

**This and That:
Garfinkel, Wittgenstein and the World in 2017**

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Good morning everybody, and thank you for giving me an audience. My talk is entitled “This and That: Garfinkel, Wittgenstein and the State of the World in 2017.” It consists of the following sections: a preamble, an introduction and three principal parts. The first part is a discussion of this and that in the context of trying to understand Garfinkel’s *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. The second part is a brief description of the state of the world today, and the third is a consideration of ethnomethodology and politics in the light of Garfinkel’s 2002 book, *Ethnomethodology’s Program*. The conclusion comes at the end.

Preamble

Let me pre-start by thanking Doug and Wendy and Jean for inviting me to give a plenary address at this IEMCA conference. It is an honour I never expected to receive; I hope I may live up to it today. Thanks, too, to Kristi North, for excellent administrative assistance. I would also like to thank my wife, Debbie Chapman, for the last 21 years of endlessly interesting, new life, including two years spent in Mexico, where this talk was written. We celebrated our wedding anniversary four days ago. Since the conference is defined by anniversaries, including the 100th anniversary of the birth of Harold Garfinkel himself, I’ll mention that a month ago we looked on as Mexico marked the 100th anniversary of the 1917 constitution promulgated in the midst of its revolution. In the same spirit we look forward to October or November of this year when we confidently expect to see all good, blue- and red-blooded Americans, in keeping with their own revolutionary history, commemorating the 100th anniversary of another such world-shattering event on the other side of the world. And nine days ago my country, Canada, tried to manage the fact that the 150th anniversary of its constitutional formation was

being remembered by its indigenous peoples as a celebration of genocide by the colonizers. These noticings presage matters I'll take up later in the presentation.

Introduction: A Text and Two Absences

Five weeks ago I became aware of, and read, Mike Lynch's 2009 paper "Working out what Garfinkel could possibly be doing with 'Durkheim's aphorism,'" having already composed the bulk of this paper. Thank goodness (or perhaps it was a pity) I didn't see it beforehand, else I might never have put fingers to keyboard. Suffice it to say, having suffered through my effort today, you are well-advised to go read *his* paper for the sublime and scholarly version of my ethno point, and much more besides. Let me, nevertheless, steal from Mike's paper the following words from Garfinkel, visually adapted for this presentation, as my "text" for this address (Lynch 2009: 101):

The objective reality of social facts is sociology's fundamental principle
(Durkheim's aphorism)...

For its investigations, ethnomethodology took this to mean [that] the
objective reality of social facts

[-] in that and just how [it is] every society's locally, endogenously produced,
naturally organized, naturally accountable, ongoing, practical achievement,
being everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely members' work, with no
time out, and no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or
buyouts [-]

is thereby sociology's fundamental phenomenon (Garfinkel 1996: 11).

We might call this "Garfinkel's aphorism."

OK, I don't know about you but the hardest thing I've encountered in my academic life has been understanding Garfinkel and practicing ethnomethodology. I rest my case! I've been at it since 1969 when I was admitted to a qualifying year for the graduate program in sociology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Since I had no background in sociology – my undergraduate degree being in geography - the program adviser recommended I take four disparate courses from across the program. UBC having a joint Department of Anthropology and Sociology, these courses included Advanced Theory in Anthropology, which was a graduate-level seminar in which we read, of all things, *The Structure of Social Action* (Parsons 1968 [1937]). They also included a weird, fourth-year, undergraduate course titled The Interactional Analysis of Language. In that course we read Goffman's (1963) *Behaviour in Public Places* and Austin's (1962) *How To Do Things With Words*. I remember the teacher working away on the blackboard with Sacksian conversational analysis (as it was then called), preferring to look at the blackboard or sideways out the window while lecturing rather than looking directly at us students. I retired last year and emptied out my university office. If I didn't throw it away then, I still have the paper I wrote for that course in which is described an interactional phenomenon I called "post-scripting". It referred to the talk that parties sometimes engaged in after they had taken leave of each other. The teacher of the course was Roy Turner. I went on to be his student.

