

Choice and mobility: decision making on the move

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Abstract Decision making theory has provided much of the micro-level underpinnings of contemporary economics. It providing a view of activity which takes seriously the choices and decisions of individual actors, something often missing from sociology. Yet at its core it is based on a dualist notion of what a decision is, a view that splits decisions (the work of minds) from actions (the work of bodies). Pursuing Ryle's critique of dualism we propose that decisions instead be seen as an ordinary architecture for co-ordinating action. Rather than seeing decisions as an invisible mental act, we see decisions as a machinery used for managing and co-ordinating activity. We talk about and use decisions to organising future co-operative activity, tying that activity to those who decided it and as a means of maintaining due process. We apply this view of decisions to *mobility*, looking at some video data of a group of day-trippers deciding what to do that day. Using this extract we explore six aspects of how decisions about mobility are made.

Introduction

As a model of interdisciplinary work, there can be few researchers as esteemed or as successful as Herbert Simon. His work covered a wide range of topics, contributing to many different scientific disciplines, obtaining some of the highest awards from many different scientific communities, such as the ACM turing award, the national medal of science and the noble prize in economics. Despite the range of fields which Simon contributed to, and the interdisciplinary nature of his work, he often said that all his life he had really just had one big research problem. Simon's work focused on *decision making*, on understanding decision

making in individuals and organisations. Indeed, he himself described not as an interdisciplinary worker, but rather as a *monomaniac* - a monomaniac about decision making.

In many ways decision making appears a very sensible topic for one to focus attention on. It can hardly be argued that decisions do not effect our lives, and decision making seems a central activity of people, government and organisations. Moreover, decisions are central to our ordinary day to day existence - we make our own decisions, and our decision making appears connected with our cognition, even if it is not entirely clear what that connection is.

The field of 'decision making theory' has developed focusing on these problems, with no small contribution from Simon (along with his collaborators particularly James March), investigating how it is that individuals and groups come to decide on certain paths and enterprises over others. While decision making mixes organizational theory, psychology and a dash of sociology, its dominant approach - and sister discipline - is still very much that of economics. Both decision making theory and economics share a common goal - to build a model of humans which could, for the purposes of prediction, be used as a human proxy - a sort of homunculus. Although this sort of modeling is looked on with suspicion in many other parts of the social sciences, it is a goal with some aspects to recommend itself, at least in terms of utility. Predicting what people do can be used (and indeed, is used) to maximise the results of decisions dependent on those individuals¹.

Moreover, whatever its shortcomings, decision making takes as its central topic the choices of actors. A criticism of much of sociology has been how the choices or agency of actors has been systematically neglected, in favour of conceptions of the social world that are broader in their unit of analysis. Decision making theory takes very seriously how actors themselves engage with and understand the world. One key quality of decision making theory is its close focus on the understandings and interactions that individuals and groups have with the world, the ongoing production of decision making as an activity.

Yet to those of us who are more used to the empirically rich descriptions of the qualitative social sciences, the homunculus produced in decision making can seem somewhat odd. The descriptions of reasoning given are often close to the level of program code which could be given to a computer - algorithms for decision making. The role of interpretation, or the buzzy booming complexity of life is mostly absent. Indeed, although recently there has been something of a re-engagement with the details of how decision making is done (in the form of naturalistic decision making), there is still a focus on producing computational

¹ Donald Mackenzie's comments on the performativity of market transactions - that theories of market transactions can be self fulfilling prophecies - shows clearly that this is in theory impossible. With popular theories that predicted the behavior of market transactions, there is an incentive to *not* act according to that theory.

model of humans, rather than one which features human interpretation in some way. The rich ways in which we engage with the world seem somewhat neutered from these necessarily simplistic models.

More broadly, the concept of *what decision are* is also confused. Decision making is treated as the work of brains, separate from actions which are the work of bodies. Such a straightforwardly dualist approaches have come under sustained attack as an incoherent view of the mind, following the work of philosophers such as Ryle and Wittgenstein. Taking this path, in this paper I argue that one clear confusion in the decision making literature has been over what a decision *is*, with decisions treated as cognitive, rather than social, objects. I argue that decisions are not made in the head, but are instead social objects which are used in relationships with others. One important use of decisions is as a device for accountability. Decisions allow us to appropriate blame or credit or, more broadly, to chain together a stream of future events with an individual or group. Decisions are an architecture for collaboration. The everyday notions of decisions have been muddled with much broader notions of cognition. Seeing decisions as a special mental act, as a particular type of cognition, not only confuses the study of what decisions are, but results in a rather bizarre two part view of thinking, one which separates decisions from cognition, and cognition from activity.

