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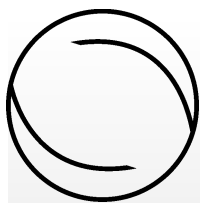**Additional services and information for *Organization Studies* can be found at:**

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Harold Garfinkel, Ethnomethodology and Workplace Studies

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Abstract

Known primarily as the author of a *method* for studying work, Harold Garfinkel — and ethnomethodological studies of work, or workplace studies — also offer an important alternative *theory* of work. First articulated in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a theory of communication, organization, and information, it has been Garfinkel's proposal that mutual understanding (orienting objects, meaning, and identities) in interactions, including technical situations of work, requires constant mutual orientation to situated constitutive expectancies — *taken-for-granted methods of producing order that constitute sense* — accompanied by displays of attention, competence, and trust. Based on this premise, researchers need to enter worksites to learn the order properties of work. Conventional theories, by contrast, treat social orders (including work) as resulting from individual interests, external constraint, and/or some conjunction between the two. For Garfinkel, however, individual motivation, power, and constraint must be managed by workers in and through the details of work. He insists that the need for participants to mutually orient ways of producing order on each next occasion adequately explains the details of order and sensemaking. Thus, any worksite exhibits the details required to produce, manage and understand local orders of work, including power and constraint — details that are local matters, lost to general formulation, requiring a research approach focused on the order properties of those details.

Keywords: Garfinkel, ethnomethodology, workplace studies, conversation analysis, social theory, work, practices, reflexivity, communication, globalization

Introduction

Some of the more important developments in the study of work and organization, including studies by Lucy Suchman (1987), Julian Orr (1996), Christian Heath and Paul Luff (2000), Richard Harper (1998) and Sellen and Harper (2003), establishing the importance of situated action, talk, sequential order and tacit understanding, have been inspired by Harold Garfinkel's argument that social orders, including work, depend for their coherence on constant attention to, and competent display of, shared member's methods (ethno-methods) rather than on formal structures, or individual motivation: hence the term 'ethnomethodology' (EM).[1] Garfinkel's notions of 'taken-for-granted' reasoning and the general importance of details of order, accountability and displays of attention have since

the 1960s influenced the research of such well-known organization studies scholars as Egon Bittner (1965, 1983), Karl Weick (1969, 1995), John Van Maanen and Steve Barley (1984) and Peter K. Manning (1979a, b).[2]

In spite of Garfinkel's impact on the development of detailed *studies* of work, his theoretical contribution, and the extent to which he has from the beginning been directly concerned with questions of organization and organizing, remains obscure. As a consequence, the studies of work he inspires tend to be framed by and appraised from conventional theoretical perspectives that treat contingent detail as theoretically insignificant. The result is that details can become vague, treated as a symbolic and interpretive matter, or as habits and routines, rather than the detailed and specifiable process of producing orders based on shared methods, trust, competence, and attention that Garfinkel indicated.

Furthermore, in the absence of a clear articulation of Garfinkel's theory, the results of detailed studies are popularly treated as qualitative 'findings' and the data approached as though theoretically neutral. The general perception is that, while impressively thorough, such studies lack an adequate theoretical orientation. For instance, in the special issue of *Organization Studies* (2006) devoted to Julian Orr's *Talking About Machines* (1996) Orr's contribution is striking for the extent to which, in spite of the impact of his work and the clear appreciation of its originality, he is nevertheless held accountable to conventional theoretical expectations and criticized for not having focused on entities such as 'the organization' (Orr 2006: 1805–1810). Orr sidesteps the issue to some extent, citing his training in anthropology. But he also offers a persuasive defense of his focus on technicians and their work, citing Egon Bittner's (1965) early work on organization as the best theoretical warrant for his approach. Bittner was an early student of Garfinkel and, given the approach Orr chose — an avowedly ethnomethodological approach — he *was* looking at the organization as a process of collaborative work, in just the way Bittner proposes. That's why Orr's work is so impressive. To insist that his 'findings' stand in need of theoretical framing forces on them theories they effectively challenge, while ignoring the theory they are premised on.[3]

Ethnomethodological studies are grounded in theoretical premises elaborated by Garfinkel principally in publications and manuscripts written between 1940 and 1967 that challenge conventional theory and research in significant ways. Garfinkel insists that mutual intelligibility (or sensemaking) in all situations from ordinary conversation through work in the most highly structured organizations (Garfinkel's studies in the early 1950s focused on the military, prisons and hospitals) requires constant attention and competent use of shared methods of organizing action for its achievement. Work is like other social processes in this regard and thus, Garfinkel argues, the methods essential to work (and organization) will be found in details of attention and mutually oriented methods of work, and ordered properties of mutual action, rather than abstract formulations. It follows that mutual attentiveness and conversation reduce accidents and make high-risk work more reliable, as a number of studies have shown (Heath and Luff 2000; Shapiro et al. 1994; Weick and Roberts 1993), because of identifiable ways that attention to ethno-methods enable mutually recognizable orders to be produced and displayed — processes that depend heavily on the moment-by-

moment management of contingent detail through sequential orderings (see also Barley and Kunda 2001).

It will be the task of this paper to make those theoretical premises and their implications for organization studies research clear while also recognizing the constraint on space here.

After outlining the basic theoretical controversies that currently animate the reception of detailed studies of work, and considering the relationship between Garfinkel and contemporary organization theory, this article will: discuss Garfinkel's principled treatment of social orders, objects, and identities as achievements of constitutive practice, considering why their theoretical character has been overlooked; examine the relevance of Garfinkel's treatment of the actor, groups, oriented objects, accounts, and trust for studies of work; and, finally, consider the implications of Garfinkel's premises for organization theory and research.

Garfinkel and Contemporary Organization Theory

The fact that studies of work inspired by Garfinkel are premised on an alternative theory of social order, in which contingent details are considered theoretically significant, is fundamental to understanding the contribution of those studies to contemporary organization theory.[4] Conventional social theories do not allow for the possibility that contingent details exhibit order in individual cases and in their own right. They require instead the establishment of general patterns because they treat order as an aggregate result of individual action in a context of either structurally constrained or goal-oriented activity. Garfinkel has referred to this characteristic of conventional theory as 'Parsons' plenum' (1988, 2002). Aggregation, and the statistical methods that support it, is considered fundamental to establishing order in this view.[5]

Garfinkel, by contrast, maintains that each action must exhibit an order that is recognizable to other members of the same situation in order to be meaningful. It is the achievement and display of such recognizable orders that allows for mutual understanding — sensemaking — and coordinated action. The argument that meaning requires order, and the empirical elaboration of how this is achieved through sequential devices and reflexive attention, are Garfinkel's unique contribution to social theory.

Several comprehensive reviews of the contemporary state of theories of work and organization are helpful in situating Garfinkel's position relative to more conventional theorizing. In their introduction to a special issue of *Organization Studies* on theories of the 'firm', the editors succinctly sum up the current state of organization theory as reflecting a basic dichotomy between individual and collective theories of social order — wherein all theories have to take either an individual or collective position, or some combination (Koza and Thoenig 2003). This has been true of organization theory since its inception, and even authors arguing for alternatives nevertheless acknowledge the main elements of the dichotomy (Schatzki 2005). Anthony Giddens's (1982) *The Constitution of Society* is one of the best-known attempts to forge an alternative bridging the

individual and collective positions. Because order is still treated as an aggregated effect of individual action, collective constraint, or a combination of the two, however, and not as evident in a single action or situation, even when these approaches include a significant focus on interaction they stress the importance of establishing analytic generalities that hold across situations (interactions become 'routines' and 'habits') — and hence prefer large data sets (albeit of different kinds), even where the data are primarily 'qualitative' and 'bottom up'.[6]

A focus on situated detail like Garfinkel's is not considered significant social science in any of these views, because things that only happen once cannot demonstrate general patterns of action across cases. Garfinkel's insistence on contingent details tends to be seen as an extreme form of individualism. This is unfortunate, because he is not interested in the individual as such, nor the uniqueness of contingent details. Rather, Garfinkel is concerned with the patterned and instructable ways in which order properties of situated action are made public and mutually recognizable objects by workers at worksites from the contingencies at hand. He is interested in how — just how — contingencies are rendered as recognizable objects using shared methods that exhibit an immediate order that *can* be seen in each single case. From Garfinkel's perspective, individual interests and attitudes are irrelevant to situated orders because each action, in order to be meaningful, must exhibit order regardless of any particular individual motivations. Similarly, organizational constraint, while relevant at the level of accounts, and oriented toward managing the accountability of actions, does not *order* action; its function is retrospective. This does not mean that organizational constraint does not have consequences, but only and very specifically that it does not order action. Nor can it exempt anyone or any action from the requirements of order. Any competent participant's primary motivation must be to sustain mutual intelligibility, and to do so through the use of situated methods (constitutive expectancies)[7] they share with others. For Garfinkel, these shared methods in the details of their use are the sociological object, not the individual, collective, or any aggregated or approximate order resulting from the influence of the one, the other, or any combination (Rawls 1989a).