As perhaps most of you will now know Roy died just a few months ago, in April, in Toronto where he lived in retirement and taught part-time for some years at York University. Had he continued to practice EM and CA beyond the mid-1970s, we would have honoured him long ago, I am sure, with an ASA EMCA Lifetime Achievement

Award and an IEMCA plenary address. He is one of the first among us, one of that coterie of Goffman's graduate students that Sacks introduced to Garfinkel. If you haven't yet read "Words, utterances and activities" (Turner 1970) or "Some formal properties of therapy talk" (Turner 1972) or "Utterance positioning as an interactional resource" (Turner 1976) then you should certainly do so, for these are elegant, pristine, faithful studies in EMCA. In 1973 I think it was, Wes Sharrock spent a term at UBC. He also worked away at a transcript from Sacks on the blackboard as I recall. The fruits of that visit (and possibly of a return visit Roy made to Manchester) were two papers he and Roy co-authored, founded in the analysis of a corpus of calls to the police. They are "On a conversational environment for equivocality" (Sharrock and Turner 1978) and "Observation, esoteric knowledge and automobiles" (Sharrock and Turner 1980). They are also well worth your attention as exemplars of ethnomethodological CA.

Some of you may be acquainted with a small book called *The Montreal Massacre* (Eglin and Hester 2003) or the introduction to a small collection titled *Culture in Action* (Hester and Eglin 1997) or indeed with a textbook called *A Sociology of Crime* (Hester and Eglin 2017 [1992]). Steve Hester and I were friends for thirty years, from 1984, when he answered an ad I posted for a UK/Canada exchange, till he was stolen from us in 2014, way too soon. The paper I get most requests for on ResearchGate is that introduction to *Culture in Action*. It's called "Membership categorization analysis: an introduction." It is, in my view, and with due respect to Emanuel Schegloff (2007a, 2007b), a remarkable excavation of Sacks's work on membership categorization, and that's because it was largely written by Steve. Steve was a very smart guy. Thanks to Dave Francis, and to the editorial assistance of Johannes Wagner and Rainar Rye Larsen,

Steve's unfinished book on *Descriptions of Deviance* – devoted to MCA - is available on the IEMCA legacy website (Hester 2016). It's Steve who should be addressing you here today. Instead you've got his sidekick, the faithful plodder, moral naïf and adopted Canadian – me.

Oh, don't let me forget, I'm also a crass opportunist. The second edition of *A Sociology of Crime* came out in May. I am happy to take your orders. And your money. Cash preferred. US dollars no problem.

So right from the beginning, trying to understand Garfinkel was really hard, much harder than anything else I encountered in sociology or academe generally, with the possible exceptions of Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Sacks was easier, though not by that much. I figure it was over forty years after before I was able to convince myself that I actually knew what I was talking about when talking ethnomethodology. When I look back at my dissertation I'm actually quite impressed at the formulations of EMCA it contains. I'd stand by them today. But I am quite sure that I did not understand what they meant. In fact, I will confess to you that in forty-one years as a sociology prof I never taught Garfinkel straight (as opposed to CA and ethno studies by others). To be fair, that was partly due to lack of opportunity; sociology at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) was a small department and did not have a graduate program until the last eight or nine years. But it was mostly, I think, because I didn't really grasp his ideas. Only in writing the ethnomethodological analysis informing the second edition of *A Sociology of Crime* over the last two years did I really feel I could now teach Garfinkel. Now that I'm retired. Oh, did I mention that the book, in paperback, is now available, on the twenty-fifth

anniversary of its original publication, at a very reasonable price? (Which is more than can be said for Sacks's *Lectures*.)

So, this is really for the graduate students among you. Unless you're a smartypants like Steve Hester was, you have to soak yourself in Harold's work, read it over and over, do studies and write about it, and then wait for forty years or so to see if you really get it. Not that these doubts ever finally go away. Just claiming that I know what I'm talking about in front of this crowd, you lot, is enough to give me the shivers.

This and That: Understanding Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology*

What first blew my mind in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* was the following sentence:

what the inquiry can come to is what the death came to (Garfinkel 1967: 18).

(I should add that *also* mind-blowing was the assertion that “not only does no concept of context-in-general exist, but every use of ‘context’ without exception is itself essentially indexical” [Garfinkel 1967: 10], but I'm not going to talk about that today.) That reversal of how one ordinarily thinks of the matter – one ordinarily thinks that the inquiry is the outcome of the death and can only come to, at best, what the death was; it either gets the right verdict or it doesn't – is simply astounding. Once you've seen it though, once you've made the switch, it becomes kind of obvious – that is, as an organizationally ordained social fact of life the death is the outcome of the inquiry – but what the significance of that reversal of point of view is, well, that's another matter entirely.

