <u>Mi</u> lan Ohio.	
31 Gar: Shuur.	
32 Cur: <u>Two</u> [Co:rd[s.	← ritualized disbelief 4
33 Mik: [°Shure.	
34 Mik: Ya[h w’l <u>one</u> ’s] en o:ld uh,	
35 Cur: [O h : : : ]	← surprise token
36 (1.0)	

---

As Goodwin's (2002) analysis shows, Curt's insistently surprised admiration of the two vintage Cords and their owner is not disaffiliative with the stance taken by the deliberately deadpan and understated Mike. Rather, social participants have methods of making something available as an assessable object (here a source of awed amazement) without being seen overtly to produce it as such: here, Curt plays knowledgeable enthusiast to Mike's knowledgeable insouciance. (We will return to this fragment in the following, final section.)

In sum, we have focused here on delayed surprise tokens (those which do not immediately follow the surprise source turn). We have exemplified the practices that typically occupy the slot between the surprise source and the surprise token—silence, ritualized disbelief and other forms of repair initiation, and multiple inserts—and have shown how these practices constitute little performances of surprise in their own right. In these instances, then, the surprise token is not an immediate visceral reaction, but is rather an extension, upgrade, or confirmation of surprise already produced or adumbrated through other practices.

#### SURPRISE AS AN INTERACTIONAL RESOURCE

So far our key argument has been that surprise is an interactional achievement. Using examples from real life talk-in-interaction, we have shown how surprise is socially organized and interactionally produced. Our analysis of surprise reactions has provided concrete evidence for Goffman's (1978:814) claim that reaction tokens, generally heard as precultural visceral eruptions in fact are "creatures of social situations." We have examined how co-interactants collaborate to bring off together a *performance* of surprise; and we have shown how these allegedly spontaneous, impulsive expressions of emotion can be recycled on subsequent occasions, without (apparently) thereby losing their spontaneous or impulsive character. We have shown how as-if-visceral surprise tokens often follow and upgrade more extensive surprise performances, characterized by silence, ritualized disbelief, and other repair

sequences (and sometimes extended combinations of these).

In this final section, we build on the analyses made above to demonstrate that the production of surprise is not only an interactional *achievement*, but also a powerful interactional *resource* for social members. In particular, we show how the expression of surprise is a resource for displaying cultural and category memberships; how it acts as a vehicle for performing other actions (such as apologies and justifications); and how it may be used to defer, or even to displace, other actions.

#### *Surprise Displays (Sub)cultural and Category Memberships*

First, "in talk about the world, speakers show whether or not they share one" (Moerman 1988:112). Surprise is one resource for doing just that: it provides a basis for displaying cultural, subcultural, and category memberships. As we noted in relation to fragments 2 through 8, consensual surprise displays define a normative world (here breached), and thereby produce interactants as co-members (or not) of that world and co-category members (or not) within it. Our data analyses have shown that surprise is shaped with reference to social judgments about what is to be expected and what is not, and that these judgments are reflected in, and reproduced by, the production of consensual surprise. These displays of surprise show what co-members treat as unexpected, exceptional, or unusual (all-night parties, fragment 4; ten-pound babies, fragment 8; houses with four bathrooms, fragment 18; and so on), and thereby what they take to be expected, unexceptional, or business as usual. In designing some informing so as to elicit surprise and in reacting to that informing with a surprise token (as in fragments 2–8; also see 17, 18, 21–23, 25), co-conversationalists collaborate to reflect and reproduce a shared culture.

Conversely, surprise that is *not* shared can work to partition co-interactants into different (sub)cultural memberships. When a recipient *fails* to produce surprise following a turn clearly designed to elicit it, or *does* produce surprise following a turn clearly not designed to elicit it, a *discrepancy* is revealed

between the interactants' taken-for-granted understandings of, or orientations to, some feature of their world. The discrepancy may arise from, and reproduce, individual differences in what is taken for granted, differences between professional and lay knowledge (as in "big babies," fragment 10); or cultural differences (as in "banana leaf," fragment 24). Recipients of such surprise source turns could elect to "let them pass by" unremarked, without thereby having created a "noticeable absence." In electing to produce, after intervening talk that prepares for it, an as-if-visceral reaction, they choose instead to draw attention to this discrepancy of worldview, giving it particular interactional salience.