It is clear that Garfinkel's position constitutes some kind of alternative to conventional organization theory. But, exactly what kind of alternative? Schatzki (2005) has recently outlined what he calls a 'third alternative' that is useful to consider as he regards it as broadly compatible with Garfinkel, and something like it is often adopted as a theoretical frame for EM studies. There are differences, however, and these differences help to clarify the distinctiveness of Garfinkel's position. Schatzki proposes what he refers to as a 'site ontology': a position focusing on situated detail, while also retaining some basic premises of both individual and collective theories. He argues that this alternative position effectively combines the strengths of individualism and collectivism, while overcoming their weaknesses. On this 'third' view, habits and routines, at the conjunction of individual interests and organizational/collective constraints, provide a foundation for stable, intelligible organizational work.

The argument basically constitutes a synthesis of Anthony Giddens's 'routinization' (1982), Pierre Bourdieu's 'habitus' (1972) and various innovations

on these by others (e.g. Latour 1987). Habits and routines, because they can be construed as observable behavior, seem more amenable to empirical studies than the 'values', 'attitudes', and 'institutions' posited by conventional social science. This emphasis on the empirical constitutes a superficial fit between the study of habits and routines and EM studies of work in details.

However, habits and routines are treated as existing in ways that distinguish them from what Garfinkel means by sequential order properties.[8] In being routinized, habits and routines are in principle abstractions, or generalizations from the contingencies of real world events, and as such do not retain the complex and fluid order properties Garfinkel maintains are necessary to accomplish mutual intelligibilities of work. Ironically, this property of abstraction is part of their appeal as a theoretical device, offering the hope that they constitute something — a standardized 'unit' of some kind — that holds constant across time, person or place, and can thus be aggregated.

Garfinkel's argument, by contrast, is that routinized 'units' cannot explain intelligibility. At worksites and in interactions where nothing is ever exactly the same twice, something nevertheless makes it possible to discriminate the orderly and expected social 'things' from purely contingent happenings. There is much essential intelligible activity at any worksite that is neither habitual nor routine.

Garfinkel argues that the contingencies of local orders are too complex and changeable to be handled by any standardized unit, and that would include habits and routines, in addition to rules, definitions, symbols, etc. In fact, it is his position that all such 'units', like any social 'object' or 'thing', only come to have recognizable and shared meaning (or appearance) to a working group when they are made using shared methods to create a situated order against which social 'things' can be seen in common. It is not the units that provide a constant; this is the mistake of conventional theorizing. It is the constantly kaleidoscoping order properties with which objects are rendered mutually intelligible which provide a constant: an epistemological and not an ontological problem in Garfinkel's view.

If one says, for example, that a worker accomplishes a task by the habitual use of a wrist flick, or by jotting down a particular set of words on paper, what remains to be explained is how the worker recognizes those situations that are appropriate for the use of that wrist flick, or just those words, and how the ordering of that activity achieves some mutually intelligible purpose. Saying it is a routine does not answer these questions. Slight variations in routines themselves also need to be explained. These variations constitute order properties that comprise both the intelligibility and the efficacy of action. Hughes et al. (2003) found that skilled iron workers have ways of turning a block of molten iron and changing the settings on the 'rollers' that might be called routines by some researchers. The interesting question is how 'skilled' workers recognize those situations in which these 'routines' might be appropriate. They must be able to 'see' within fractions of seconds that the iron is not looking right, and then select from a variety of options for altering the 'normal' rolling procedures. They must also be able to see how far 'off' the depth measurements are, to keep from damaging machinery. Operators who are 'skilled' at seeing these things produce less bad iron and do less damage to equipment,

For Garfinkel, habits and routines, like any other social object, are only them-selves constituted as intelligible objects against a background of constitutive order. Workers must be able to recognize what kind of a sequence they are in. Focusing on ontological units (things, habits, routines) begs the question of what order properties allow them to be mutually seen as units and intelligibly employed on any particular occasion.

In looking at why doctors refused to make use of a new, very expensive, com-puterized record-keeping system in the UK, Heath and Luff (2000: 31–57) exam-ined the order properties of the old written records the doctors preferred. They found the order of the entries exhibited an economy and sequential placement of terms that allowed doctors to make important inferences about patients, their complaints, the doctor who made the record, and the trustworthiness of com-plaint and/or diagnosis. The records typically consisted of two or three lines: the patient's complaint, the diagnosis, and the treatment, in that order and on sepa-rate lines. By juxtaposing serious complaints with insignificant treatments, or placing the patient's complaint in 'quotation marks' doctors conveyed their assessment of the patient's complaint (e.g. 'not to be taken seriously') without making the assessment explicit in the written record. When insignificant treat-ment was combined with no diagnosis and a notation of referral to the social worker, the inference could be drawn that the patient was mentally unstable. The new computerized system, by eliminating the possibilities for creating an orderly and economical sequential construction of items recognizable to doctors and see-able at a glance, rendered the new, more complete records meaningless.

To 'read the chart', doctors must be able to discern the order properties of the entries. The juxtaposition of diagnosis and complaint can be informative, the same diagnosis following a different complaint conveying different informa-tion. This approach treats both order and mutually intelligible 'fact' as an accomplishment of details — constantly changing details — that exhibit order properties in their sequencing.

By contrast, the focus on detail in habits and routines does not look for order, nor treat meaning, intelligibility or mutual action as a matter of order. Somehow the workers are pictured as managing to enact just the right routines at just the right time, and the question of how they know when or what is not problematized. It is only in Garfinkel's view that the details of any particular situation are expected to exhibit order properties in their own right. Sequential order proper-ties can be observed and studied only in their details, and thus, instead of treat-ing order either as details generalized into habits and routines, the result of an aggregation of individuals more or less orienting toward collective norms and values, or as an ontological property of situated things, Garfinkel treats details themselves as exhibiting the order that workers have to go on.

If one takes seriously Garfinkel's proposition that sequential order is consti-tutive of mutual intelligibility, then order properties of sequences become the primary research object. What is required for the study of how this order is jointly made is a method that preserves the contingencies of its local produc-tion, those sequential details oriented toward by workers in doing their work, and a theory treating these contingencies themselves, not the routines and habits an observer might see 'sedimenting' from them, as essential. The 'constant'

organization theory seeks will, on Garfinkel's view, be found in the sequential order properties of the methods workers use for producing order, not in 'units' or abstractions that appear to the observer's view.[9]

The basic problem most social science neglects, according to Garfinkel, is how we come to 'see' intelligible things in common in the first place — how we mutually constitute the 'objects' and 'things' that inhabit social situations (Garfinkel [1952] 2008). The problem as Schatzki sees it is one of ontology, or as he calls it 'site ontology': a concern with what social objects exist, and the relationships between them. This view takes the intelligibility of social objects and their existence for granted and explains the 'routine' treatment *of* them, and their relationships *to* individual and collective action.

Schatzki, like Giddens and Bourdieu, accepts the individual/collective dichotomy, and tries to bridge that dichotomy theoretically. Garfinkel rejects the dichotomy outright (Rawls 1989a; Garfinkel [1948] 2006). For Garfinkel, individual identities only exist (and can only be seen, recognized, or understood) within social situations, or groups, defined by shared ways of producing order in details.[10]

In keeping with his treatment of the mutual intelligibility of objects and words as constituted by order properties, Garfinkel approaches the question of what constitutes a group as a situated production through working acts. He proposes that situated actors, engaged in constructing a sequential order of meaning, constitute a group only when, and only for as long as, the sequential character of the interaction in which they are currently engaged requires of them collectively a mutual commitment to constitutive properties of the situation. The group, as a set of interpretive procedures, is, as Garfinkel says, 'there before the actor gets there and there after they leave like a "'standing crap game'".[11]

What makes a group — a group for the moment — is that its members are committed to the same constitutive expectations or, loosely speaking, 'playing the same game' (Garfinkel [1948] 2006; 1963).[12] Later participants in the group will join other situations and the sequential orders they build together with which to mutually orient objects will be different. The objects and identities they can 'see' and 'be' are also tied to constitutive expectations of game/group and change as they change situations and constitutive commitments. Individuals, objects, and groups cannot be taken for granted by the researcher. They only exist as and when they are made: a problem of epistemology, not ontology.

This idea, that a group has nothing to do with the demographic characteristics of the individuals who comprise it, but rather with their situated competences and commitments, is the kind of definition of society that Durkheim ([1893] 1933) offered when he said society is more than the sum of its parts. Garfinkel's argument implies that what makes a group does not come from *any* of the parts. It is the individual that has a problematic reality for Garfinkel, not the group.[13] This is an important treatment of collectivity that does not describe a traditional tribal, cultural, or gemeinschaft group bound together by shared beliefs. Rather, it corresponds to Durkheim's argument that in modern society self-regulating practices replace groups characterized by boundaries, shared norms, values, or culture.

