



Harold Garfinkel's Legacy

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Harold Garfinkel was one of the most influential sociologists of the 20th and beginning 21st centuries. When he passed away on April 21, 2011, at the age of 93, he not only had introduced and anchored the conception of “ethnomethodology” within the theoretical discussions in sociology, and he not only had conducted numerous ethnomethodological investigations of sociological analysis himself, but he had also inspired and converted a great number of students and scholars to follow his path of sociological inquiry and contemplation.

Two years ago, in 2017, the scientific community commemorated the 100th birthday of Harold Garfinkel and, in the same year, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first publication of his *magnum opus*, the *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967), which became one the most influential theoretical books in sociology.

This special issue of HUMAN STUDIES is dedicated to the memory and intellectual legacy of Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011). Since its breakthrough in the 1960s, the ethnomethodological program has been constantly refined and amended, revisited and evaluated, criticized and enriched, and it soon gained a distinct part inside the field of the social sciences. As its leading figure and *spiritus rector*, Garfinkel not only emphasized the analysis of the production of social order as primary ethnomethodological quest, but also developed the appropriate conceptual apparatus and methodological echo chamber. His seminal writings set a milestone for future studies in sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics.

Even though the idea of ethnomethodology was known, and Garfinkel and his “circle” were acknowledged an innovative group within sociology well before, it was with the publication of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology* that ethnomethodology was eventually established as a theoretical approach. In the 50 years after the publication, ethnomethodology has become one of the most important social theories, and one might even say that it has revolutionized sociology in many different ways. Some of these ways are represented by the adoption of the typical, radically self-reflexive stance that ethnomethodology has constantly advocated. Others refer to the

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many methodological innovations that ethnomethodology has triggered. Still others are exemplified by the opening of new fields of research such as the “everyday” as phenomenon for study that ethnomethodology has promoted. Yet others relate to such new methodologies as Conversation Analysis that it has inspired. Finally, some of these ways are also embodied in new epistemological positions motivated by it. And still, all these pioneering directions are only some of a great number of innovations that ethnomethodology has stimulated.

In spite of its great success within sociology, however, ethnomethodology has never come to occupy a warm place in the very heart of the discipline. Rather, it remained a persistent thorn in the side of sociology, and it not only has been kept away from outside of the community of ethnomethodologists, it has also kept itself voluntarily at the margins, fringes, and frontiers of the discipline, celebrating its most undisputed (and maybe easiest) successes in neighboring or even distant fields such as linguistics, science and technology studies, or informatics.

The reasoning about the odd story of ethnomethodology within sociology represents a continuing diversion for many scholars. One of several reasons for this was found in that ethnomethodology, shortly after the publication of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology* onwards (and well before the more recent trends towards ‘interdisciplinarity’), was conceptualized as a disciplinary ‘hybrid’. Launching what he called “Hybrid Studies,” Garfinkel (1986) wanted to account for the fact that in differentiated societies, each field is a field of expertise that is no less organized by social principles than is everyday life.

A second reason for the precarious position of ethnomethodology within sociology can be found in the fact that much of the ethnomethodological knowledge and debates circulated in gray literature, often accessible only to insiders. This practice, that was related to Harold Garfinkel’s style of work, as well as the fact that ethnomethodological insights were orally disseminated, and often practically handed down from teacher to student amplified the often-stated impression from the outside that ethnomethodology was a cult-like circle and guru clique.

An interview with Harold Garfinkel from March 1980, conducted 13 years after the publication of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology* by Norbert Wiley, that is published in this special issue of HUMAN STUDIES for the first time, gives an insight into the ethnomethodological spirit of these years. It shows how, after a period of great success and consolidation, but also of many disappointments and the reorientation of ethnomethodology towards “hybrid studies,” Garfinkel was assessing the state of sociology in the US and the place of his own research within it. The interview is introduced by a personal account of Norbert Wiley about its genesis.

Thus, with this special issue of HUMAN STUDIES, we take the opportunity to prolong the anniversary of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology* by presenting a collection of personal stories, idiosyncratic takes, conceptual discussions, and stories of theoretical progression. Taken together, the individual texts coalesce to a conceptual kaleidoscope of theoretical perspectives and research within the ethnomethodological movement that was inspired by Harold Garfinkel. 52 years after the publication of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, it reconsiders and re-appreciates some of its basic conceptual propositions. Enigmatic from the outside, yet thrilling for the insiders, such concepts as “accountability,” “reflexivity,” “indexicality,” or “ongoing

practical accomplishment,” count among the outstanding conceptual innovations that ethnomethodology has achieved.

With this special issue, we grasp the opportunity to discuss these basic concepts that are so relevant for ethnomethodology. Some of the contributions recount the development of individual ideas in terms of a conceptual history of ethnomethodology. Others report on the work within the ethnomethodological community on a personal basis. In doing so, they give insights into the spirit of ethnomethodological work and into the everyday of ethnomethodology. Still others present biographical and historical self-reflections. The interview with Harold Garfinkel from 1980 substantiates the personal character of the collection.