In "big babies," the call taker's noticeably absent surprise at a baby's birth weight (presented as a surprise source) produces and reinscribes her membership of the category "childbirth expert" and her co-interactant as a "lay" woman. In "banana leaf," the English radio presenter's display of surprise at the Balinese cook's use of banana leaves (not presented as a surprise source) is treated by the latter as marking a cultural difference between them: she teasingly takes as literal the exclamation *oh my god*, commenting "In Bali for *GOD* we do everything" (lines 8–9), and thereby producing herself as Balinese and her co-interactant as someone outside that culture. In responding to the *format* of the surprise token (*oh my god*) and not to the surprise it enacts, she is also maintaining as normative her own cultural stance to the growing of banana leaves for culinary purposes, and declining to align with the presenter's surprise (or, indeed, to engage with it at all).

In fragment 25 ("caesarean"), we saw how Parvati successfully elicited the call-taker's surprise about her Indian relative's assumption that she might choose an elective caesarean, thereby producing both interactants as co-cultural members (as "not Indian," aligned in disapproving surprise about Indian values). Immediately subsequently, however, Parvati produces herself as someone with expertise on "people. . . in India" (line 6), thereby making relevant both her identity as the British descendant of Indian immigrants (she has already informed

the call-taker that this is so) and the call-taker's presumed identity as someone without direct knowledge of India. Cultural difference is deployed here (line 6) to normalize (for a culture of which the co-interactants both are produced again as non-members) an informing already treated as a surprise source.

Surprise, then, does not simply display the acquisition of unexpected new information; it also claims or displays preexisting knowledge. Surprise displays give rise to the recipient's inferences both about what was *not* known by the surprised person and about what *was* known (providing the basis for whatever it was they treated as unexpected). This (sometimes sophisticated) taken-for-granted knowledge, which makes surprise relevant on any given occasion, may be distributed differentially between co-interactants. When one interactant displays surprise that another does not or cannot, or can display only ineptly, their respective category memberships are displayed and reinscribed. For example, by contrast with Curt and Mike, Gary (the third participant in fragment 27, "two Cords") seems not to know enough about vintage cars to display surprise appropriately. His question "Has 'e gotta lot?" (line 29) targets quantity, rather than quality, as the possibly salient feature of the cars (and he gets no response from the other two). Through Gary's misplaced question, the co-interactants are produced as "vintage car aficionados" and Other.

Speaker's prior knowledge can be inferred either from the absence (or mitigation) of surprise or from its production, depending on the nature of the surprise source turn. The issue of whether to display surprise, and with what degree of intensity, is a recurrent concern for participants, in part because of what it makes inferable about their preexisting knowledge and (therefore) about their category and cultural memberships.

#### *Surprise As a Vehicle for Other Actions*

Second, surprise acts as a vehicle for other actions; it may be displayed or withheld (and its intensity calibrated) with reference to the other actions it can be

understood to convey in its local sequential context. Many of the actions that surprise is used to perform are affiliative, especially when a surprise token follows a surprise source turn designed to elicit it. For example, some of the exchanges we have shown celebrate the surprising achievements of the speaker of the surprise source turn: not looking one's age (fragment 7), giving birth to five babies at home (fragment 21), building a large collection (fragment 15). Recycled surprise sequences in our data set are likewise overwhelmingly in pursuit of affiliative goals: reestablishing alignment after an interruption (fragment 12: "a hundred and fifteen") or a non-aligning sequence (fragment 14: "gold bridge"), or praising an industrious student (fragment 16: "two hundred instances").

Even when people display surprise to

turns not designed to elicit them, or withhold surprise to turns designed to elicit them, very often they do so in pursuit of affiliative goals, as we have seen already from Fran's deployment of unelicited surprise to invite topic talk (about a long telephone number, fragment 9) and Curt's insistently surprised admiration of the two vintage Cords (fragment 27). One common use of (unelicited) surprise displays is to register the breach of a local moral order, and to produce embedded accounts, excuses, and justifications for that breach, as in fragments 28 and 29 below.

In fragment 28, Amy is at Janet's home before a Tupperware sales promotional party. She realizes (with Janet's response at lines 3–4) that she has arrived too early, and produces a surprise reaction.

---

Fragment 28: Tupperware

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[RT389: from McCarthy (2003): 50]  
 01 Amy: What time are your other  
 02       people coming, Janet?  
 03 Jan: Well the thing officially  
 04       starts at two.  
 05 Amy: Oh right ooh gosh.  
 06 Jan: The Tupperware lady said she'd  
 07       come about half one but as far  
 08       as I'm concerned if she comes  
 09       about half one-  
 10 Amy: Yeah. Oh sorry we're early.