For Garfinkel, the dichotomy between individual and collective is itself a social production that requires an explanation, not a place to begin. While conventional

approaches treat the individual and collective as given and then ask how social order results from an intersection between them, Garfinkel treats the intelligible ordering of 'actions' which comprise mutually recognizable 'individuals' and 'collectives' as the primary problematic. They only 'exist', like any social object, in so far as they can be intelligibly (and mutually) seen and understood; and thus the epistemological question takes precedence over the ontological. This treatment of the order properties of situations as fundamental to mutual intelligibility does not fit within either of the two more conventional perspectives, nor Schatzki's third alternative.

Why is Garfinkel's Position Not Recognized as Theoretical?

There are good reasons for not thinking of Garfinkel's position as theoretical. For many years he forcefully and explicitly criticized conventional theorizing, arguing that any researcher who 'formulated' research problems theoretically before entering the field could (in principle) not find the actual real-world problems of making action and objects mutually intelligible that people at the worksite faced everyday. But it is a mistake to think that because he criticized conventional theory, emphasizing the importance of the empirical and steering his own students away from theory, he did not work out his own theoretical premises in great detail. Between 1948 and 1954, Garfinkel wrote extensively on the theoretical implications of his argument that the order properties of situations constitute their meaning.[14] This theoretical work involved reformulating basic sociological ideas (including the assumption that the individual and the collective are the essential protagonists in the creation of social order) and working out a general framework for a new understanding of the problem of social order in which the perception of social reality depends on the particular order properties enacted.

What it means to say that Garfinkel's position is theoretical, while at the same time respecting Garfinkel's own deep criticisms of theorizing, is that there are good *reasons* why he would work in some ways and not others, and that these reasons have to do with deep noticings about how social things work, paired with some basic theoretical premises about the nature of social order generated by Garfinkel to explain those noticings. This does not mean that Garfinkel employs abstractions, reduces details to generalities or that he formulates the details of social orders, or, as he would say, 'makes them up' in advance of research. What is radical about ethnomethodology theoretically is that it does *not* reduce details to generalities — a practice generally considered the hallmark of theory — but, rather, locates the constitutive order properties toward which members mutually orient in the contingent details of their work.

Because conventional theory does not recognize the significance of ordered contingencies, a focus on details seems to be a-theoretical. But there is an intrinsic relationship between detailed studies and their theoretical premises, at the heart of which is the premise that order is an ongoing achievement of member's methods for producing it — rather than the result of structures, cultures, habits,

routines, power, or interests, as other theories assume. If the coherence of actions, objects and identities depends on shared ways of producing situated orders of practice, and a mutual commitment to, or trust in, those shared practices, and if that order is made at local worksites, out of just what people need to get the work done in mutually understood ways, then the order properties of that coherence will necessarily exhibit the constitutive expectancies used to make it. These order properties of the coherence of objects, identities, and situations do not involve the considerations of individual motivation and collective constraint that are the theoretical mainstays of conventional social science, and consist only and exactly in their details. They only work in practice if they can be seen and recognized by others. Thus, they are available to research.

The situated need to make sense, to mutually orient objects and actions, imposes order requirements on participants. Objects and actions are recognizable, and hence meaningful, only when they can be seen as orderly within a particular context of situated action. As Garfinkel says, 'order = meaning' ([1948] 2006). That order, and its properties of sequential and contingent detail, is the sociological object.

Garfinkel's criticisms of theory were themselves theoretically informed. This is not a contradiction. Garfinkel did not criticize conventional theory merely for being theoretical. What he criticized was the practice of letting theory define in advance the research questions and relevant concepts such that the researcher entered the research site with a closed mind, or as an observer merely, a point taken up at the close of this paper. Garfinkel called this a 'heads you win, tails I lose' approach — pursuing a research agenda to a foregone conclusion ([1948] 2006: 105). Having formulated the problem tautologically in advance, conventional researchers cannot lose. On the other hand, they are sure to miss the *lived* problem of order, and there is always an actual lived problem, as opposed to the theoretical problem posed by the observer. Consequently, Garfinkel referred to the lived problems of social order at the worksite as the 'missing what' of conventionally theorized social science. Ethnomethodologists understand order as a local production: it's why they do their research the way they do.

The irony is that EM studies of work, sometimes called the new anthropological approach to studies of work,[15] constitute a *radical theoretical position* in their own right, one that stands in contradiction to other theories. More than a method, Garfinkel's position is not anthropological except in being deeply ethnographic (and not conventionally ethnographic in that EM looks for order properties rather than culture, beliefs, or symbolic meaning). EM studies are not in need of theoretical contexting; they constitute an *inherently theoretical* approach. Both theoretically and methodologically they provide a serious challenge to prevailing 'social science' theories and methods.

While Garfinkel offered his premises without historical consideration, it's worth noting Durkheim's argument ([1893] 1933: 100) that, as social relations become more diverse, orders based on shared beliefs and traditional social structures can no longer maintain social solidarity. In a future characterized by diversity and differentiation, theory and research premised on formal structures, values, and beliefs become irrelevant, as the orders they describe lose efficacy (Rawls 2004a, 2007,

forthcoming). Social orders in a modern context of communication between relative unknowns must come increasingly to rely on constitutive or, as Durkheim called them, 'self-regulating' practices (Durkheim [1893] 1933: 100; Rawls 2003). Durkheim draws examples from science, in which shared competence in a practice replaces beliefs as the basis for both sustaining and challenging ideas. In a context of globalization and globally distributed work, where people who do not share beliefs and have only situated practices to fall back on must nevertheless work together, it is important to understand the relevance of a theoretical and methodological shift from the conventional view of structures versus individuals — requiring a solidarity of beliefs and values — to an appreciation of the utility of members' methods for producing the order of the social situations they inhabit (Rawls 2005, 2007, forthcoming). It is instructive to see Garfinkel and ethno-methods as elaborating Durkheim's argument.

Hybrid Studies of Work or Workplace Studies, in Details

Since the 1960s, Garfinkel has been teaching and doing what he calls 'hybrid studies of work' (Garfinkel 2002). Also known as 'workplace studies' (Luff et al. 2000), what is unique about these studies is what makes them hybrid: they are a cross between research and work. Performed by trained researchers, the questions they raise orient toward the problems and taken-for-granted competences workers manage in doing their work. They are different from 'applied research', which takes its problems and questions about how the world is ordered from disciplinary interests with no immediate practical relevance to the worksite, and then attempts to 'apply' them. Hybrid studies, by contrast, take their problems and questions from the worksite — treating workers, not the researcher, as the experts — and bringing into sharp relief how work is done and how problems are detected and dealt with by workers, an approach that is of immediate relevance to work. As a theoretical perspective, its practical promise is unique.

It is no coincidence, then, that the major impact of Garfinkel's position has first been acknowledged in areas of work studied by EM researchers, and not in their home discipline of sociology. Garfinkel expected this for two reasons: *first*, the theoretical presuppositions of sociology — and conventional theories of organization — make it impossible to focus on work, or anything else, in details. Everything must be reduced to a correlation between attitudes, values, and demographics, or routines, to be considered sociological; and, *second*, because hybrid studies reveal practical issues involved in any worksite, it is not surprising that they make a significant contribution to the problems and orientations of the research sites studied.

As a consequence of these studies, those responsible for technical work are coming to see the benefit of funding and participating in detailed studies of work.[16]

Training students for this work poses an interesting problem. Because the task is to see the work as a member/worker, and not as a researcher, time spent on theorizing, or even learning research techniques, could be time spent closing a researcher's eyes to the order properties of a worksite.

Conventional social science training, with its focus on 'objectivity', experimental controls, aggregated data sets, and hypothesis testing, has a tendency to do this. Garfinkel's intention is to open the field of possibilities as much as possible, to get researchers to see the world of work in new and unexpected ways, and to use whatever tools seem appropriate to their research problem in doing so (audio, video, photographs, technical slides, drawings, stories, transcripts, etc.).

Methods that enable researchers to preserve and record order properties of situations, and approaches like CA that help in identifying possible order properties, are useful in this regard, but only in combination with an embodied experience of the work in question. John Hughes (Hughes et al. 1993), for instance, has made creative use of computer programs that allow field notes to be inserted as links into visuals of the proximal relations between workers at the worksite. This not only allows for sharing the order properties of work across a team that includes designers, but also for constant updating of observations, and does not require reduction of fieldwork analysis to a single viewpoint. While many research approaches are useful, the objective is to locate and preserve the order properties of work.

While Garfinkel elaborated his position theoretically between 1948 and 1954, after he got to UCLA in 1954 he focused more exclusively on research. Because constitutive orders must be experienced to be understood, theoretical explanations (even when correct) can prevent researchers from seeing the order properties of constitutive expectancies for themselves.[17] At UCLA in 1954, Garfinkel began teaching a series of what he refers to as tutorial problems (Garfinkel 2002: 145–168). Tutorials are exercises designed to help students make a gestalt shift away from the taken-for-granted in any setting, and toward the details of the work at hand. They involve things like attempting to follow ordinary instructions while wearing inverting lenses (lenses that turn everything upside down and backwards) or recording an ordinary telephone ringing: could the students hear the difference between a phone ringing for them and one ringing for someone else?[18] The exercises helped students realize how much work was involved in orienting objects (a phone ringing for someone else is oriented differently) and following instructions in the ordinary way, work they would not otherwise be aware of because they were taking it for granted. The objective is to get beyond the taken-for-granted, beyond habits and routines, to the order properties that constitute their recognizability on each next occasion.

