



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRENTO

Dipartimento di Sociologia  
e Ricerca Sociale

# Studying Objectivation Practices

Kenneth Liberman



DIPARTIMENTO DI SOCIOLOGIA E RICERCA SOCIALE

QUADERNO 2

Università degli Studi di Trento  
Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale

# Studying Objectivation Practices

Kenneth Liberman

Anno 2016

**Collana: Quaderni del Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale (Online)**

**Anno: 2016**

**Comitato scientifico-editoriale:**

Paolo Boccagni  
Emanuela Bozzini  
Andrea Mubi Brighenti  
Natalia Magnani  
Katia Pilati

**Segreteria di Redazione:**

quaderni.dsrs@unitn.it

**ISSN 2465-0161**



Quest'opera è distribuita con Licenza

[Creative Commons Attribuzione 4.0 Internazionale](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Università degli Studi di Trento  
Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale  
Via Verdi, 26 – 38122 Trento – Italia  
Tel.: 0461 281322-281329  
Fax: 0461 281458  
[www.unitn.it/sociologia](http://www.unitn.it/sociologia)

# Studying Objectivation Practices

Kenneth Liberman

## Abstract

Three case studies demonstrate the self-organization of social events: the situated practices of Tibetan philosophical debating, playing table games, and coffee tasting. The paper clarifies the mechanisms by which the self-organization of local affairs emerges and the extent to which local participants to a shared practice can take part in ongoing events. Events mostly drive themselves with their own momentum, but even the event does not know just where it is heading. While local participants are intimately involved, society moves according to its own vectors that exceed the participants' control. These cases display how actors participate, patterning after each other, how they pick up ways of formulating and ways of knowing that follow from the previous speaker, and how they convert occasioned accounts and formulations into objective forms that can be relied upon by parties for organizing the local orderliness of their affairs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Georg Simmel deserves a place alongside the founders of the discipline of sociology, Durkheim, Weber and Marx. Simmel's influence is mostly derived from his influence upon the Chicago School of sociology, whose founder (Albion Small) had studied in Berlin alongside Simmel, and the Chicago School of sociology was partly responsible for the way today we ground our inquiries in worldly studies rather than doing library research.

In his essay "The Problem of Sociology," Simmel (1959 [1908]: 324) wrote, "There is no perfectly clear technique for applying the fundamental sociological concept itself (that is, the concept of sociation)." Since Simmel's time sociologists have indeed developed "perfectly clear techniques," but "the fundamental sociological concept" has mostly gone missing. What did Simmel mean? What is this thing "sociation"? As Harold Garfinkel (2006:161) once observed, "a rough statement doesn't tell us what we've found; it tells us only what to look for."

It is for certain that we do not want to define sociation and then proceed from that definition. Simmel only named it; he did not yet know what it was.

He wrote (Simmel 1959: 326-27),

In addition to the phenomena which are widely visible and very imposing in their magnitude and external importance, there are an immeasurable number of minor forms of relations and of kinds of interaction among humans. Although each of these taken separately may appear trivial, it is one of a mass that can scarcely be estimated. By inserting themselves between the comprehensive, official, so to speak, social formations, it is really these minor forms that bring about society as we know it. .... What renders the scientific determination of such obscure social forms difficult is the very thing that makes them eminently important for the deeper understanding of society – the fact that as a rule they are not yet fixated as rigid, superindividual structures, but exhibit society, as it were, *statu nascendi*. They do so not in the sense that they are the very first beginnings – these are historically traceable – but in the sense that they originate each day and each hour.

I accept these "obscure social forms" that "originate each day and each hour" to be ethnomethodology's data.

Let us recall that Edmund Husserl and Simmel were friends, corresponded extensively, and read each other's works. On Husserl's library shelves in Leuven there are several well-used volumes of Simmel's work. Their status as assimilated Jews having academic careers in Germany would suggest they had a good deal to share. In fairness it can be said that some of the sociological interests that interactionist traditions of sociology have inherited have influenced phenomenology, and this influence can be seen in the later Husserl, in Schutz, and in Gurwitsch; that is, it is not only that phenomenology has influenced sociology.