←

At line 5, Janet first receipts the information about the start time (with a change-of-state token claiming that something not previously known is now known; Heritage 1984). She then performs a surprise reaction to it ("ooh gosh"), thereby claiming this new information to be unexpected, and hence that her arrival at Janet's home more than half an

hour before the start of the party was inadvertent, not planned, and based on not having been informed properly about the start time. She subsequently produces an explicit apology (line 10).

In fragment 29, Mum is enquiring whether Lesley's husband and children have left for their skiing trip.

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Fragment 29: Half Past Three

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[RT43: Holt:1:1,1:23]  
 01 Mum: 'Av your family gone o:ff?  
 02       (.)  
 03 Les: Ye:s,  
 04 Mum: Oh goo:d,=  
 05 Les: =A:t um: half past three: this morning.  
 06       (0.3)  
 07 Mum: Oh my wo:rd.

←

In response to Mum's enquiry (line 1), Lesley confirms the family's departure (line 2), and Mum receipts this as good news (line 4). Lesley comes in quickly after Mum's "good news" receipt to counterpose the fact of the departure's unsocial hour (line 5), hearable as a mild complaint on Lesley's part. By producing a surprise reaction to what is (thereby) treated as unexpected information, Mum excuses herself from having receipted as "good" an event that, it now turns out, had negative consequences for Lesley.

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Fragment 30: Couple of Bottles

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[Holt: F:S088:2:5:3]

01 Gor: All the old, all the old lads (.)  
 02 .t .hhhh gettin' together we uh .hhh  
 03 we polished off a couple a' bottles.  
 04 Nan: What a surprise

---

Across all of these interactions, then, surprise performances embody the assessment that something is unexpected or unusual, and such assessments can act as vehicles for actions including praise (fragment 16: "two hundred instances"), apology (fragment 28: "Tupperware"), and knowledgeable admiration (fragment 27: "two Cords"). In withholding surprise, a speaker claims to have had prior expectations (for example, as regards the drinking behavior of Gordon and the "old lads," fragment 30); such claims likewise act as vehicles for actions such as the claim to cultural knowledge (fragment 25: "caesarean") and the attribution of a characteristic trait to a co-interactant (fragment 30: "couple of bottles"). The interactional meaning carried by displays of being surprised (or not surprised) is both context-free, insofar as it hinges around the core notion of "expectability," and context-dependent, insofar as the *meaning* of treating something as expected (or unexpected) in any given context depends on what else is being done, deferred, or supplanted by the expression of surprise.

### *Surprise As an Alternative to Other Actions*

Third, surprise tokens are alternative to other possible actions that could have been performed in the interactional context in which they occur, so that the action performed by the surprise token depends to

Conversely, the withholding of surprise—indeed, the explicit denial that anything surprising has happened—also can perform other actions. Again, what those actions are depends heavily on context. In fragment 30 below, Nan retorts that Gordon's account of his previous evening's activities is entirely as she would have expected. ("What a surprise" is heavily ironic.) This reply treats Gordon and his friends as people who typically drink in the manner described.

some extent on how it stands in relation to such alternatives. For example, tellings, announcements, informings, and so on typically elicit assessments (as good or bad). The appropriate valence of the assessment, however, is not always immediately apparent, and the interactional costs of getting this wrong—of treating good news as bad news, or vice versa—can be high. In response to an announcement, a surprise token sometimes may be deployed precisely because it can be designed so as merely to mark some news as unexpected and nothing more. Thus surprise tokens can defer assessment until more information has been given (or can displace assessment altogether). As Sacks (1995:574) put it, "The surprise thing can be treated as reserving rights to future expression of emotion, saying, 'I see that this is the thing that I will express emotion about. Let me give you some more room to tell me about it. Then you'll hear me give a wail.'"

The interactional advantage of giving the prior speaker "more room to tell" is that this may enable a recipient to determine whether wailing or celebration is the more appropriate response. For example, in fragment 31 below (an expansion of fragment 2: "speaking of bottoms"), Betty seems to deploy the surprise token precisely to pass the turn at talk back to the prior speaker, in order to gather more information about the valence

of response required. As Maynard (1997:116) points out, Betty's surprise token enables her to postpone any assessment of the news (of Andi's pregnancy) as either good or bad until after establishing Andi's own stance. Only after Betty has established that the pregnancy

is intended (the couple having elected to reverse the vasectomy) does she produce the assessment "oh I'm so happy" (line 21), treating the pregnancy as "good news" (whereas her earlier surprise token merely registered its unexpectedness).