The sentence comes at the end of a passage that remained obscure to me, as I've said, for a very long time. In “Suicide, for all practical purposes” Garfinkel asserts that the coroner and SPCers engaged in death inquiries must make their determinations “with respect to the ‘this's’:

they have to start with *this* much; *this* sight; *this* note; *this* collection of whatever is at hand. And *whatever* is there is good enough in the sense that *whatever* is there not only *will* do, but *does* ... What the inquiry can come to is what the death came to (Garfinkel 1967: 18; emphasis in original).

This - and that! A “that” – the social fact of a suicide, for example – is made up of a bunch of thises. The relationship among the thises and the that is not correlational or causal but – what? – logical? conceptual? mutually implicative? involving the mutual determination of meaning as in the documentary method of interpretation? Yes, but, like Lynch (2009: 103), I prefer “constitutive,” or “grammatical” in Wittgenstein’s sense; that is, the meanings of the concepts in terms of which the particulars constituting the thises and the that are described are defined in terms of one another. But such a statement remains abstracted, philosophical, and what we must never forget is that Garfinkel was, above all, a sociologist. There was clearly more to it.

In “‘Good’ organizational reasons for ‘bad’ clinic records” occur another couple of passages that gave me trouble for a long time. Garfinkel (with Bittner) writes:

A folder’s contents consist of a single free field of elements with the use of which field the contractual aspect of the relationship [that is, the therapeutic contract between clinic and patient in and as a medico-legal enterprise] may be formulated upon whatsoever occasion such a formulation is required. Which documents will be used, how they will be used, and what meanings their contents will assume, wait upon the particular occasions, purposes, interests, and questions that a particular member may use in addressing them (Garfinkel 1967: 203).

And:

The documents' meanings are altered as a function of trying to assemble them into the record of a case ... Thus an effort to impose a formal rationale on the collection and composition of information has the character of a vacuous exercise because the expressions which the so ordered documents will contain will have to be "decoded" to discover their real meaning in the light of the interests and interpretation which prevails [sic] at the time of their use (Garfinkel 1967: 205-206).

"At the time of their use." What the documents' contents mean remains indeterminate until they are used. But use implies social interaction, so meaning is not a philosophical matter but a sociological one; it is interactional. But then that's what Wittgenstein said: "don't ask for the meaning, look for the use." The philosopher was pointing in an empirical direction. His interpreter, Peter Winch, puts it like this:

To give an account of the meaning of a word is to describe how it is used; and to describe how it is used is to describe the social intercourse into which it enters (Winch 2008 [1958]: 115).

OK then, so far so good, I think.

I'd been hired at WLU in 1976 to teach, principally, Criminology, a big, popular, two-section, second-year course. Just as I had no background in sociology when being considered for admission to the graduate program in sociology at UBC, so I had absolutely no background or training in, or knowledge of, criminology when hired to teach principally just that subject at WLU. Those were, indeed, the days! And so, of course, I came to take up the debate over the meaning and use of official statistics (Eglin 1987) since that debate was

carried out chiefly with reference to crime and suicide statistics (and I was also teaching a course on suicide). So, apart from that footnote in Sacks's brilliant 1963 paper, "Sociological description," the official statistics issue made this passage from *Studies* relevant:

Within the perspective of police activities there exists a culturally defined "real amount of crime" committed by a culturally defined crime-producing population. Police use "crimes known to the police" to stand for or represent its features, like amount, trend, contributors, etc. Correspondingly, from the point of view of clinic personnel there exists a culturally defined "real demand for the clinic's services." Clinic personnel use actual inquiries to stand for or represent its features. Both situations – culturally defined real amount of crime for police and culturally defined real demand for clinic services for clinic personnel – "exist" but only in the peculiar sense in which cultural objects, sociologically speaking, are said to "exist": their existence consists only and entirely of the likelihood that socially organized measures for the detection and control of deviance can be enforced (Garfinkel 1967: 215, emphasis in original).

Oh boy! If I thought I was slowly getting a handle on the words and ideas presented so far I really didn't have much of a clue about the italicized passage. Let me read it again: "the existence of the culturally defined real amount of crime for police ... *consists only and entirely of the likelihood that socially organized measures for the detection and control of deviance can be enforced.*" I consigned it to the dustbin labeled "for possible future illumination," thankful that it was only a footnote in the original. Peculiar indeed!