Explanations of EM have often focused on these tutorials as if they were intended as the EM method of research, with unfortunate consequences. Some tutorials disrupted an ordinary activity in order to reveal its 'normally thoughtless' orderly character and these came to be widely referred to as 'breaching experiments'. Although it can be instructive when things fail, and Garfinkel did some things he called experiments early on that involved breaching, these tutorials were not intended as 'experiments'. They are ways of learning to see the taken-for-granted details of members' work in members' terms — which takes a lot of practice. Challenges for organization studies researchers are considered in the conclusion.

Intelligibility, Reciprocity and Trust

Methods (or practices) for producing mutually intelligible objects and actions, according to Garfinkel, require constant mutual orientation and sustained trust. They have the character of reflexivity, meaning that each next thing done or said is taken in relation to the last (reflects back on the last), and this reflexive sequential chain constitutes a basic order of sensemaking ([1948] 2006). This gives social action and conversation a sequential, back-and-forth character, a reflexive relationship between the last thing and the next thing, with mutual obligations to attend and contribute to sequencing at every point. Since objects and identities can only be mutually understood against sequential orders, the mutual work of creating and sustaining them is a *necessary*, and hence a *moral*, obligation that requires a deep mutual *trust* (Rawls 1987, 1989a, b).

Contemporary discussions of trust that treat it as an attitude (Fukayama 1996) or a quality of social networks (Tilly 2005) are inconsistent with Garfinkel's argument that in contexts of constitutive practice trust is a background requirement, not something to be developed, even if it could be achieved over the course of a single interaction (e.g. 'swift trust', Meyerson et al. 1996). Trust in a mutual commitment to a particular set of situated practices is constitutive of the order properties of situations, which give objects and words meaning. Trust must be assumed first, by all members of a practice, and then confirmed constantly through various displays of attention and competence.

Trust, in Garfinkel's sense, is not an attitude and can only be lost, not gained, as it is required to begin with. Much of what passes for 'trust building' in formal organizations would, on Garfinkel's view, damage trust by calling it into question. Trust is tacit and taken for granted. Studies show that taken-for-granted issues are only topicalized when they become problematic. Topicalizing trust can mark it as a problem. In addition, many efforts to make work more efficient eliminate aspects of interaction that are crucial for displays of trust, attention, and competence. The tendency is to treat trust as an attitude toward whole biographical persons, their beliefs and actions over time and in different situations, not as the competence to concretely perform and display commitment to members' methods in a particular situation of work.

Everything meaningful for Garfinkel involves trust (Garfinkel 1963). Every action assumes (trusts) that the ordinary properties of objects (defined by constitutive practices) are as they are expected to be. One assumes that tables are solid and that bottles are labeled properly — until something goes wrong. Then every assumption is open to inspection. This notion of trust is very different from what circulates in social science and organizational science.

Because of the constitutive requirements with regard to trust, understanding technical problems of engineering and information — and communicating about and with objects and technologies — requires a deep familiarity with the constitutive details of the social practices involved, with a particular emphasis on their sequential character and the orientation of both practices and persons/actors to trust requirements. Where technical applications conflict with situated practices and/or their trust requirements, problems will necessarily arise.

Oriented Objects and Phenomenal Fields

Garfinkel insists that the social world and the actors and objects in it do not have the character that conventional theories suppose. Social objects are not just there; they must be mutually oriented. They must be rendered in a mutually intelligible form in order to exist as social objects: thus the terms 'oriented objects', 'oriented identities', and 'phenomenal fields' (Garfinkel 2002). Problems involved in constructing a mutually intelligible object can only be handled by the properties of an organized sequence of interaction. This cannot be done in one turn but involves an interactional series, or sequence.

This idea animated contemporary studies of work. In their study of the London Underground, for instance, Heath and Luff (2000: 88–124) found that workers with different jobs, watching different video screen feeds, nevertheless carefully attended one another. They relied on a sense of a developing course of action, to which many people attended, in order to be able to 'see' the objects that appeared on their own video screens in real time, and coordinate their responses to those objects with others. The supposedly separate jobs all turn out to depend on each worker being able to see what others are 'seeing' in sequence and producing a finely coordinated response.

Such complex, mutually attended sequences of interaction allow for adequacy to be established through reflexive relations between parts of a series. By 'reflexivity' Garfinkel means that the next thing said, done or seen reflects back on the last thing and has the potential to show it in a new light.[19] Thus 'reflexivity', for Garfinkel, is a feature of the witnessable order of a sequence of action, not something happening in the mind. No object or word is clear in itself. Over the course of a sequence they become clear. The idea that objects can be conjured in this way, and mutually oriented, is important. We usually assume that ordinary objects are just there in front of us and that we do not have the same job of mutually orienting them that technical objects require, but Garfinkel argues that we do. Anything about an object could be relevant. What is being mutually oriented? Picking out the 'just what' about present objects that is being oriented in common — the 'what' about them that makes them one kind of social object instead of another — is a similar job of work to mutually orienting technical objects.

Ordinary objects must be oriented in contexts of constitutive practice. Friends seen in places they are not expected may not be recognized. A hand raised overhead in a classroom or town meeting is seen immediately as a 'handraising' because there is a practice of asking questions to which it belongs. But, if hands are raised on a subway or in a park the action is merely confusing, not recognizable as a handraising. Chuck Goodwin (1994) popularized the idea that professional training leads to being able to see objects untrained people do not see, which he calls 'professional vision'. But Garfinkel argues that orienting any meaningful object — not just highly technical, scientific or academic objects — involves instructed and socially constitutive aspects of vision.

Constitutive Properties of Work vs Formal Rules and Manuals

By contrast with Garfinkel's focus on the constitutive properties of sequential orders, the conventional theoretical presumption is to treat generalizations and formal constraints of organization (including manuals and rules) as more important and more theoretically significant. Even leaving aside the extensive critique of the incompleteness of rules and plans that the conventional approach ignores,[20] any actual worker's problems and competences with regard to their work are too complex to be captured by rules, and too closely coordinated to be merely the result of aggregations of individual choices or organizational constraint. Studies like Lucy Suchman's *Plans and Situated Action* (1986) demonstrate that workers orient toward tacit features of situated action in lieu of formal plans (see also Button 1993; Button and Sharrock 1994; Drew and Heritage 1992). Julian Orr's (1996) study of Xerox technicians shows the superiority of mutual collaboration, over manuals. Finely coordinated practices are too complex to be imagined, or formulated theoretically in advance, even by technicians themselves. Garfinkel insists it is impossible in principle to represent these competences — situated and flexible as they are — with generalities, and social theories that do so are irrelevant to fields of action.

Work requires ordering contingencies to produce the order properties of any particular worksite. But it is difficult to get theorists or managers who have been trained to orient toward a formal model of organizations to take these order properties seriously (see Orr 2006). That methods of work have a contingent character does not mean that ways of producing order cannot hold across situations. Some do. But every situation has its own essential contingencies and unless these are taken into account research fails in its practical application. It becomes a model of a theory rather than a model of a worksite.

Accounts and Institutional Contexts of Accountability

Accounts and accounting practices are one way that institutional constraint, power and inequality manifest in interaction. Looking at accounts as orderly practices within institutional settings and, more systematically, at institutions as contexts of accountability, was one of the first ways that Garfinkel impacted on studies of work and formal organizations (1940, 1949). He elaborated ways that both formal and informal social orders were actualized by persons through the production of recognizable and acceptable accounts. Such accounts were produced to satisfy formal organizational accounting procedures and to get work done — conflicting purposes. Studies of clinic record-keeping (Garfinkel 1967) and police record-keeping (Meehan 1986), the social organization of justice and policing (Cicourel 1968; Bittner 1967; Manning 1979a, b; Van Maanen 1979; Van Maanen and Barley 1984), and the social construction of problems through accountable practices were inspired by Garfinkel's treatment of accounts (Kitsuse and Cicourel 1963).

According to Garfinkel, each situation in social life (or in formal organizations) constitutes a location for particular accounts considered appropriate narrative justifications of order production in that situation, but not necessarily in others. Trust

in any participant's competence is related to the way they handle these expectations with regard to accounts.

Garfinkel inspired many studies of organizational accounting practices, including studies by Larry Weider (1974) Dorothy Smith (2005) and Albert Meehan (1986) that influenced the development of formal institutional studies in significant ways. Smith developed institutional ethnography, which focuses on the career of institutional documents and their relationship to internal and external contexts of accountability, and situated identities within organizations. In *Telling the Convict Code* Weider demonstrated an informal context of accountability — a countercode — that inmates name in refusing to comply with formal institutional expectations. No other explanation was necessary. Naming the 'code' was sufficient. Meehan tracks the production of crime statistics, documenting that statistics measure organizational activity, not crime. Such studies have provided researchers a framework for looking at interactions in institutions with extreme power differentials and rethinking the relevance of statistics.