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Fragment 31: Speaking of Bottoms (Expansion of Fragment 2)

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[RT513+RT514: PND3:18 (from Maynard 1997)]

01 Andi: .hhh well: (.) speaking of bottoms are you sitting  
 02 dow:n.  
 03 Betty: Ye:ah.  
 04 Andi: Well (.) we have some news for you:.  
 05 Betty: What.  
 06 Andi: .hhh th't (.) may come as \$ a bit of a surpris:e. ehhh!  
 07 Betty: I see- \$what are you telling me.\$=  
 08 Andi: =hhhh! Bob and I are gunna have a baby.  
 09 Betty: <°O:h my: go:od↑ness°> hho- (0.5) did you have a ←  
 10 reverse- he have a reversal?  
 11 Andi: Yeah.  
 12 (0.5)  
 13 Andi: .hhh[::~::~:]  
 14 Betty: [ ↑whe::n.]  
 15 Andi: tch e-yup. Last ↑Ma:rch.  
 16 (0.5)  
 17 Andi: .mhhh ((sniff))  
 18 Betty: O:H [ MY ↑GO:OD ]NESS: ←  
 19 Andi: [And it was-]  
 20 Andi: It was (.) [very successful.] [Very \$quickly] hh::h .hhh  
 21 Betty: [ O:H I'M SO: ] [ ↑HA:PPY. ]

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When responding to a prior turn that is producing complaint, surprise tokens are characteristically disaffiliative. That is, affiliation with a complaint calls for more than simply an expression of surprise: for example, it requires confirming the speaker's assessment of the situation, joining in the complaint, or expressing dismay or sympathy (see Curl, Drew, and Ogden forthcoming). In fragment 32 below, although Mum treats the matter of

the first-class letter that hasn't arrived as a surprise source, via her surprise token *good gracious* (line 7), she does not offer any (negative) assessment of the postal service, nor does she join in Lesley's complaint. Indeed, her subsequent question about the contents of the letter (line 9) is hearable as possibly implying that the delay in arrival may not matter.

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Fragment 32: Letter

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[RT315: Holt:X:(c):1:2:7:3]

01 Les: Becuz I posted a letter (.) to Katharine last Monda:y  
 02 Mum: Hm:?  
 03 Les: Fir:st cla:ss, ↑marked?  
 04 (0.4)  
 05 Mum: Y[es]  
 06 Les: [An]d she hasn' got it yet.  
 07 Mum: ↑Good gracious. ←  
 08 (0.7)  
 09 Mum: Is there anything important in it?

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Here the surprise token provides a response that registers the unexpectedness of the complained-about behavior, but without engaging with the “complaint” element. In effect, it displaces an appropriate alternative action, such as co-complaining or sympathizing.

In sum, because surprise tokens can be limited to simply marking the unexpectedness of a telling or an announcement, they can displace or defer other actions made sequentially relevant. The action accomplished by reacting with surprise to a prior turn depends very much on the action pursued by that prior turn (and indeed within the sequence more generally). Analysis of any particular surprise token, in its sequential context, requires analyzing it for what it is an alternative to, as well as for what surprise itself does in that position.

In this final section we have considered some of the interactional uses of surprise: the display of (sub)cultural and category memberships (through differential displays of surprise to some feature of the world, indexing differences in cultural, specialist, or individual knowledge); the use of surprise as a vehicle for other actions (such as pursuit of affiliative goals, attending to breaches in a local moral order, or trait attribution); and the production of surprise as an alternative to some other action (such as an assessment, a co-complaint, or an expression of sympathy), or as a means of deferring it. In all of these ways, then, surprise is an interactional *resource* as well as an interactional *achievement*.

## CONCLUSION

We have offered a detailed empirical analysis of *how* surprise is constructed and deployed in everyday social interaction through the use of reaction tokens. Further, we have examined *why* this is done, in specific interactional contexts.