But then illumination did come, if much later, and only grudgingly. It came partly through Jay Meehan's work that, foolishly and to my shame, I waited far too long to read. Meehan analyzed how the recording and assembly of gang statistics was responsive to the demands of municipal politics in two US cities "during the critical period when gangs were becoming recognized as a widespread national problem" (Meehan 2000: 338). What makes his study ethnomethodological is its focus on the interactional production of the "problem:" he writes, "the context of accountability has a political and organizational dimension but the police practices that satisfy the demands of accountability and create the statistical reality that supports organizational and political accountability are *interactional*" (ibid: 340; emphasis in original).

Through his analysis Meehan is able to show, in interactional detail, "how groups of ordinary young people were constituted as gangs at various points in the course of citizen complaints and police responses to incidents during a time when gangs [had] been publicly designated as a problem" (ibid: 340). Moreover, his analysis demonstrates "that police recordkeeping is geared toward external accountability and is only a gloss for 'what happened'" (ibid: 342). That is,

the officers' organization and use of the category "gang" [was] responsive not only to the immediate problems of achieving the police relevance of a citizen's complaint (i.e., within a call for service) but also to the organization's work relevancies (i.e., generating "activity") and the larger political framework to which the police are held accountable (e.g., "solving" a problem in an election year to make the incumbent mayor look good). **In this fashion, "solutions" to**

problems may in fact produce the records that are used to constitute the statistical existence of a problem in the first place (ibid; emphasis added).

To me, that sounds an awful lot like an explication of the claim that the existence of the “culturally defined real amount of crime for police ... *consists only and entirely of the likelihood that socially organized measures for the detection and control of deviance can be enforced*” (Garfinkel, op cit.). That comes up in chapter two of the second edition of *A Sociology of Crime*, in case you were wondering. The e-book is only \$55.57 from Amazon. A real steal.

From a somewhat different angle, Garfinkel’s point about the existence of a cultural object depending on *the likelihood that socially organized measures for its detection and control can be enforced* recalls a further point that passes almost without notice in “‘Good’ organizational reasons.” In that chapter, you’ll recall, Garfinkel and Bittner come to explain the troubles they encountered getting the reporting forms they inserted in clinic folders filled out, as the result of “good” organizational reasons for “bad” clinic records. The good organizational reasons arise from the clinic’s normal operating procedures “that for them and from their point of view are more or less taken for granted as right ways of doing things” (ibid: 191). The authors conceptualize the deficiencies of the records as “normal, natural troubles.”

The troubles we speak of are those that any investigator – outsider or insider – will encounter if he consults the files in order to answer questions that depart in theoretical or practical import from organizationally relevant purposes and routines under the auspices of which the content of the files are routinely assembled in the first place (ibid: 191).

Such organizationally generated troubles have to do with such things as:

- the anticipated cost of keeping detailed records,
- the “greater or lesser dignity of paper work,” (ibid: 194)
- the unpredictable possibility of the records being used in a job review of the performance of the clinic staff member recording the data on the self-reporting form in the case folder,
- the gap between the standardized categories of the reporting form and what it takes to describe actual practice, and how
- **“the relevance of the reporting form’s terminology to the events it describes is subject to the stability of the on-going clinic operations ... It is disconcerting to find how even small procedural changes may make large sections of a reporting form hopelessly ambiguous”** (ibid: 196-197; emphasis added).

This is a point that, I believe, is too little appreciated in our field, certainly by me for decades, and certainly outside the field where EM is too easily, and wrongly, assimilated to the indefinitely extendable constructionist camp (Lynch 2007: 110-117). It may be said that Steve and I made this mistake in the first edition of *A Sociology of Crime*. It comes, perhaps, from too heavy an emphasis on the production of the “thises” and too little emphasis on the stability of the “thats.” Wittgenstein is again critical here, as explicated in the recent work of Greiffenhagen and Sharrock (2009) and of Coulter (2016) on Wittgenstein on mathematics.

There correspond to our laws of logic *very general facts of daily experience*.

They are the ones that make it possible for us to keep on demonstrating those

laws in a very simple way (with ink on paper for example) (Wittgenstein 1956: 36e; cited in Coulter 2016: 2).

Coulter writes, in explicating Wittgenstein here:

He is far from proposing a conception of necessity or compulsion in terms of “majority rule”, *but* if most people of suitable capabilities did *not* agree most of the time on what counts as “proofs” and “axioms”, then these very concepts would be devoid of sense (Coulter 2016: 9; emphases in original).