After outlining this argument I then work through an empirical example of decision making - an example of individuals *moving* and choosing where to go. Decisions are a key yet neglected part of mobility. Examining these movements gives us some view on how a how people make decisions about where they go. In these examples even a relatively simple decision making event is a complex negotiation and 'working out', where people use making a 'decision' as a device to share and organise the social interaction around movement. In conclusion the paper reflects on how the study of decision making can help sociology take more seriously the actions and viewpoints of individuals.

What is decision making theory?

As discussed, the study of decision making has taken as its subject matter how individuals and groups make decisions. The goal for much of this work has been the production of a model of decision making - a model general enough to describe individual cases of decision making while drawing out important generalities across different individuals and situations. Very broadly, there have been three main approaches to understanding decision making in this way. The first is *rational decision making*, a model of the decision making process in terms of outcomes. Still widely used in economics, this approach describes decision making as a process whereby individuals judge the results of the various actions which they can do. These outcomes are evaluated, and the action which leads to the most desirable outcome is selected. This process of decision making is

therefore 'rational', in that it objectively selects the 'best' option. However, while the *process* here is rational (in the sense that the process selects the 'optimum' action) that is not to say that the *outcome* of such a process will be rational.

To use an example from mobility: as the problems of traffic congestion show, while we might all drive to work using an optimum route, this does not entail an optimum outcome. Individuals can follow their own fastest route home, but the aggregate result is everyone gets home slower - a so called 'collective action failure' as Olson {, 1965 #1450} christened it (see also Wardrop's work on equilibrium in traffic networks). Rational decision making describes a broad process of evaluation which attempts to pick an optimum result, although not one which actually obtains an optimum result.

In its pure form, rational choice has some rather obvious shortcomings as a description of how we make decisions. First, it assumes that decision makers have all the time in the world to reflect upon different courses of action, and can clearly evaluate possible actions and likely future states. Secondly, it ignores the role of different rules - either official or cultural - which can influence our decisions. Often we make decisions based more on our identity or culture than a rational balancing of different outcomes. Third, this conception ignores the ways in which decisions are made in groups and organisation - the importance of friendships, relationships, coalitions, politics and the like. Lastly, the implementation of decisions is neglected. Decisions are not simply handed out from on high in organisations, they need to be implemented by those who may have their own agenda.

Yet as a model of behaviour it can at least be recognised as a template for describing to others how we came to 'sensible' decisions. We have all justified a decision at some time with reference to the outcome that we wanted. Moreover, despite its shortcomings, this description has proven remarkably powerful at describing aggregate behaviour, at least in terms of explaining the decisions made in certain controlled and regulated situations. Despite its shortcomings (and recent empirical failings), rational decision making is at the heart of much research in game theory, and in analysis of economic markets.

Yet rational decision making is still an unrealistic model of human activity. These shortcomings are addressed to an extent in models of *bounded rationality*. These models retain the same process of decision making - choosing actions based on predicted future outcomes, but incorporate the many additional limitations. Simon's bounded rationality, for example, has proven particularly powerful in the context of organisational decision making. Simon describes 'satisficing' behaviour - a decision making process which searches for 'good enough' options, rather than an optimum solution. With satisficing decision making becomes something which is carried out in a limited time, and with some limits on the individuals concerned. Rather than seeing the optimum solution we decide on a result in advance - a 'good enough result' and search for options and information until we find a predicted result which is 'good enough'. Again, while this hardly

explains all the subtleties of decision making it does at least capture some of our ordinary practices. The phrase 'good enough' captures some aspects of how we satisfice in our ordinary decision making.

Theories of bounded rationality have been developed to incorporate the importance of rules and identities in decision making. Much of the time decision making is not about rationally calculating likely outcomes, but simply implementing rules - be they organisational ones, or cultural ones developed from our own experiences. Rules and identities are important logics which are used in deciding what to do - the so called 'institutional' aspects of activity. This reconsideration of individual action in terms of rules has been behind the so called 'new institutionalism' in economics.