Thus, the current issue draws on both biographical and intellectual accounts of prominent scholars and former colleagues, and retraces the diversity of ethnomethodological inquiries (Garfinkel and Wiley, Lynch, Kelly). This first memorial section dedicated to the particular atmosphere surrounding Garfinkel's work is followed by theoretical papers drawing on topics ranging from important and sometimes controversial ethnomethodological concepts and original empirical studies (Schuettpelz, Greiffenhagen and Sharrock, Koschmann), to contemporary theoretical discussions on the specific profile of ethnomethodology (vom Lehn, Meyer). These contributions aim at presenting in a condensed way the ambitious relationship between inspiring personal encounters and research and intellectual reflection—a deeply appreciated resource in ethnomethodology.

While by now we dispose of increasingly systematic knowledge about Harold Garfinkel's carrier and life (Rawls 2002; vom Lehn 2012; Rawls 2013; vom Lehn 2014), as yet there still scarcely exist consistent studies that present material on the practical intellectual work of Garfinkel's group in the years after the publication of the “Studies in Ethnomethodology”. This gap is partly bridged in the present issue by former students (now renown scholars themselves) focusing on the circle of persons who developed salient ethnomethodological concepts together with Harold Garfinkel. At the same time, the contributions to this special issue of HUMAN STUDIES present the original historical context of the development of ethnomethodology in a new light, sketch the problems and questions of its initiators, and reflect the intellectual atmosphere dominating Garfinkel's theoretical and empirical studies.

Michael Lynch, in his detailed contribution, discusses the years directly after the publication of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, when the paper on “Formal Structures of Practical Action” (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970) emerged in the collaboration between Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks. Russell Kelly, in his rich personal report, recounts the development of concepts such as indexicality, the mundane, the ordinary and the everyday. Having been a student of Harold Garfinkel's he also discusses the latter's relation to Erving Goffman. Erhard Schuettpelz not only offers an original approach to the architecture and inner coherence of the *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, but he also presents a thorough analysis of its third chapter. He focuses on the concept of understanding and this analysis leads him back to Weber's conception of “subjective meaning,” to Mannheim's idea of a “documentary method,” and to Durkheim's definition of “social facts”. Timothy Koschmann gives a further account of basic concepts such as “accountability” and “trust,” embedding them in discussions about the “documentary method” and Garfinkel's “tutorial

problems". Christian Greiffenhagen and Wes Sharrock debate the new developments and theoretical problems that ethnomethodology has discovered as soon as it turned its interest towards the "Studies of Work" and the "Hybrid Studies". Dirk vom Lehn discusses how far and under what circumstances it makes sense to speak of an ethnomethodological conception of "interaction". Finally, Christian Meyer presents some reflections on the ethnomethodological notion of "culture".

The last 2 decades displayed a trend towards rendering access to both founding and classical texts in ethnomethodology. Amongst several publications, this development is most clearly exemplified by the two 4-volumes sets edited by Michael Lynch and Wes Sharrock titled *Harold Garfinkel* (2003) and *Ethnomethodology* (2011) respectively. However, not only, but certainly in increasing intensity after his death, a renewed interest in Harold Garfinkel's writings, in ethnomethodological perspectives on a multiplicity of issues, and in methodologies emerged. This has materialized in a number of studies (e.g., Liberman 2007; Livingston 2008), but also in a rising internationalization, an increase of debates on basic concepts, and the growing publication of introductory texts (e.g., Fele 2002; Fornel et al. 2001, Francis and Hester 2004; Gülich and Mondada 2008; Haakana et al. 2009; Ayaß and Meyer 2012; Endress and Psathas 2012).

Furthermore, translations of Harold Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* to Spanish (Garfinkel 2006), French (Garfinkel 2007), Turkish (Garfinkel 2017), German (Garfinkel forthcoming a), and, partly, Italian (Garfinkel 2000), were, or are in the course of being, accomplished. The ongoing publication of formerly unpublished writings by the Garfinkel Archive in Newbury Port under the direction of Anne Warfield Rawls is a further sign of the international interest in ethnomethodological ways of thinking and of investigating social phenomena (Garfinkel and Rawls 2002, 2006, 2008; Garfinkel 2012, 2019, forthcoming b).

Thus, in spite of all cries of naysayers and suspicions of pessimists, the "ethnomethodological movement" is not only alive, but is even confident and active-minded, finding itself in the middle of another process of (radical) self-reflection. This time, this process includes more than ever an ongoing reappraisal of its roots and sources, its conceptual projects and conceptions, and its historical developments, splits and reconciliations, as well as historical reviews and reassurances. This special issue of HUMAN STUDIES with its ethnomethodological kaleidoscope is one contribution to this ongoing process of self-understanding.

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