In my own research on conversation between persons identifying with different racial groups in the US (Rawls 2000), I found that participants do not have adequacy with regard to each other's methods. There is no one who can be treated as an expert at both. In this case, accounts served as important clues to what participants who self-identified with both racial groups found storiable (unexpected) about cross-race communication. Their narratives point toward problematic sequences and conflicting expectations: 'white people are nosey' was a widely recognizable account among persons identified as Black Americans.[21] The account resulted from the fact that question sequences treated as normal and expected among white speakers were dispreferred among Black speakers.

EM researchers have also focused on gender. Garfinkel's early research on Agnes and the interactional work required to enact gender identity is well known. Candace West (1982) and Don Zimmerman and West (1975) focused on how gender relations of power and inequality are enacted through phenomena such as frequency of interruption. Roberta Sassatelli (2007), an Italian ethnomethodologist, has done substantial work on gender, extending Garfinkel's original insights with regard to Agnes.

This idea of a context of accountable narrative practice, as a way of understanding how organizational workers formulate the order of their actions, accompanies Garfinkel's studies of interaction from the beginning. It can be found later in his discussion of what he called 'the documentary method of interpretation' (1967), as well as in studies that more explicitly examine 'institutional contexts of accountability' such as 'Good organizational reasons for bad clinic records' (1967). However, accounts do not explain how actions are constructed to be mutually intelligible. Their purpose is to respond to expectations that have relevance within specific organizational contexts.

The difference between the accountable relevance of records and their sequential production and use by participants is especially important. For example, in their study of medical records, 'Bad organizational reasons for good records', a play on Garfinkel's original title, Heath and Luff (2000) argue that the good records that new computerized systems make possible do not facilitate the work of doctors. The good records are organizationally accountable, but not situation

and sequence sensitive. Doctors need to share information that could be crucial to patient care during subsequent visits (e.g. the questionable status of a diagnosis, or questions about the patient's mental health) but which is not appropriate for the official record. A shared practice of juxtaposing diagnosis and treatment decisions (described earlier) allows them to do this efficiently and 'off the record'. The formal organization and its legal commitments might want to prevent this; but if they succeed then care, when doctors do not see the same patient twice, will be less adequate. The apparently 'bad' records that doctors prefer allow them to project essential inferences without making problematic issues accountable for the official record. Doug Maynard (1993) has demonstrated the importance of sequencing in the delivering of 'bad' news.

There is another problem resulting from the accountable character of records. Because workers are oriented toward the need to produce certain documentary records of their work, while also attending the often conflicting situated requirements of work, they make sure that records are complete in just and only the ways they need. Thus, the 'statistics' produced by organizations reflect accountability practices and not instances of events or actions. Treating these records as if they constituted an actual count of events as we have overwhelmingly come to do is problematic (Garfinkel 1949, 1967; Meehan 1986). The use of statistics produced by institutions for accountable purposes as measures of crime, for instance, is subject to this critique. The records are tautological. If a department decides to 'crack down' on a particular category of crime, their efforts will produce increases in the statistical record that reflect a change in police activity rather than changes in instances of criminal activity. Put another way, organizational statistics are not a measure of events in the world. They measure how an organization, as a context of accountability, orients toward certain events, and how organizational workers account for the contact they make with those events: an argument that influenced the development of social problems as a field.

Because workers use accounts to formulate institutional work, while at the same time using practices or members' methods not evident in those accounts to do that work (the work proceeds one way but is accounted for in another), the details of practices are not recoverable from accounts. Accounts that institutions and workers produce, both statistical and narrative, not only hide the actual work of any institution (and its problems), but create the false impression that they represent a count of actual instances of something in the world, which they cannot (Meehan 1986; Garfinkel 1949).

Ironically, conventional research that insists on the importance of power and inequality, and which accuses EM of ignoring those issues, adopts a methodology that treats data sets accountably produced by organizational workers reflecting the accountable narratives that support race and power differentials as 'objective' EM, by contrast, challenges the institutional status quo.

Agency and Organization Theory

The recent turn toward detail and sensemaking in studies of work has resulted in increased concern with the actor and the actor's perspective, and a debate

over what an adequate theory of the actor would consist of (Llewellyn 2007; Kallinikos 2003). As with organization theory in general, the theory of agency suffers from the classic dichotomy between individual and collective, or agency and structure. Consequently, efforts such as Giddens's (1982) attempt to bridge that dichotomy are becoming increasingly important. Because Giddens was influenced by both Goffman and Garfinkel (and yet there are essential differences between them that allow Garfinkel to avoid the pitfalls of Giddens's argument) a short review of the state of the actor in current organization theory will precede the introduction of Garfinkel's position on the actor.

Sue Llewellyn (2007), drawing on Giddens, points out the importance of the idea that most 'actors' projects are effected from within organizations'. Yet, she argues, most organization theories do not have an adequate account of agency, and what they have tends to rely on psychology rather than the capacities that being in organized relationships with others make possible for agents. Garfinkel would agree with the importance of agency to a theory of organization. However, his conception of an actor who constitutes the intelligibility of work and its objects in cooperation with others is very different from Llewellyn's conception of the actor as a motivated individual whose capacities are enhanced by the group.

On the latter view, organizations are treated as the location for aggregating, or organizing, qualities that add capacities and understanding to individual actors. The individual agent is seen as a container for projects and motivations, moving between different organizational contexts in which their capacities are enhanced and shaped by particularities of the local practices in which they engage.

Garfinkel, by contrast, locates practices in situations defined by constitutive expectations, not in persons, and his actor depends on order properties of the situated group and the methods that define that group, not the organization, or individual motives, for making sense.

There are also some similarities between Garfinkel's position and recent attempts to separate the actor, or role, from the whole person. Jannis Kallinikos (2003: 596) argues (building on Luhmann and Gellner) that 'humans are involved in organizations qua roles, rather than qua persons' in modern organizations. This is an important argument because it separates situated action from demographic characteristics of whole persons, a move Garfinkel made as early as 1948. However, conventional theory wants to see the actor's interests (constrained by social structure) driving action. Therefore, Kallinikos's argument faces the criticism that it eliminates agency, reducing it to role.

If roles continue to be defined in organizational terms, a conflation of agency and structure remains and the identification of actor with role threatens to reduce the agent to an abstracted and formalized organizational role. Instead of role, which tends to be seen in formal organizational terms, Garfinkel refers to the 'identified actor', a more local identity than role, and defines a group by its constitutive expectations (including possible identified actors) not by demographic members or formal organizational characteristics. What is necessary from Garfinkel's perspective is to identify actors with the bundle of competences their jobs and situations require and to do so independently of formal organizational roles and values, or individual persons and individual motivation.

The Identified Actor as a Sequential Achievement

In the 1948 and 1951–1952 manuscripts, Garfinkel effects a conceptual trans-
formation from the idea of social relationships, as existing in historical time,
between whole historical persons and their values and beliefs, to a focus on
interaction between embodied and identified actors engaged as participants in
situated orders. In order to make this move away from the whole demographic
person, the actor, in Garfinkel's view, must be treated as entirely situated. He
returns to this idea in the famous Agnes study of the enacted presentation of a
gendered self by a trans-sexed person (1967). As an identified actor Agnes is the
gender that she succeeds in enacting — something critics have often misunder-
stood. This approach does not reduce agency to role, but rather treats the iden-
tity of the actor on each next occasion as a mutual accomplishment through
constitutive practices. Garfinkel's identified actors are situated identities, con-
stituted through shared practices, whose personal characteristics and/or beliefs
and values are of interest only insofar as they impact on competence to produce
practices required to enact identity in the situation.

Because Garfinkel does not need to know about the actor's motivations,
beliefs, or values, he is able to give up the model of the whole person, and treat
the identified actor as entirely situated in practice. And, because he treats the
principal organization as the group (defined by shared practices) his treatment
does not conflate the actor with structure or reduce it to organizational role.

Garfinkel argues that motivations are sufficiently accounted for by the pro-
cedural expectations of groups and/or situations. While engaged as an identified
actor in a situated practice, everyone must be equally committed to using 'just
these' practices to get the job done, ignoring personal differences except where
relevant to the practice. There may be variations in competence. But it is impor-
tant for the ability of the practice to generate intelligible action and objects that
social demographics should not correlate with these variations. If they do,
opportunities to interact are not open and fair, and trust relations and participa-
tion in practice are threatened. In cases where they do correlate (for instance
when blindness prevents someone from performing bits of practice), partici-
pants work hard to ignore this so that it does not destroy the practice and the
group constituted by that practice (Coates and Rawls 2003).