Lastly, over the last ten years or so approaches which study in detail the actual decision making processes used by individuals have grown. *Naturalistic decision making* uses a variety of methods (in particular cognitive ethnography) to explore the real world processes by which decision making is done. Unsurprisingly this has proven to be a rich stream of study, particularly in the context of organisations. However, it is important to emphasise that studies in naturalistic decision making still mainly have the goal of producing a description of decision making, one that sits behind individual cases. The detailed examinations of decision making which result are thus very much focused on uncovering generic processes of decision making, rather than the specifics of the situations examined.

What's in a decision?

Despite the recent focus on actual incidences of decision making, one failing in decision theory concerns the conception of what a decision actually is. Considerable effort has been exerted describing what is involved in making a decision, but I would argue that there is still confusion over what a decision is. To start: how can we differentiate a decision from what is not a decision? Can we differentiate *activity* from *decision*. Do we need to take a decision for every action we take? If so, how many decisions per action? Or what about decisions where we take no action? This can be even more complex when we consider the way groups make decisions - are these decisions different from the decisions of individuals? Can computers make decisions?

Part of the confusion here comes from the way in which the notion of decision has been pulled out of ordinary usage and taken to be a scientific object. In particular decision making has been set up as a dualist concept - decisions are the work of *minds*, whereas bodies do the actions. Since there is a need to differentiate between decisions and carrying out those decisions, decisions become a different class of actions - a mental act. These actions are differentiated from more ordinary verbs, since they take place inside heads, rather than in the world.

These sort of confusions were clearly diagnosed by Ryle in *'The concept of mind'*. Indeed, his comments on the myth of volition apply with a few modifications to what a decision is. Ryle starts his discussion of volition by outlining their role in a cartesian model of mind:

“Volitions have been postulated as special acts, or operations, ‘in the mind’, by means of which a mind gets its ideas translated into facts. I think of some state of affairs which I wish to come into existence in the physical world, but, as my thinking and wishing are unexecutive, they require the mediation of a further executive mental process. So I perform a volition which somehow puts my muscles into action. Only when a bodily movement has issued from such a volition can I merit praise or blame for what my hand or tongue has done” (p62)

Decisions, in this view, fit into this model as non-executive mental acts - I decide to do something (usually a high level action) and then will myself to carry out the actions. Decisions are thus *mental* acts, like promises, propositions, ideas and the like. While cognitive, these mental acts do seem to be able to be shared - a group can *decide* to do something, just as a group can promise, or propose together. There is a ‘ghost in the machine’ here which makes decisions, a different class of event to the physical movements and words we see and hear as the results.

Following Ryle, a first objection to this view is that it is a very unnatural way of talking about decisions. We don’t talk about making five or six decisions about how to drive into work, we talk about driving into work. If we decide to change our career or propose to our partner, often their will not be a simple time and place *when* and *where* we decided. Decisions are *not* simple actions - we can decide over a period of time, even years, but that doesn’t mean that we are consciously thinking about that matter all that time. While differentiating different decisions from each other, and from actions themselves is a tricky matter in a cartesian model, in ordinary language it seldom gives us problems. We make all sort of decisions, in all sorts of ways, and in an ordinary way we report upon and act on decisions all the time. The cartesian model of decisions needs to divide up decisions from each other, and in turn from the actions which are the results of these decisions - but with little clarity on how exactly to do this.

A second objection, if we consider decisions made by individuals, is how to differentiate between actions involuntary or accidental, and those that are decided upon. The decisions which are purported to be behind actual actions can be difficult to find, since all we have to go on are the actions. What are we to make of a murder, if the murder claims not to have ‘decided to pull the trigger’, even if witnesses report that deed? If the only way we ever get a decisions is by the reports and actions of the authors, do we need to be purporting imaginary mental acts? We can easily talk about voluntery or involuntery acts, and we draw together evidence to believe those claims (drunkenness, insanity, reliability), but it is not through discovering the mental act of decision making that we make such calls.