We have built upon Goffman’s (1978) pioneering work on “response cries,” providing empirical evidence in support of his claim that these apparently spontaneous, uncontrolled “exclamatory imprecations” (p. 798), which we call reaction tokens, are fundamentally interactional events. We have shown

empirically that expressions of surprise conveyed through surprise tokens are not involuntary emotional eruptions but interactionally organized performances. First, surprise tokens typically are produced after talk analyzably designed to elicit surprise from its recipient: for example, by using devices such as pre-announcements, negative observations, and extreme case formulations to build a surprise source turn. Second, surprise is not necessarily produced on one occasion only, but can be recycled: surprise tokens can be produced on multiple occasions to the same surprise source without (apparently) thereby losing their as-if-visceral character. Third, surprise tokens also can be delayed by practices such as silence, displays of ritualized disbelief, and other repair initiations. These practices themselves appear to constitute mini-performances of surprise, thus rendering the surprise token an extension, upgrade, or confirmation of an earlier intimation of surprise rather than an immediate visceral reaction to the unexpected. All of these observations support our analysis of surprise as an interactional *achievement*.

We have moved well beyond Goffman’s notion of “response cries” as “creatures of social situations” (p. 814), not only in our specification of how surprise tokens work, but especially in our examination of what they can be used to do. We have shown that surprise provides a potent interactional *resource* for social members, and that the expression (and withholding) of surprise is thick with culture. In performing as-if-visceral surprise in response to talk designed to elicit it, people confirm for each other a shared, taken-for-granted world, defined by a set of norms, values, and expectations, of which the surprising behavior or event constitutes a breach. The interactional uses of surprise that we have identified are the reflection and reproduction of a normative world; the production and reinscription of membership categories; affiliation and disaffiliation; and the management of the local moral order.

The analyses presented above contribute substantially to the interactional tradition of studying emotion, specifically surprise. Our key contribution has been to separate the personal *experience* of encountering the

unexpected (the psychology of surprise) from the public *display* of finding something counter to expectation (the social expression of surprise). Further, in analyzing surprise displays in some detail, we have shown not only that these are interactionally organized performances, but also that these perfor-

mances accomplish an array of social actions. In this way we also regard our work, specifying how one particular aspect of human behavior is produced and socially managed in situ, as a contribution to the broad tradition of ethnomethodological and conversation-analytic work in sociology.

#### Appendix. Transcription Key

[ ]	brackets	overlapping talk
=	equals sign	no space between turns
(0.5)	time in parentheses	intervals within or between talk (measured in tenths of a second)
(.)	period in parentheses	discernable pause or gap, too short to measure
:::	colons	extension of preceding sound (the more colons, the greater the extension)
.	period	closing intonation (not necessarily the end of a sentence)
,	comma	continuing intonation (not necessarily between clauses of sentences)
?	question mark	rising intonation (not necessarily a question)
¿	inverted question mark	rising intonation weaker than that indicated by a question mark
!	exclamation mark	animated tone (not necessarily an exclamation)
-	dash	abrupt cutoff of sound
<u>here</u>	underlining	emphasis
HERE	capitals	loud, relative to surrounding talk
<u>HERE</u>	underlining and capitals	very loud and emphatic, relative to surrounding talk
°here°	degree signs	soft, relative to surrounding talk
°°here°°	double degree signs	very soft, or whispered, relative to surrounding talk
>here<	“more than”/“less than”	speeded up, relative to surrounding talk symbols
<here>	“less than”/“more than” symbols	slowed down, relative to surrounding talk
<	“less than” symbol	rapid start to following talk
>	“more than” symbol	slow ending to preceding talk
↑↓	up or down arrow	marked rise or fall in pitch, immediately following the arrow
_:	underlined letter before colon	downward pitch turn (falling intonation contour on the vowel)
⋮	underlined colon	upward pitch turn (rising intonation contour on the vowel)
\$	dollar sign	smile voice
*	asterisk	“creaky” voice
((f))	letter <i>f</i> in double parentheses	high-pitched (“falsetto”) voice
hah		laughter
heh		laughter
hih		laughter
huh		laughter
(h)		laughter particle inserted into talk
hhh		audible outbreath (number of <i>h</i> s indicates length)
.hhh		audible inbreath (number of <i>h</i> s indicates length)
( )	empty parentheses	transcriber unable to hear words
(bring)	word(s) in parentheses	transcriber uncertain of hearing
(boy) / (buy)	slash separating word(s) in parentheses	alternate hearings by transcriber
((sniff))	word(s) in double parentheses	sounds or other material hard to transcribe; other comments by transcriber
[...]	three periods in brackets	words omitted for presentational purposes
//	double slash	lines omitted for presentational purposes

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