It’s just because we *insist* on carrying out mathematical calculations in the way we do and *enforce* those ways on others that the rules defining addition and subtraction and the rest can have the force they do in actual computations. This isn’t just a matter of convention but depends *only and entirely of the likelihood that socially organized measures for the detection and control of [mathematical] deviance can be enforced*.

This is the point, perhaps, at which to introduce the source of the “that” in the title of this address. I’ve ripped it from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in which he writes:

Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is

(Wittgenstein 2007 [1922]: 6.44, p. 107; italics in original; bold emphasis added).

It seems to me that one way to characterize the difference between the early and the later Wittgenstein is to say that the later one went back to investigate ***how*** the world is, but without relinquishing the sense that ***that*** the world is, is the mystical. Thus, he posits that understanding “is not one thing; it is as various as the language games themselves are” (Rhees 1969: vii, paraphrasing the *Brown Book*), thereby emphasizing the *how*. But then,

“[w]hat has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life”

(Wittgenstein, quoted in Winch 2008 [1958]: 38-39), he says, emphasizing the *that*.

Certainly this resonates on *this* hand with Garfinkel’s writing “[n]ot a method of understanding, but immensely varied methods of understanding are the professional sociologist’s proper and hitherto unstudied and critical phenomena. Their multitude is indicated in the endless list of ways that persons speak” (Garfinkel 1967: 31; cf. Wittgenstein 1958: paragraph 133; see Eglin 1980: 26), wherein he explicates his proposal to make ordinary affairs “anthropologically strange” so as to see the thisness of things, while, on *that* hand, honouring and extolling “immortal, ordinary society” and “the objective reality of social facts [as] sociology’s fundamental phenomenon” (Garfinkel 2002: 119), so as to emphasize the thatness of things. Before taking this further in the context of a discussion of ethnomethodology and politics, let me turn to the other part of my title and consider the state of the world right now.

The World in 2017

The second hardest thing of my adult life – not just my academic life - is living with the knowledge that the pleasures and comforts I enjoy as a rich member of a rich society are at the expense of the exploitation, oppression and impoverishment of most of the world’s population (Shawn 1991, 2017; Eglin 2013). (As I was writing these very words at a table in the outside patio of a café on the edge of the Plaza Miguel Auza in Zacatecas, Mexico, where I was enjoying a mango smoothie, a man approached my wife and I and asked for money. He and his companion were Mexican migrants who had attempted to enter the United States but were turned back at the border and were on their way back to the state of Michoacan from which they had come. He was clearly penniless.) Actually, to be

perfectly honest, as an empirical matter living with that knowledge is really easy; it takes no effort at all. Nevertheless, as a morally abstract matter, one significant part of the dilemma is the problem of living with the idea that:

The intellectual responsibility of the writer, or any decent person, is to tell the truth ... it is a moral imperative to find out and tell the truth as best one can, about things that matter, to the right audience.

The responsibility of the writer as a moral agent is to try and bring the truth about matters of human significance to an audience that can do something about them. That is part of what it means to be a moral agent rather than a monster.

The moral culpability of those who ignore the crimes that matter by moral standards is greater to the extent that the society is free and open, so that they can speak more freely, and act more effectively to bring those crimes to an end. And it is greater for those who have a measure of privilege within the more free and open societies, those who have the resources, the training, the facilities and opportunities to speak and act effectively: the intellectuals, in short (Chomsky 1997: 55, 56, 65).

The crimes that matter today are staring us in the face.

Science tells us that a new and dangerous stage in planetary evolution has begun, the Anthropocene, a time of rising temperatures, extreme weather, rising oceans, and mass species extinctions. Humanity faces not just more pollution or warmer weather, but a crisis of the Earth System. If business as usual continues, this century will be marked by rapid deterioration of our

physical, social, and economic environment. Large parts of Earth will become uninhabitable, and civilization itself will be threatened ... capitalism's inexorable drive for growth, powered by the rapid burning of fossil fuels that took millions of years to form, has driven our world to the brink of disaster (blurb for book presentation – *Facing the Anthropocene* - by author Ian Angus, 25 August 2016).

In the words of the title of Naomi Klein's (2014) book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Versus the Climate*.