Third, we have the curious case of decisions *to make* decisions. It seems that we can decide not only to do physical actions, but also mental acts. Yet how many decisions are involved in making a decision? When we decide to do something, are there yet more decisions involved in executing that decision? At what point do we stop deciding, and actually do something, and what is different about those decisions and the previous (secondary) decisions?

Lastly, we must differentiate between the decisions of individuals and the decisions of groups. However, in much of the decision making literature, group decision making is considered as a variant on individual decision making. Yet is there really a continuity here? It seems that the mental acts involved in decision making are very different from the discursive processes which produce decisions in groups. Yet if we make a distinction between types of decisions, we have to consider how groups execute decisions. Group decisions are executed not through the actions of groups, but of individuals. So are group decisions a mix of individual and group decisions?

What might a decision be?

In this critique I am not discounting the notion of decisions. Rather, the argument is that by tearing the notion from its ordinary usage creates considerable conceptual confusion - mixing individuals and groups, minds and bodies, actions and thoughts. We end up with decisions as a term which both retains yet contradicts our ordinary usage. A different approach, one pioneered by Jeff Coulter, and others, is to see mental acts as quite ordinary things which go on in the world all the time. Fusing together ordinary language philosophy with ethnomethodology, Coulter develops an understanding for how we talk and act based around understanding ordinary activity, rather than positing imaginary mental acts. Rather than hypothesise about what decisions are, we might investigate how decisions are used in ordinary settings.

Rather than see decisions and something which goes on in the mind I would like to propose instead that decisions are *a machinery used for managing and co-ordinating activity*². That is to say, decisions are machines used by individuals and groups as a way of accounting for actions (describing who's done what), co-ordinating future activity and co-ordinating the distribution of information and calculation. Decisions are not something which floats around inside heads or in

² I am thinking here of something similar to Sacks' descriptions of conversation in terms of machinery - not as a mechanistic production of talk (or decisions), but as seen in common structure of interaction that can be used by individuals to co-ordinate their activity: "I intend that the machinery I use to explain some phenomenon, to characterize how it gets done, is just as real as the thing I started out to explain... Members have it available for uses in one or another place. (Sacks, VI p316)"

the boardrooms of companies, they are an ordinary device whereby we co-ordinate our activities with others.

Take the case of an organisation deciding to develop a new product. A group of managers will meet, discuss the pros and cons, and then decide in their talk in that meeting to go ahead and develop that product. Future meetings will be planned to produce other decisions (who to run the development group, what will its budget be, etc.). Individuals will be appointed and will start working on the new product. Their actions will take their lead from the decision, but their actions will also make sense to others because the decision has been taken. The decision and the activities fit together - the decision helping to co-ordinate future activity (we're doing this because we decided) and in turn those actions make sense (they are accountable to others) because of the decision.

In organisations decisions are thus a general tool for connecting together a stream of future events with an individual or a group. An important part of this is blame and responsibility - if things go right or wrong those responsible need to be pinpointed. Yet this only happens in extreme cases - more normally the decision works simply to help those who want to understand why an action was decided, that it was properly decided, and that those who should have agreed did agree. The decision making helps co-ordinate the involvement of the right people in organising future activity. The decision itself then stands both as a justification to others for those involved in the activity, and as a scaffolding that they can use to plan their own activity.

Individual decision making follows a similar trajectory. When we talk about our own individual decisions they are devices which we use to explain to others our future actions and co-ordinate their involvement: "I've decided to propose to Julie, can you help me get the ring?" Our decisions are used in our conversation with others to help account for our current, past and future activities. They provide an ownership procedure for activities, a structure through which discussion, dispute and resolution can be done.

In describing decisions as 'machines', I am not giving them agency or proposing that they do things by themselves. It is rather that decisions are a discursive device that is an incredibly powerful and useful tool for organising the distributions and co-ordination of actions. Once made, a decision can be used to do all sorts of organisationally and individually useful things, like appropriating credit, finding who knows what about an activity, and predicting what will happen next.

One criticism of this description is that we make hundreds of decisions every day where nobody else is involved, and there is no co-ordination with others. What about these decisions? I would suggest that these are best investigated not as decisions but as *actions*. With something as varied as action in the world, we would expect them all to be varied and different, with few similarities - unlike the term 'decision' which makes such events seem much too similar. It is in the *reporting* and *accounting* to others than notions of decisions become important.