Simmel is correct that it is not so easy to capture the details of these “everyday formations.” Our colleagues who are used to highly idealized versions of society may become disappointed when ethnomethodologists keep delivering meticulous accounts that reflect the complexities of the real world of the people we study. The late 19th century physicist Arthur Worthington was disappointed when the new and exacting method of photography gave him recordings of drops of liquid splashing on a surface that were messier than the drawings that he himself had drawn previously, since he was expecting the drops in the photographs to be even more perfectly organized, not less (Daston and Galison 2010: 11-16). In a similar way, the everyday world that we record can be too messy for some rationalist minded social theorists to digest.

## 2. EVENTS ARE SELF-ORGANIZING

I will commence by taking up an aphorism invoked frequently by Garfinkel, that “Events are self-organizing,” and I want to explore what this can mean. In effect, it is a criticism of cognitivism in social science. Intersubjective affairs are unpredictable because events largely run themselves. The “reciprocal stimulation” that takes place there (that too is Simmel’s term, 1959: 328) is so dynamic that sometimes participants just gaze upon affairs in wonder, barely able to anticipate where things might go next. Things are continuously in flux, and there are no time-outs. The flux of ordinary affairs keeps confounding us by exceeding our efforts to render them orderly, and new rules are born every minute. Simmel (1959: 328) writes,

At each moment such threads are spun, dropped, taken up again, displaced by others, interwoven with others. These interactions among the atoms of society are accessible only to psychological microscopy, as it were. They explain all the toughness and elasticity, all the colorfulness and consistency of social life, which is so striking and yet so mysterious.

How do people cope with the endless entanglements of these recurring dislocations? In ethnomethodology these go by the following names: “no time out,” “autochthonous,” “*in vivo*,” “first time through,” and my favorite, “endless, ongoing, contingent accomplishment” (Garfinkel 1967: 1).

In the 1970s Ernest Gellner and others (Von Lehm 2013: 79) dismissed ethnomethodology as a form of “Californian subjectivism.” This upset Garfinkel, first because he never thought of himself as a Californian, and in fact he always hated the place; and second, because he was not a bit interested in subjectivity – in his dissertation he had already spoken against “the sterilities of subjectivity” (2006: 151). Instead, he called for ethnomethodologists to pay attention to “the neglected objectivity of social facts,” which is our topic here. What is this neglected objectivity of social facts? Garfinkel was interested in investigating the “ongoing” aspect of reciprocal stimulations by elucidating what is “developingly objective” (Garfinkel 2002: 189). In our efforts to tame our data, we must never lose *the site* of this “developingly.” And we have yet to fully appreciate the flux of natural affairs, or what Aaron Cicourel used to call the always emerging character of ordinary events.

Members are interested in orderliness and in turning the flux of affairs into something predictable, but in most cases they are unsure how to do that, so they end up stumbling into any ready-at-hand solution that presents itself serendipitously in the course of their affairs. Moreover, people do not usually seek a total organization – they are not sociologists after all, they are people. Sometimes their interest in organization extends only as far as being able to cross the street. As Garfinkel taught, members pick up a method for organizing local affairs, and then *display* how others can use such a method (a rule, a place in line, a recommendation, etc.) to accomplish the orderliness. In these ways ethnomethods are instructable matters – the people teach them to each other. But I want to emphasize here that in most cases these methods are *stumbled upon*, spotted in the swiftly passing spectacle of the world. *Only rarely are they planned with foresight*; or, if they are planned, such plans never quite work out in the way that is anticipated. So people are forced to pay close attention to their mundane affairs, and it was this close attention that people pay that most captured Garfinkel’s imagination.

Even though the ethnomethods that people stumble upon and teach each other help to organize the orderliness of their local affairs, people still become *entangled* in the circumstantiality of these methods (Garfinkel 2002: 65). As Mike Lynch (2000: 529) has commented insightfully, “Intersubjective order is achieved relentlessly at the *surface* of communicative actions.” Participants become entangled in the surfaces of these self-organizing, emerging ethnomethods; the result is that those ethnomethods *lead the participants*, rather than the people having full control of the ethnomethods. Every line of communication becomes an entanglement.

### **3. BECOMING “TANGLED IN CIRCUMSTANTIALITY”**

For a moment, let us pursue what is meant by “entanglement.” In the case of coffee tasters, taste evaluation schedules place something tangible in the professional tasters’ hands that they can use to make their activities orderly; however, these rating cards end up directing the interaction, even leading the tasters around by the nose. Let’s look at how this can work. In Trento my colleague Giolo Fele and I were attempting to study the indexical properties of taste descriptors. We were hoping to track the semantic drift of some taste descriptors over the course of tasting several different coffees, and especially how those descriptors helped parties to develop their understanding of what tastes the coffees have. Prof. Fele is interested in the tasting schedules that professional tasters use, so we decided that it would be good to give the tasters a schedule to work with. That decision transformed our entire project.