In short, the actor becomes a location for practices instead of a container for
motivations. This version of the actor as embodied identity work does not con-
stitute an individual perspective or a focus on the actor, in any conventional
sense. Changes in how identity work is done alter the actor's identity even within
the same situation. This does not deny the possibility of creative agency. Tacit
knowledge of situated practices is not organizational knowledge. It belongs to
the situated practice and the group that is defined by that practice. As long as they
produce competent, recognizable and accountable practice the identified actor
can innovate.[22]

The competence to perform intelligibly is necessary before an actor can make
any claim to be an identified actor on any particular occasion. Garfinkel's obser-
vations of the relationship between agency and organizational accountability
began in the army. Working at the Gulfport army hospital, he made systematic

observations of how the possible identities for doctors and patients were tied to situated rules and regulations in specifiable ways. There were only four identities sick soldiers could have and they were assigned these identities by doctors. Garfinkel noted especially that doctors attributed motives to sick soldiers based on identities that doctors (using the institutional context of accounts) assigned to them, as if those identities were the soldier's very own motives. He notes that social scientific researchers do the same thing: making up theoretical schematics and attributing motives to people based on where they fall within this schematic as if these were their very own motives.

Garfinkel took this problem especially seriously, given the central role played by *motivation* in most research schemes. A large part of his 1948 manuscript is devoted to this issue. Since the real motivations of actors cannot be known, either by researchers or other persons, he argued that motives could not play the big role in social order that conventional theory assumed.[23] In Garfinkel's scheme, by contrast, motivations play no role, the primary motivation of any actor being to produce recognizable orders so they can be understood and accepted as a trustworthy participant.

There is much more order than the conventional model of the actor can account for and there needs to be more order. Models based on an aggregation of demographic individuals assume social objects and identities have a constant and common meaning. They do not. Given Garfinkel's understanding of interaction as constitutive of objects and identities, a number of serious questions must be raised about scientific description. Positivists and pragmatists, William James ([1907] 1975) and Alfred North Whitehead in particular, argued that in experiencing objects we must use concepts and consequently our understanding of the physical is conceptual. Thus, it is a problem — positivism — to attribute concreteness to objects. Whitehead ([1929] 1978) called this 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness'. Researchers have struggled with the implications of the argument ever since. The general tendency has been to focus on making concepts more precise, giving up any 'real' purchase on objects. What has been overlooked is that the processes through which objects and meanings are actualized (objectified) on each next occasion are empirical (seeable and hearable), not conceptual. I refer to the failure to appreciate the implications of this for empirical research as 'the fallacy of misplaced abstraction' (Rawls 2004b).

Words and Sequences as Oriented Objects

Most theories of communication treat symbols and words as unit objects that carry meaning into a situation. The problem then is to explain how one meaning is distinguished from another through relationships (postulated as grammatical, or referential) between the units: words, phrases, and presuppositions attached to words. Garfinkel's argument works differently. Of course, words carry meaning. However, according to Garfinkel, their ability to do this is not really helpful. The problem is that words carry too much meaning. Any word, he says, can mean anything (Garfinkel [1948] 2006). Words, like objects, have the property of 'indexicality'. How we know exactly what conversational object

any given word is on some particular next occasion is what requires explanation. Orienting sequences and sequential properties of order turns out to be one of the more important jobs identified actors have as participants in interaction.

In the 1948 manuscript (and again in the memos of 1951–1952) Garfinkel offers a theory of communication in which the meaning of each next thing said is located by reference to its position in a developing sequence, and each next thing said reflects back on what was said before: a relationship of reflexivity. This requires speakers to orient the developing sequence and its constitutive order properties. This approach had a particular influence on Sacks and the early development of conversation analysis, particularly the focus on adjacency pairs and the idea of turns and orders of turn taking.

Garfinkel argues that on its own a first utterance by a first speaker is ambiguous. It takes a response, and a particular kind of a response, to nail down the meaning of a first utterance. To produce such a response, a competent listener is required to produce a next utterance that displays an orientation toward and understanding of the first, while also moving the conversation forward. Take for instance the following fragment of conversation between A and B:[24]

1 A: I hope the traffic is not bad going home.
2 B: It will be (.) it's raining.

The opening turn by A is, like many opening moves, grammatically complete and does not depend on a prior utterance or prior developing sequence for meaning. But it still has properties of ambiguity and could mean several things. The second utterance (or turn) by B, 'It will be (.) it's raining' makes sense only in the sequential context of the first utterance, as a second of a pair of utterances. On its own it could mean anything and nothing.

The second turn does the work of displaying an understanding of the first. B as second speaker displays an understanding of the wish for traffic not to be 'bad'. B also displays, just through the taking of the turn, that she understood the first turn as an invitation to take a responding turn. But, in addition to this display of understanding and participation, B adds something. It is raining and, as B will go on to say, when it rains there is always a traffic problem. This does another sort of work building onto the sequence in such a way that the second turn adds something that can only be understood in the context of the prior utterance, thus maximizing the degree of mutual orientation required between speakers. Everyone must carefully orient prior turns to understand what comes next and what came before.

Because a careful orientation toward sequence is required for sensemaking, displays of orientation toward sequence and turn are also required. These displays give participants essential information. This results in various devices such as turns having the property of being 'owned' by someone who is expected to speak in that turn space: to make a display. When they do not speak, the absence of speech is significant.

Conventional approaches treat it as a problem that language has the property of ambiguity, or indexicality, and can be interpreted in many ways. However, Garfinkel's point is that all speech has this property of indexicality. In ordinary

speech it is not treated as a problem but rather as a resource. In the sequential ordering of speech, indexicality has an important role to play. It is the response that an utterance gets that displays, reflexively, the understanding others have of the utterance and nails its meaning down to the order of a developing sequence.

There are preferences in repair sequences for speaker-initiated repair (Schegloff et al. 1977) that display a sensitivity of actors toward one another's 'face' and 'feelings'. Preferences with regard to assessments, and pre-sequences (Pomerantz 2004; Terasaki 2004) display a similar sensitivity. Such work also displays a sensitivity to protecting the order of developing sequences. Competent displays by an identified actor not only affect the perception of the actor as a competent and trustworthy member of the situation but also have implications for the coherence of the situation itself. A silence or a pause (passing a turn) allows the prior speaker to repair their own turn without making a problem explicit, thus allowing subtle changes in the meaning of the first utterance without calling attention to problems, protecting both identified selves and the situation.

Words in the workplace, like objects, must be mutually oriented to be seen in common. There must be methods of constituting the objects that words are, in the context of ordered sequences of action, on each next occasion as an order property of the situation, displaying this work for others — and this way of constituting their 'thingness' must be shared.

Information as a Sequentially Produced Oriented Object

Most surprisingly, given the preliminary nature of the current interest in the social characteristics of information, Garfinkel developed a sociological theory of information in 1952.[25] After the war, 'information' became important as a transmittable, computable 'thing' that could be quantified, bought, sold, and managed, on the basis of which decisions about complex organizations could be made: global society entered the 'information age'. The first theories of information in the 1940s and 1950s, formulated in the languages of mathematics and engineering, focused on problems like the carrying capacity of telephone wires, which had no obvious social component.[26]

But in attempting to formulate the ways in which messages or information could be discriminated from everything else, even engineers and mathematicians had to theorize about signs and signifiers, to formulate theories about redundancy in language, defining information (at least initially) as inhabiting the realm of the non-redundant.

Information is the thing that is not yet known, the thing that is different and can be discriminated from other things, that in some basic sense fails the identity test. It is not surprising then that social patterns, which by definition repeat, tended to be seen as extra, redundant, non-essential. Hence, the goal from the beginning was to pare information back to its essence, eliminating socially determined redundancies. The social aspects of information were treated as extra, as inefficient, as if information not only could but should be reduced to a problem of pure mathematics and engineering.

Over the past several decades the degree to which information is socially embedded and cannot be reduced to mathematics or logic has been increasingly recognized (Brown and Duguid 2000). However, information itself is still usually treated as existing in its own right, as something that social things are done *to* and *with.* The position essentially is that, existing independently, information also comes to have a social life.

By contrast, Garfinkel argues that information itself, like objects, words, and identities, is necessarily constituted as a recognizable and intelligible object in and through social orders of practice — ways of making sense of a world in common. His argument that information would and could not exist without social practices which depend on redundancy remains a relatively undeveloped area of inquiry. As a consequence, the relationship between 'information' and social processes is still an unhappy one theoretically and epistemologically in a number of ways.

The essential thing about information for Garfinkel is that, in spite of the ambiguities conventional theory would lead one to expect, the social actor can make and recognize information. He says that

'The important thing and the thing that stands without a standard with which to judge ironically is that the actor *keeps going.* Thus, the nature of his factual knowledge must somehow be accounted for by considering what characteristics of his experience permit this continuity of activity.' (Garfinkel [1952] 2008: 23)

Because sequential properties of action are significant, most redundancies are in fact information. In Heath and Luff's (2000) discussion of medical records, for instance, it is the relationship between lines in the entries that constitutes information for participants competent to read the record. The entry items themselves are not information in this sense. The entries are quite simple: 'Says they are depressed' and 'gave aspirin'. The sequential relationship between items in a socially organized series, constituted by shared practice and competence, allows a competent reader to draw important information from the entries. Aspirin is not a treatment for depression.