This approach allows us to differentiate decision making from thinking. It is not that thought is not involved in decision making, but rather that thinking about thinking (and cognition) is a different undertaking. Decision making should instead be the study of the decisions that people make and how people use decisions to organise their activity.

An example: mobility

What would such an exercise be like? I return (at last) to the topic of this seminar, mobility, and how we might understand the decisions involved in choosing where to go. A very fundamental aspect of mobility is how decisions about mobility are made, how we choose where to go. Yet much of the more sociological literature on mobility seems to give very little consideration to the notion of *choice* in mobility. Take Castells, for example, in his description of the 'space of flows' - here we get a description which itself is something of an unstoppable flow, not much room for agency here. From such a high height, everyone looks like ants. As is often then case we get very little sense that mobility is a set of choices. Of course, these choices are hardly free, they are much constrained by others, circumstances, politics, class, race etc. However, in understanding mobility a valuable place to start is the interaction between choice and constraint. That is to say, how decisions are made with the constraints imposed by others, as well as the actions enabled through collaboration.

Let us examine one decision about mobility in some detail. The extract we will look at is some video recorded of a group of friends on a daytrip (figure one). The group of friends are driving through a town deciding what to do that day. In this transcript four friends, the ethnographer (Barry), Jane (on the left), Fay (on the right) and Lou (in the driving seat) are in a car driving out of the city into the countryside for a daytrip. While they drive they are planning what they are going to do with their day. Before this clip there is some initial planning around some recommendations given by a friend (Susan) about a few places worth visiting (photos listed in square brackets):

Figure 1: The friends' daytrip into the countryside

Jane: [1] Right it's got to be either loch ern or loch tay [2]
Fay: I know there is a loch aber somewhere
Barry: Did Susan give us directions?
Jane: I think. [3] So what was Killin bit where was
Fay: [4] Killin [5] was
Jane: Yeah but what's?
Fay: Now she says that's where the, the pub is, is it, or?
Lou: That's where the waterfalls and the walks are
Jane: Cos the pub was by a loch [6]
Lou: Well there's a loch with a nice pub too
Jane: Is that separate though from killin

Lou: Yeah killin is further on
Jane: and it must be loch ern
Fay: so [7]
Jane: Must be that. Which is. Which is there. [8]
Fay: Yeah well this road [9] goes up over to there [10]
Jane: yeah
Fay: and that road there [11]
Jane: It's not much further
Fay: Ah well. Let's just drive, see what happens

This clip has been described in detail elsewhere {Brown and Laurier, 2005 #1215}. In that paper we focused on the interactions around the map, and the planning which was done in this short clip. Here I want to focus on the features of this interaction as an example of a group making a decision. The friends discussion, as an example of decision making, is structured in ways that give us some leads as to how decisions more generally play a role in organising activity.

The decision as an architecture for co-ordinating the day

One of the first points to draw out is that this is an example of a group making decisions together, co-ordinating their action as a decision. The problem of *what to do today* acts as a focal point for the groups interaction. The activity of the day must be decided sometime soon, so the driver will know where to drive, putting the group under a light time pressure to decide where to go. Thus the time bounded activity of decision making acts as a point in time where all those interested can discuss and work together on the problem. The decision sets up an architecture for the interaction - there will be some sort of end point (a set of things that they will decide upon) and a time where everyone can say what they want. Saying at the end of the day "but i wanted to do a walk" - can be rebuked ("well why didn't you say that when we were deciding?") It also provides an ownership in the decision for individuals and the group - you need to pay attention here, or else the decision will be made without you. The known in common trajectory of the decision, and its involvement in the daytrip act as something that gives the individuals some sense of when it is proper to do when, and what they should or can be expected to do. The decision is a formatting device {Garfinkel, 2003 #1226}.

The decision acts as a method for managing responsibility

The decision making also acts as a way of setting up ownership and responsibility. The future events of the day, their desirability and pleurability, will come in part from how well the job is done here. Shared involvement in the decision making implies shares responsibility for what happens later. One cannot criticise others for the decision if you were responsible yourself (or it becomes a different and potentially harder matter). Indeed, one can see a little of this in how

the two women share the map - the main map reader still retains ownership of the task, but the map is shared with the other passenger. Responsibility for what happens later is shared in part now - they *both* looked at the map, so they both have some responsibility.