These tasters proceeded through three rounds of tasting, one for each cup of coffee they tasted. It was not predictable, but once this group got their hands on the schedule, they began to use it for managing and coordinating their interaction. For them the schedule was made to serve two purposes – (1) to help them describe the taste of the coffee, and (2) to help them coordinate their work together, that is, to give them a way to get on the same page. The latter purpose was almost always given priority over the former. The local microstructure played a similar role in my study of Tibetan debaters (Lieberman 2004). In the Tibetans' case, the formal analytic logic was used for coordinating communication about philosophical problems, and those organizational interests prevailed over their substantive philosophical interests. Their concern to keep the logistics of their argumentation well organized and clear eclipsed their truth interests, in much the way that courtroom personnel become preoccupied with the technicalities of their legal arguments and occasionally lose track of what is moral. Lawyers and justices may try to work in the moralities from time to time, occasionally adding some moral considerations to their legal reasoning, but the logistics of the legal reasoning is what predominates.

Here the task of filling out of the schedule predominated, and while this allowed the panelists to do a smooth job of coordinating their interaction, the panel lost track of describing the tastes of the coffees since most discussion was limited to verbalizing and deciding the numbers (between 1 and 10) for the various categories (sweetness, body, texture, etc.), and much of the time it was uncertain just what the numbers meant. Panelists could be seen staring at the schedule after each number was allocated and written down. For example, when it was decided that the *dolcezza* (sweetness) be given a “5” rating, the panelists stared at the schedule as if it was a spectacle in hope of picking up the sense of what a “5” could mean, along with the significance of what they had just accomplished.

Despite or because of the competent work of filling out the schedule and the marvelous way it allowed them to concert their talk and keep on the same page – both literally and figuratively – the activity of numerating with the schedule eclipsed the work of describing the tastes of the coffees.





Only occasionally did the panelists relate the numerating to the taste. Mostly they deferred to their happy and public agreement in settling their assessments for each of the descriptive categories that they were numerating, without extensively considering the intersubjective adequacy of the meaning of those numbers. In the end, they did not communicate about the meaning of taste descriptors to an extent that permitted us to collect enough data to study semantic drift. Once the first two cups' sweetness was registered, for example, it was a relatively simple task for them to arbitrarily place a third cup's sweetness as more, or less, or mid-way between the first two, without ever discussing what sweetness can be in a drink that is essentially bitter or what were the varieties of sweetness that the coffees had presented. Having done the job of rating the one category by filling in that line, they quickly left it behind as they proceeded methodically to the succeeding category. Their work was well organized and sure, only the coffee was left behind.

Here they are inquiring about their previous ratings for sweetness before settling on a score:

- A *Il primo era 5.*  
The first was 5.  
B *E secondo?*  
And the second?  
A *Secondo 9.*  
The second 9.  
C *Un 7!*  
A 7!  
A *O.K. ... Vellutato?*  
O.K. ... Velvet?

C proposes to fit the rating of the third cup's sweetness mid-way between the rating of the first two cups, and as she does so, she almost satirizes the arbitrariness of her decision, gesturing with her index finger pointing upwards. The tasters have not learned much about the coffee this way. With only minimal use of taste descriptors and the details that accompany discussion of descriptors, they are not teaching each other much either. What is amazing is that although they had never expected to be using a schedule, in their hands it quickly evolved into a full-fledged ethnomethod; and by their third run of tasting they had developed competence with it, a competence that consisted not so much of knowing the flavors of coffee as knowing how to fill in the schedule in an organized way. The ethnomethod that they

developed is what drives their analysis, and they become caught up and entangled in those *competent local methods* of interaction that they employed for providing the orderliness for their affairs, entangled even as those methods are providing them with their only route to the coffee's flavors. They are "tangled in circumstantiality" (Garfinkel 2002: 65).