Garfinkel's focus on the continuity of practice (sequential continuity) and the question of just how an identified actor does manage to go on is extremely important. In conversation, silences convey information by their sequential position, for example in adjacency pairs. The reflexive relationship between turns at talk constitutes an ordered sequential backbone to conversation. In all types of action, sequential ordering is what gives objectivity and concreteness to social things and creates information as a social object.

While theoretical approaches to the problem of order/information that require conventionally 'objective' standards make it look unsolvable, there are methods or practices for constituting information that are known in common to members of any practice. Since there are no conventionally 'objective' standards, they must not be necessary. The key to social order, and hence information, must be in the methods by which people do go on. It is these situated members' methods that constitute objectivity and these that we should study.

Garfinkel's position parallels Wittgenstein's argument that the approach to language through words, reference, and a correspondence theory of meaning is what made the problem of meaning appear to be unsolvable in the first place

(1945). Garfinkel ([1952]: 14) gives a Wittgensteinian twist to information: 'We know the thing information,' he says, 'through usage. We're looking for the ideas that are immanent to the concept of information in use.' The problem has been the treating of information in abstraction, as a thing in itself. Seen in sequential contexts of use, as an oriented object, rendered mutually intelligible through shared members' methods, the problem looks very different.[27]

Garfinkel presents a simple formulation of a big problem. Objects are always seen in situated social contexts by identified selves. They must be constituted using shared methods, ethno-methods. Since they are never seen in 'objective' contexts by transcendent selves, theories of objects and information, of work and organization, that depend on objects as they would exist and be perceived by transcendent observers have no objects. The implications for research will be highlighted in the conclusion.

Conclusion

There are good reasons why applications and innovations fail. Workers do not just 'resist' change, but defend practices essential to their work. It is true that work has changed over the past several decades but that does not explain why work is not well understood. There never has been much known about work in details, even in its old, supposedly familiar form, because conventional methods (and theories) reduce the details of practices to generalities. Garfinkel argues that order, the social order we are all looking for, the order that constitutes the 'thingness' of social objects and social facts, has been achieved already — and is constantly being achieved again and again in and through the details of what people do. Our daily work is to make recognizable orders for one another. Only by treating objects, identities, and orders as social 'things' made on the spot, by persons using shared methods or practices for doing so, can the essential social phenomenon of sensemaking, and the complex cooperative configurations of contingency and uncertainty that comprise social organization, be understood.

Preserving the ordered details of practices is especially crucial to studies of work because one way that workers manage complexities is to create more complexity and uncertainty, and to order this process interactionally. Communication is crucial to this process. The way it works, and why it works, can only be found in sequential interactional details. It confounds and has confounded any attempt at systematization, and attempts to systematize it organizationally make it less effective. Social scientific approaches that stop short of grasping this inevitably miss the great prize, the discovery of those social orders themselves.

What is essential to know about any worksite involves not only the particular details of work but how those details either provide for, or interfere with, constitutive interactional requirements. Situated constitutive practices make moral demands on both actors and situations (Rawls 1987, 1989b, 1990). Trust relations, and a commitment to practices, are required to make sense, to be an identified self, and to be seen as competent and trustworthy by others. Displays of competence are also displays of trust. Understanding these underlying presuppositions is at least as important as understanding what work consists of. It can

be said in advance that when a company 're-engineers' a worksite in ways that violate the interactional requirements for trust, constitutive practice, and/or intelligibility, serious problems result.

Collaborative sensemaking is not just something that happens when things break down; it is happening in every meaningful moment. Luckily, this does not involve an unexaminable culture or 'group mind', but rather properties of group that are empirically available in the form of specific methods and devices that are used in specifiable ways. Better communication between researchers, managers, designers, and workers requires attention to these details. So-called 'improvements' that eliminate the essential structures of sensemaking make businesses less efficient — or even dangerous — as well as wasting huge amounts of money.

For researchers studying work and organizations the implications are profound. Research must preserve the real-time relationships at the worksite and pay close attention to orders and sequencing. Because essential order properties involve timing and sequencing, video is an invaluable tool for identifying sequential order properties. Field notes can reveal order properties when the fieldworker is trained to look for them, and the field notes preserve them. But because most interactional work is taken for granted, workers cannot be asked about it. Researchers must learn by observing and participating, but there are also essential problems with observation.

What the conventional observer does, according to Garfinkel, is take the perspective of scientific reflection, which reifies the actor (their motives, intentions, and attitudes). Questions asked by conventional scientific observers deal with theoretical objects they bring with them to the situation and are based on reflection. Actors engaged in 'working acts' do not have these theoretical objects/issues before them and cannot reflect until they finish acting. When asked questions, they adopt the attitude of theoretical reflection to answer. But because they did not adopt this attitude when engaged in the action in question, their answer does not reflect the objects they had in front of them while they were engaged in work.

Attempts to solve this problem through full disclosure of the observer's perspective and assumptions (auto-ethnography) which became popular in the 1980s confuses the issue. The problem is not the assumptions and intentions of the observer, although insofar as they bring assumptions with them those are problematic. The problem is that the conventional observer participates (qua observer) in a different social world with different constitutive expectations from the identified actor engaged in working acts. The observer is not constructing the situation they are analyzing, the participants are. Focusing on the observer at all is a problem in itself.

There are a number of challenges for organization studies researchers: to meet the unique adequacy requirement by treating workers as experts and involving them in the research; investing the time to learn work from the worker's perspective and taking seriously in doing so the need to look for order properties, not beliefs and values; remembering that while some aspects of order properties do hold across situations (the same 'tools' so to speak being used over and over again) they may be used differently on each next occasion.

Their identity rests on order properties, not ontological characteristics. That is what gives them such flexibility and utility; research that reduces them to generalities also loses the details that make them work.

Researchers can only *formulate* questions as good as their theories, and if conditions of work and interaction are other than what those theories propose, as Garfinkel argues, then to discover the actual conditions of work researchers must *stop* formulating the questions and problems they will be concerned with before entering the research site. They must focus instead on what 'methods' participants in the setting are using to render the setting mutually intelligible, i.e. orderly. They must abandon ideas of demographic orders and gemeinschaft social structures, emphasizing instead the self-regulating communities of shared constitutive practice which inhabit contemporary worksites, oriented objects, and words.[28]

It is also not enough to begin research in the field and to work from the 'bottom up' so to speak. Garfinkel insists that something essential is lost if, after getting a sense of what workers are up against, this sense is formulated (generalized) in any way that obscures its situated order properties. To create a set of categories and concepts that organize 'data' in ways consistent with social science theories, even on the basis of field research, loses the essence of how work is done. Even asking questions, no matter how deeply embedded in field experience, can be a problem. Workers formulate their narratives about work in organizationally accountable terms which obscure the details.

From Garfinkel's perspective, even phenomenology and ethnographic studies do not go into enough detail, and what they mean by detail is more conceptual and cognitive than empirical (see Garfinkel [1948] 2006; [1952] 2008). Observation itself poses a problem for research. The observer and the subject they are observing are each engaged in a different constitutive practice. Because of this they are also quite literally engaged in different social worlds. It follows then that they are constructing different worlds of objects, and consequently have different objects before them. The scientist's observations of action and objects belong only to the world of the observer, but are nevertheless ascribed to the subject's world, like the doctor's ascription of motives to the soldiers at Gulfport hospital. A transformation is required. Garfinkel's aim was to construct a sociology that would reveal the 'more' detail there was to social order and meaning, not a sociology that would obscure detail under scientific abstraction.

Garfinkel is after a social theory that works, one that explains the details of what workers actually do, in sequence, without explaining detail away. It is a 'hard' science criterion applied to a social domain of reflexively constructed meaning, a way of talking that he was using as early as 1962 ('ethno-methodology' conference transcripts). From a conventional theoretical standpoint, sociology as a hard science is not possible. But, given Garfinkel's theoretical premises, it is not only possible but the only viable approach. Whatever general theory will emerge from this endeavor will be held accountable to the details of social interactions, and not the other way round. Therefore, no details can be reduced in the name of theoretical clarity. It is *theoretical clarity that must serve the interests of the details*. Not positivist, not postmodern, not realist or idealist, not micro or macro — it is a new kind of theory, a different kind of theory, challenging the terms of conventional theoretical debate.

Notes

1   Studies influenced by Garfinkel are often also influenced by Erving Goffman and Harvey Sacks (who initiated conversation analysis (CA) with Emmanuel Schegloff, Gail Jefferson, and Anita Pomerantz). Their groundbreaking paper 'The simplest systematics for the organization of turntaking in conversation' was published in 1974. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Garfinkel met regularly with Goffman and Sacks. Later, in the mid-1960s, Goffman and Garfinkel had a falling out, while Sacks and Garfinkel remained close until Sacks died in 1975. Garfinkel had very close relations with several other students, including Aaron Cicourel and Egon Bittner, who went on to make names for themselves in studies of organizations, but he never developed the very close — almost tutorial – relationship with Schegloff, Jefferson and Pomerantz (who continued Sacks's work after his death) that he had enjoyed with Sacks.