It is not that the friends are scared of losing their jobs or friendship here - the responsibility is instead one of helping each other by contributing to the day. This is a positive responsibility, in that there is a motivation to be seen to have done the job correctly or well, lest one slowly becomes characterised as 'lazy' or 'useless with maps'. This distribution of responsibility also sets up a distribution in knowledge - the different parts of the route will be known by each other. This acts as a way of duplicating route knowledge amongst multiple people in case anybody forgets, but also in distributing the job of who needs to do what and remember what. Particularly for Jane, as the person holding the map, she can be expected by others to have some sort of sense of 'what is ahead'

The decision involves thinking as much as choosing

The decision here is also just one of debating individual preferences, or what each person wants to do, but involves considerable *calculation*. The suggested places have to be found on the map, and the distances between places evaluated. The decision is thus a combination of geographical calculation (working with a map) and a discussion of preferences. This extract here is of a group thinking together - working through what is available, where they can go, what the recommendations referred to on the map and their position with respect to each other. Indeed, most of the focus here is on working out the different options that the group have, rather than necessarily deciding upon one thing to be done over another. This calculation - working out what is going on - is of course an essential part of decision making.

Calculation and evaluating preferences are combined in much of the interaction. The day-trippers discuss the recommendations, where they could go, what is in those different places, and how to get those places in combination. This combines calculation (working out where a place is and how to get there) with discussing preferences (what do they want to do that day). These different aspects depend upon each other - the order in which they will come to the different places (something that needs to be worked out) will influence what they might want to do. For example, lunch might follow a walk, particularly if lunch is further along the road from the walk.

Deciding on activities, then working out where they were, or the other way around would have caused problems, calculation and preference need to be done and discussed in tandem. Therefore, in the transcript, places are described in terms of their activities not simply their location. This description is one which is particularly suited for making these decisions.

The end result isn't known at the beginning

A classical approach to decision making might attempt to see this decision making task as one of listing the possible options for the day (the pub, walks and so on), calculating which ones are preferable (how far away are they, who wants to do what) and then coming up with a decision about what to do. One might even suggest - follow the notion of satisficing - that the group had some sort of idea of what a 'good day' is, and when they find something that fits then they stop the searching and make a decision.

Yet a problem with this sort of account here is that the end result isn't known at the beginning. That is to say that what sort of opportunities the day offers isn't known before the friends start searching. The sense in which they have a 'good enough' notion of the day ready formed is difficult to sustain, since what to do will depend to a large extent on what is revealed as available. The metrics which the friends use, their preferences are fashioned on the fly as the different possibilities are revealed. Indeed, as the conversation goes on the methods that are used by the friends change as the problem change. Rather than reply upon the recommendation as determining what they will do, they use the recommendation to form a list of optional events which they will come across in the future. The recommendation thus acts as information about what the day could be, rather than a list to be followed or events which they will do. The decision making process itself changes as different aspects of the world are revealed.

It is clear also that the characteristics of the different activities are hardly investigated in depth, instead the most important thing about them is described - where they are. The friends work on preparing a list of possible options, and placing them in the order they will be found as they drive. To a large extent, much of the decisions will depend upon each other and their order in the drive. Doing a walk will fit in different ways with having lunch, as will going to the pub.

Partial decisions are formed not final

The friends in this extract hardly seem to make much a decision in the end: "let's just drive and see what happens". Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that this extract is perhaps not decision making, because the friends do not arrive at a final decision on what to do. Yet this would be too crude: the friends arrive at an list of places, with activities to do in those places, with that list ordered in terms of what will come first as they drive down the road. The world has been separated into Walks and Waterfall (Killin) and Pub and Loch (Lock Ern), and a route has been planned which takes the friends across these two places. As they drive along the road selected they will come across each place.

The plans produced are 'good enough' rather than detailed plans of activity. This plan is *deliberately* ambiguous so that it can be further formulated later in the journey when that journey brings them more details (e.g. seeing the outside of the

pub from the road). The plan being made here is deliberately designed to be only as specific as necessary. To the friends, they need only list the place and the activities knowing that decisions on what exactly to do can be made later, perhaps not until they are actually in the places mentioned and can pass their judgement on the “nice pub”.