The world in 2017 is facing major threats to the survival of human civilization, not just from the environmental consequences of global warming, but also from nuclear re-armament and the consequent renewed threat of nuclear war, from a more and more permanent-looking, US-led, Orwellian, terrorist “War on Terror” (Cohn, M. 2016) and from staggering levels of economic inequality. According to Oxfam, “in [2016] just [8] individuals [I believe the figure is now 5] had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people – the bottom half of humanity,” while “a global network of tax havens further enables the richest individuals to hide \$7.6 trillion” (Oxfam 2016, updated by Oxfam 2017; see also Chernomas 2014). Actually existing wars, notably the catastrophe of Syria, but also the disasters in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere have produced the highest number of refugees and displaced persons since WW2, not to mention the growth of armed resistance in the name of God. Globalization's deleterious effects are generating huge movements of people from South to North, not just of refugees but of economic migrants and migrant labour, against which we have been witnessing the building of walls and other disgraceful means of closing borders, together with the rise of fascist or

anti-immigrant parties, Donald Trump and Brexit. The US empire continues to flex its muscles both militarily and economically in support of the very global capitalist system that is now increasingly seen as wrecking the planet. Russia and China respond in kind.

In response to the turmoil and resistance generated by its own military and economic policies and practices the United States and its NATO allies fortify their bastions with global co-operation and co-ordination in intelligence, surveillance, armed forces, military bases and militarization of policing at all levels. Israel has cornered for itself a niche market in this complex. 2017 marks a couple of other anniversaries, namely the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and the 50th anniversary of the military occupation of the rest of Palestine by Israel, a circumstance that is perhaps the single greatest threat to peace in the world (see Cook 2017). In his book *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* Jeff Halper (2015) describes and analyzes in meticulous detail Israel's extensive contribution to sophisticated techniques of pacifying and managing both perceived enemies and the "surplus" people generated by the global capitalist economy. Treating the Occupied Territories as a laboratory, Israel and Israeli corporations have become expert in

the integration of militarized systems - including databases tracking civilian activity, automated targeting systems, [and] unmanned drones ... Halper goes on to show how this method of war is rapidly globalizing, as the major capitalist powers and corporations transform militaries, security agencies, and police forces into an effective instrument of global pacification (from the publisher's blurb).

A current example is the revelation that the Mexican government is using spyware from Israel's NSO corporation to spy on Mexican journalists, lawyers and human rights activists ("Mexico Uses Israeli Spyware ..." 2017). Halper's book is a quite remarkable work by the anthropologist and head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (see also Klein 2007: 532).

What links these things together – global warming, obstruction of effective measures to combat it, the ongoing destruction of the earth's environment and the pillaging of its resources, the threat posed by nuclear weapons and conventional warfare, the creation of a huge mass of "surplus humanity" and the huge resources being put into their pacification and control on a global scale – is US imperialism, given its 800+ military sites or bases world-wide and its self-appointed role as guardian of global corporate capitalism (Panitch and Gindin 2012). US corporations own close to 50% of the global economy (Chomsky, in Polychroniou 2017), and, as of 2014, control more than 50 percent of the global weaponry market (Nicks 2015). As Ramzy Baroud (2017) puts it in a recent commentary on "Trump in Israel,"

From an American mainstream media perspective, to be judged "presidential" enough, all US presidents would have to commit to three main policies. They are, in no particular order: privileging the economic business elites, war at will and unconditionally supporting Israel.

Ethnomethodology and Politics

And yet here we are, talking to each other about ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, in the belly of the beast – the most dangerous and violent country on earth, a rogue, terror state, built, like my country, Canada, on a foundation of genocide, and, like

my country of birth, the United Kingdom, on a rapacious imperialism, including slavery – a beast that kills people on a daily basis around the world, including on the streets of its own black ghettos, ravages the environment, attacks the poor and is turning into a fascist police state, if it isn't already one (Whitehead 2017). Which isn't to say that there are not wonderful movements of peaceful resistance across the globe, including here in the US, trying to tame the beast and, literally, save the world. As always the outcome rests in our hands. For proposals on what to do see now Naomi Klein's new book, *No Is Not Enough: Resisting the New Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (2017), then Robert Jensen's (2017) critical review of Klein's book, then Rupert Read's (2017) remarkable paper on the likely possibility of the coming disasters affording us the "gift of community," not to mention Chris Hedges, the late James Baldwin, Wallace Shawn and Noam Chomsky.