2   The *Social Problems* article (Garfinkel 1964) was an important early influence on these thinkers and laid some groundwork for the reception of *Studies* three years later.

3   There is a concern on the part of conventional social scientists that if entities such as the 'organization' and organizational 'constraint' and 'power' are not a focus of attention something essential is left out. This concern has gotten in the way of an appreciation of Garfinkel and EM research from the beginning. It is a misplaced concern. Nothing is being left out. EM focuses on those constraints or power relations that manifest in the situated interactions being studied. The way conventional researchers approach power and constraint they are reifications, that is, artifacts of theory, power in some general sense theorized in some local manifestation. Garfinkel is not interested in this. He insists that there are actual constraints and power relations that situated actions constitute, and that these cannot be comprehended by the application of ideas like power in general. What is necessary is to focus on the ways that power and constraint are actually constituted in particular situations. It is wrong to think that because Garfinkel does not accept the conventional approach to power and constraint he is not interested in these issues. EM researchers have studied the police, public defenders, courtrooms, doctor–patient interaction, gendered interaction, interracial interaction, cross-cultural interaction, etc., all relations of power and authority.

4   My analysis of Garfinkel's theoretical position builds on a number of prior publications, in particular my introductions to Garfinkel's three latest books, *Ethnomethodology's Program: Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism* (2002), *Seeing Sociologically* (2006), and *Toward a Sociological Theory of Information* (2008) and my chapter 'Garfinkel' in George Ritzer's *Contemporary Social Theory*, for which I was able to tape-record Garfinkel discussing his experiences during the war years and his early years in graduate school. Several earlier papers on the work of Garfinkel, Goffman, and Sacks are also relevant to this analysis (Rawls, 1987, 1989a, b, 1990). There I elucidated the moral and social contract implications of constitutive interaction orders. I also draw on unpublished manuscripts and conversations with Garfinkel over many years. Because so much of his work remains unpublished, it has seemed particularly important to provide some sense of the scope of the unpublished work.

5   The notion of a 'plenum' which has no order, until that order is theorized using professional social science methods to do so, is an oblique reference to William James's 'buzzing blooming confusion'.

6   The quest for generalizable findings is not a characteristic of only some conventional research, but rather a matter of principle that does not vary between researchers. It is one of the things I mean by the term 'conventional theory'. As such it is also taken for granted: every textbook teaches the importance of generalizability. Since it is assumed that order is an aggregate result of many actions, the researcher assumes in principle that they cannot look for it in individual cases. Any research approach that looks for tendencies, or generalizes in any way, or which treats individual cases as inadequate unless they can be shown to fit a more general trend, is assuming that order is only evident in the aggregate. This is the perspective of almost every theory or research method except Garfinkel's and sets his approach quite apart from the rest. Some ethnographers, like Howard Becker, John Van Maanen and Peter K. Manning depart from this tendency to some degree, but then each has been significantly influenced by Garfinkel.

7   Garfinkel uses the notion of constitutive in a fairly strict sense. Something is constitutive of something else if the one thing could not be what it is without the other. The rules of baseball are constitutive of the game of baseball. The rules of chess are constitutive of chess. And, according to Garfinkel, there are many taken-for-granted expectations that are constitutive of the order properties, and hence the meaningful and 'normal' character, of social situations.

8   Whether sequential order properties are considered as constitutive expectancies, instructable actions, or the preferences orders of conversation analysis.

9   Garfinkel's argument that the observer cannot see what the participant sees because order is an ongoing accomplishment in which only the participant is embedded is a fundamental theoretical premise and will be considered in the conclusion.

10 See Garfinkel [1948] 2006 for an extended discussion and definition of 'group'.

11 As a set of rules or situated background expectancies, a situation does not begin or end with the people who inhabit it. A standing crap game, like a game of pick-up basketball, is always there. People come and go but the properties of group remain the same.

12 It is essential to note that Garfinkel is not talking about rules in the conventional sense and therefore not actually talking about games. It is a very loose analogy. What is similar is that there are expectations that are entirely constitutive of games, and there are expectations that are entirely constitutive of situated orders of practice. It is the constitutive element of the expectations that makes them game-like, not anything about rules.

13 Karl Weick has referred to sustained mutuality as 'group mind'. This is not a characterization that Garfinkel would accept. The idea of group mind suggests that mutuality consists of some mysterious merging of minds. For Garfinkel, by contrast, there is no mystery. There are very specific empirically observable practices of attention and sensemaking that constitute the coherence of a working group.

14 The writing from this period includes the 1948 manuscript on communication (*Seeing Sociologically* 2006), the three Princeton memos written in 1951and 1952 that develop the idea of the order properties of situations and their implications for organization and information theory, several smaller research sketches from the Princeton period, and the dissertation completed at Harvard in 1952. There are also several manuscripts from these years that begin developing the idea of order properties that appear in the 'trust' paper in its various versions.

15 There have been decades during which ethnomethodology was so unpopular that those associated with it were encouraged not to broadcast that fact. Words like ethnographic and anthropological were used as substitutes, much to the confusion of those who would now be interested in tracing Garfinkel's influence.

16 Studies inspired by Garfinkel's work have brought recognition to the research centers that sponsored them: at Xerox-PARC California — Lucy Suchman (now at Lancaster) and Julian Orr, Marilyn and Jack Whalen, and Eric Vinkhuyzen; at Xerox Research Centers and Microsoft in the UK and the EU — Bob Anderson, Graham Button, and Richard Harper; at King's College London, Christian Heath, Paul Luff, and Jon Hindmarsh; at the MITRE Corporation — Anne W. Rawls, Gary David, and Angela Garcia. John Hughes and Wes Sharrock pioneered studies in the UK as did Don Zimmerman and Doug Maynard in the US.

17 I have had many conversations with Garfinkel about theory over the years, in part because I write about theory and he continues to have deep reservations about it. But his concern goes far beyond theory to a conviction that even descriptions of order properties, if merely read, will be misleading. Garfinkel expressed this concern on a number of occasions and I wrote explicitly about it in the introduction to *Ethnomethodology's Program*. Garfinkel insists that his argument can only be understood if the tutorials, instead of being merely read, are also enacted by the reader.

18 The focus on gestalts was inspired by Garfinkel's interest in and relationship with Aron Gurwitsch while he was at Harvard. Adelbert Ames originated gestalt experiments with lenses like these.

19 I have had the privilege of having two brilliant blind students and as a consequence am aware of the bias toward 'sighted' descriptions in descriptions of practice. I retain the bias purposefully because I have found in my research that sequential orders often do incorporate a bias toward sight, to the disadvantage of the sight-impaired (Coates and Rawls 2003).

20 Wittgenstein (1945), Mills (1940), Kripke (1982), Garfinkel (1963), John Rawls (1955), Winch (1958), Searle (1969) and others. See also the forthcoming special issue on 'Two concepts of rules' in *Journal of Classical Sociology*, and especially Jeff Coulter's contribution.

21 No matter how widespread an account is, it is not generalizable. Generalizability is not a property of situated action. It is not a property that matters if order is made on the spot out of the resources at hand. Order is what matters, not generalizability. Furthermore, accounts are not

methods for making order. However, situated orders do generate accounts and are sensitive to them. Therefore, discovering widely recognizable accounts is a clue that there are order properties that are widely divergent and problematic. The research task is then to discover the underlying order properties that generate accounts and explain them in details.

22   The tendency to treat groups as unorganized, or only loosely organized, while treating formal organizations as ordered leads to the conflation of tacit knowledge with lack of creativity. There is a long history of argument to the effect that formal institutions, organizations, and societies are much more organized than informal groups and situations. Conventional social science builds on this idea. Even Sartre's existentialism, in extolling the importance of the authenticity of the individual, assumes that situations are only organized by virtue of their relationship to more formal organizations, or 'constitutions', and that order emerges as organizations become more formal. Garfinkel is the first — followed by Goffman — to argue that interaction is ordered in its own right.

23   Even Max Weber, who could be said to have introduced a focus on motivation into social theory, insisted in a fashion more consistent with Garfinkel than with conventional social theory, that motives are only publicly known and do not belong to individuals; they are only attributed to them by others after the fact.

24   Data courtesy of Angela Garcia.

25   In a series of three manuscripts written at Princeton in 1951–1952 while Garfinkel was working for the Organizational Behavior Project. Soon afterwards published as *Toward a Sociological Theory of Information*.

26   The classic theories of Shannon, Wiener, Bateson, and Deutsch.

27   The methods will be different for every situated action. There are no standardized methods.

28   'Community of practice', as popularly used, ironically proposes a gemeinschaft community, not a community of constitutive enacted practices. I use it in Durkheim's original sense to refer to membership in a self-regulating practice.

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