As Suchman argues, plans decided do not determine behaviour, but are used flexibly in handling future events, and become a tool for making sense of one and others’ actions (Suchman 1987). In this case the recommendation is a form of plan given by Susan. Various decisions can only be made when one arrives in the situation for which plans are made. Planning the complete route in advance using a map would be impossible and if attempted cause havoc, since there is always some detail which is unspecifiable in advance. If the friends continued to search for Loch Aber until it was found, it would likely have caused serious problems for their day out. The plan decided on is in the form of a deliberately *ambiguous* routes, which lead to picking a specific route by using road signs when one is driving, asking locals for directions, searching for other locatable items (Loch Ern and Loch Tay), phoning a friend and so on. The decisions made are deliberately ambiguous - ambiguous to the extent required for the ongoing activity.

Culture and rationality are mutually constitutive

The last point I will draw out from this extract concerns the extent to which this clip can be seen as an example of rule following, rationality, or some combination of the two. As discussed earlier the two dominant views on decision making have seen decisions as governed mainly by rational contemplation, or alternatively by convention, culture and rules.

In this extract one can certainly see the friends as ‘rational’ or sensible actors. the different suggestions are discussed in terms of activities, setting them up for evaluation. The discourse is rational in the sense that the items discussed are ‘reasonable’, and the activities discussed are presented for evaluation, in particular in terms of their place on the road.

The friends are also working under the constraints of culture, and some rules of the architecture of the built environment - they can only go somewhere a road has been built. Indeed, much of the transcript is the friends using the map to work out the constraints under which they must operate, with much of their view of the world given by the map. There appears to be a role for rules in this interaction.

However, it is important to see that both these aspects depend upon each other for their sense. What is a rational thing to do or suggest depends to a large extent on the cultural expectations concerning a day out with a friend, as well as the specific biography of the friends here. Suggesting that they spend the day staring into space, or sleeping, would have resulted in puzzlement - it would not have

been 'rational', since that is an option less desirable than spending time walking with friends, for example. The rationality of the friends in the transcript is thus as much a feature of the expectations of culture as it is of a formal process. The rationality of the process depends upon a selection of sensible activities, something culturally dependent.

In turn, just as rationality depends upon culture, so the rules that are used by the friends depend upon their rationality. The friends have to select what aspects of their culture and expectations are sensible at this point. This involves some sort of visibly rational process of selection. It would certainly have been possible for the friends to spend the whole day in the pub, but that would have been a less than optimum outcome for the friends - they select what activities are sensible using some sense of what would be desirable for the day. Rule following and rationality are thus mutually constitutive in decision making, rather than separate device or approaches to how one makes a decision.

Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to look again at the notion of decisions from a perspective which sees decisions as lived everyday organisational devices. Rather than come up with abstracted models whereby 'decisions' are produced inside heads, and then transferred into activity, I argued for a view of decisions as an everyday architecture for co-ordination. Seeing decisions as an architecture for the arrangement of activity lets us avoid attempting to describe or understand the whole gamut of human thinking under a single process.

After a necessarily brief review of decision making theory, we followed Ryle's comments on volition. These prove to be applicable to consideration of what a 'decision' is, since much of the consideration of decisions falls into a similar problem. Seeing decisions as a mental act means we must separate actions from decisions. As Ryle points out, this does considerable damage to the ordinary everyday way we talk about decisions.

Taking the approach of naturalistic decision making, but from an ethnomethodological direction, we then discussed an example of a decision being made - a short but complex transcript of a group of friends deciding what to do that day. I drew six observations concerning this decision. First, decisions act as an architecture for organising the day. Second, the decision helps allocate responsibility between the friends. Third, the decision involves thinking and calculation as well as expressing preferences. Fourth, the end result was not known at the beginning, or even what sort of end result the friends would arrive at. Fifth, I discussed how the decision produced at the end was a 'partial decision' one which would be further elaborated as the friends continue their drive. Lastly, I discussed how culture and rationality depend upon each other in the decision making, rather than being opposing approaches to making a decision.

This paper has examined an example of mobility, focusing on the nature of choice in decisions. Where we go is one of the most fundamental choices that we make, a decision which is frequently made with others. Uncovering how decisions are made about where we go is something that should be at the heart of research into mobility.