So each day I ask myself, as it were, what are you going to do today, Peter - ethnology or politics? You can't do both at once since, plainly, they are different things. To do one is not to be doing the other. There's an "economics of inquiry" (Anderson and Sharrock 1980) after all, and politics requires inquiry just as EM does. As Wallace Shawn (1985: 91-92; see Eglin 2013: 166) puts it: "my daily obligation [is], first and foremost, to learn how to make a correct and careful study of the world ... [since] morality insist[s] upon accuracy - perpetual, painstaking study and research." Ethnology is not only useless for doing politics; it's not in the same domain of endeavour. Ethnology is an exercise in thought. To do politics is to engage in changing social relations. When ethnology announces itself to be "ethnologically indifferent" (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 345-346) to any

practical, normative, moral or political import members of society may attribute to the phenomena under investigation, the “ethnomethodologically” in front of “indifferent” is important. While it makes it clear that the investigator is not saying that they are indifferent to the phenomena under investigation when not engaged in investigating them ethnomethodologically, it also implies that the ethnomethodological inquiry *cannot* by its nature make a practical difference to those phenomena. Except adventitiously. Like Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigations, ethnomethodological inquiry “leaves everything as it is” (Sharrock and Anderson 1991: 62; Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock 2008). When agonizing over whether to enter the United States in order to attend this conference and give this talk in light of Trump’s Muslim ban – first stalled by two federal appeals courts and now temporarily upheld by the US Supreme Court pending further consideration – I did not consult *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Of course not.

But how about *Ethnomethodology’s Program: Working Out Durkheim’s Aporism* (Garfinkel 2002)? Would that be of any help? Garfinkel states that ethnomethodology has discovered a previously missed, vast domain of social phenomena in need of investigation. Indeed the scale of the significance of this “missing what” is truly awesome. He puts it like this: “the objective reality of social facts [as] sociology’s fundamental phenomenon ... is an astronomically massive domain of phenomena of social order” (ibid: 119, also 104). Insofar as this “absence,” this “missing what,” can be seen to apply to the whole edifice of Cartesian reason, then one could be forgiven for assuming that the underlying prime imperative of EM is to bring this whole edifice down. But this is not what Garfinkel says. First, “In its central tasks Ethnomethodology is directed to the reform of technical reason” (ibid: 93), but this is construed, as it were,

positively, not negatively, as adding something more alongside received accounts, not replacing them. Thus, secondly, the quote continues, “and doing so with the premier aim of specifying the work of the social sciences and the natural sciences as naturally accountable sciences of practical action and practical reason” (ibid). That is, “Ethnomethodology is NOT a corrective enterprise. It is NOT a rival science in the worldwide social science movement” (ibid: 121). After all, the edifice of Cartesian reason stands. It’s a social fact. That it is, is the remarkable thing! **That is there**, like end-of-the-line in a supermarket service line or queue – thank you Mike (Lynch 2009: 110)! The implied critique is then not of the edifice itself but of the standard (philosophy of science) accounts of what holds it up, the pretensions of formal rationality. The point, to adopt Wittgenstein’s phrase (Sharrock and Anderson 1991: 62), is to assemble reminders, in the form of perspicuous demonstrations and tutorials, of just what does hold it up. For example, again quoting Lynch (2009: 110), Garfinkel “would go on to observe that the service line and its observable properties are *achieved* (i.e., constitutive).”

In *Ethnomethodology’s Program* Garfinkel (2002: 279) goes on to ask, “What are some consequences [of ethnomethodology (EM)] for the worldwide social science movement? What’s in it for sociology as a science in the social sciences?” He answers as follows:

What’s in it is this: EM is opening an argument on the curious massively absent probativeness of professionally refereed analytic studies of everyday activities of ordinary society that are done with formal analytic policies, methods, and the corpus status of literatures of the social science movement (ibid).

Saving a community from philosophical error, “giving [the missing] proof or evidence” (my dictionary’s definition of “probative”), bringing inquirers back to a realization and appreciation of “the miracles of the familiar society [**the thats**] as the local work consisting of *this* [**he might have said “the thises”**]: persons living the ordinary lives they do are therein achieving everything that the magnificent topics of logic, meaning, method, order, world, real, and evidence have ever purported to be about” (ibid: 218), this is the point (adapted from Eglin 2009: 41-42; emphasis added).

So there is a benefit to doing ethnomethodology. That’s a relief, eh?! It’s an *intellectual* benefit, one that is, and not just in my view, of revolutionary significance across the natural and social sciences. But is it a practical or, indeed, a political benefit? Professional sociology positively undertaken in the spirit of the Enlightenment imagines that knowledge can be secured on true foundations and thus serve as the basis of progressive change in society. Philosophy is to provide the foundations and science the knowledge. The change is to take the form of piecemeal social engineering, otherwise known as liberal reform. Ethnomethodology does not so much doubt that the house of knowledge has stable foundations as question just what it is that the foundations are made of. Rather than true knowledge being secured by being expressed in the terms of a formally incorrigible language and on the basis of valid scientific method, EM points to the *irremediable* dependence of formally correct language and valid scientific method on practical reasoning involving constant and *unavoidable* recourse to commonsense knowledge of social structures. Thirty-five years earlier Garfinkel had expressed this thought in a memorable apothegm, the meaning of which also escaped me for many years:

To treat instructions as though ad hoc features in their use were a nuisance, or to treat their presence as grounds for complaint about the incompleteness of instructions, is very much like complaining that if the walls of a building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was keeping the roof up (Garfinkel 1967: 22).

Here, in Garfinkel's formulation, "instructions" stands for the whole edifice of Cartesian reason expressed in everything from, say, instructions for assembling IKEA furniture to the rules of formal analytic philosophy, mathematics and scientific method. So EM does not set out to correct formal analytic inquiries with a rival account – that is, to write a better set of instructions - but will endeavour to show that *any* formal, analytic inquiry will fall short of probativeness by failing to take account of its *necessary* dependence on practical reasoning, involving constant and *unavoidable* recourse to commonsense knowledge of social structures. As Lynch says, both Garfinkel and Wittgenstein "were indifferent to the project of reforming or correcting 'common sense' with constructed logical languages or (in the case of sociology) explanatory models, and both were more interested in explicating practical actions in ordinary as well as professional settings" (Lynch 2016: 11, fn. 5). So EM is not correctional, but then what is one to make of the wreckage left strewn about after it has turned its attentions to moral philosophy, cybernetics, information science, computational science, semiology, psychology, social psychology, linguistics, pragmatics, anthropology, socio-economics, criminology and all kinds of sociology? See Wes Sharrock's publications especially. According to Lynch (2001: 147), like Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations Garfinkel's "ethnomethodology offers a valuable form of therapy for social theorists." As Garfinkel

(2002: 114) himself says, “Ethnomethodology is not critical of formal analytic investigations. But neither is it the case that EM [the corpus] has no concern with a remedial expertise and has nothing to promise or deliver. Ethnomethodology *is* applied Ethnomethodology. However, its remedial transactions are distinctive to EM expertise.” Who is to say that therapy for theorists is not practical?

As for politics, Michael Lynch has come closest, perhaps, to ascribing a politics to EM. To the degree that ethnomethodology may be said to have a politics that politics is, he writes,

antiadministrative. By this I do not mean that ethnomethodologists necessarily are hostile to administrators. Instead, the idea is that no amount of foresight or planning will ever be sufficient to guarantee the effective realization of administrative schemes. This lesson applies to reformists no less than to reactionaries (Lynch 2008: 728).

What I draw from this, and from EM generally, is that people’s doings in their smallest particulars are both consequential and inextricably tied to the life they share with others, from which there is no time out, **and for which it is an essential truth that none of it can be secured by rule.** What is its import?

Conclusion

It means, I think, that when contemplating the fate of the world we should do so in a spirit or attitude of awe or amazement at what in the most mundane, everyday, prosaic way we produce together as the ordinary miracle of social life. Noumenon is incarnated in phenomenon (cf. Janik and Toulmin 1973: 195). Whatever the resources at hand – people themselves, their knowledge, experiences and abilities, the physical infrastructure,

the time available, the local history and geography of their institutional lives together, the events of the day, the tasks at hand and so on - through the complex logistics of concerted, setting activities, for another first time, people together produce the world they must perforce live in. Like my career and history itself this talk is, and has been, a bunch of thises and thats. Ethnomethodological studies remind us of what it is we do together, and how it is we do it, that makes of what we do social. It is irremediably tied to the “thises” insofar as, through members’ methods of sociological inquiry, they ceaselessly transform into “thats,” and to the “thats” that give “thises” their meaning. Indeed, “this” and “that” are just two different ways of seeing things. When those of us who wish to intervene in the conduct of human affairs in pursuit of something no less than the survival of civilization, do so intervene, we are well advised never for one moment to forget the mutually accomplished, here-and-now-occasioned character of what we do in any actual case (adapted from Eglin 2009: 53-54).

I leave you with this question. What will you be doing tomorrow?

Ethnomethodology or politics? I know what I’ll be doing.

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