#### 4. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Garfinkel studied under Parsons who used in his sociological practice what had become sociology's standard trope of the homunculus – people were turned into puppets, and the thoughts that sociologists allowed them were mostly limited to those that the sociologist could stuff into their heads. For the last three generations, however, the direction of interactionist sociology has been *away* from this sort of rationalism and individualism. In contrast to Talcott Parsons, Schutz was not fully satisfied with simply theorizing society, and he gave more priority to the lived realities of everyday life. In contrast to Schutz, who was one of his mentors, Garfinkel came to mostly avoid even phenomenological theorizing and turned for direction to what his studies of naturally occurring activities could expose about sense making in everyday life, even to the point of being accused of being an empiricist. In place of the "construction" of reality, Garfinkel began to speak of scenes as "self-organizing," a description that portrays most ordinary situations well – in which members, although skillful, are not in charge. Instead, the situation is in charge.

Finding one's path through the complexities of ordinary situations requires extraordinary ability on the part of the participants, and it is the concern of ethnomethodologists to examine each one of those artful practices, like a bird-watcher who is keenly observant and intent upon identifying and describing every behavior. Despite the artfulness of the participants' practices, they proceed myopically. Ethnomethodologists call participants "members" in order to emphasize the collaborative character of the occasions. Their vision is *local*, even more local than local. After Husserl (1982: 218), I call their vision "immanent," and much of the time no one is in control. People are *caught up* in the tendentious immanence of their affairs.

For some years I have been investigating *how* it is that events organize themselves, and under what conditions; and I have been studying to what extent, and how, members weigh in. There have been studies during which I have wondered whether *anyone* knows what they are doing, beyond momentary fits of self-delusion. Parsons presumed too much. Schutz presumed too much. And on a few occasions even Garfinkel and his students, myself included, presumed too much. It is extremely difficult for us to shed our rationalist blinders.

Here is what I mean. In a 1962 unpublished paper that first laid out his plan for *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Garfinkel said that he would "treat ... methodological interests of the members of society as objects of theoretical sociological inquiry." Do people always have such deliberate, planned ahead-of-time "methodological interests"? They can, but my observation is that it is more common that they do *not* know what they are doing until one routine or another gets put into play, as a collaborative yet autochthonous event.

In a 1965 unpublished paper outlining *Studies in Ethnomethodology* and delivered at the University of Oregon, Garfinkel said, "Persons, in the ways in which they are *members* of

ordinary arrangements, are engaged in the artful accomplishment of the rational properties of indexical particulars.” At that early stage of ethnomethodology I think we perhaps idealized how rational that rational activity was. It turns out that it is not as rational as we were thinking. The notion “members” already undoes some of the individualist, deliberate, controlling aspects of rational activity, in that it is an admission that people are acting as a collective. Deliberate, voluntarist, rational planning is not unknown, to be sure, but events mostly move too fast for planning to be effective.

Once Garfinkel became absorbed in studying scenic practices, in “studies,” he came to rely less upon social phenomenological idealizations of decision-making and sense-assembly and emphasized the *authochthonous* and *tendentious* nature of those affairs. In the last year of his life, when he once casually used the phrase “production practices” in a conversation with me at his home, I criticized the term “production” by suggesting that it was too voluntarist. I said to him (and he was blind at this stage, but he always listened very carefully) that yes an orderliness gets produced, but much of the time no one is in charge, and the orderliness that ends up governing affairs can be one that no one had in mind in advance, so “produced” is not an apt term to describe what is going on. Garfinkel said with some enthusiasm, “Yes, you’re right. Perhaps we need to give up on the term ‘production.’” Even at an early stage Garfinkel (2006: 156) intuited such a thing: “One runs the risk of assuming a rational actor, and we wish to avoid this assumption,” and in the same study he downplays the role of what he calls “purposeful calculation” in our affairs (Garfinkel 2006: 160). After a moment of further thought, Garfinkel inquired about what term I would use instead. I replied that there is congregational work oriented to finding an orderliness, but we have yet to describe it adequately. The study of this congregational work has become the principal focus of ethnomethodological research.

## 5. CONGREGATIONAL WORK/CONCERTED WORK

### Intersubjectivity

Aron Gurwitsch (1966: 432) described this congregational work as “intersubjectively concatenated and interlocking experiences.” Once again, this too is only a name and not a specification. It is the aim of ethnomethodological research to provide such specification in its local details. One of the most striking discoveries of this research is that these interconcatenations can occur *before* their meaning is settled. That is, the structures of talk and interaction can synch together in reliable and predictable ways before the parties know what they are really talking about. Does the meaning come first, individual consciousness by individual consciousness, as so many social phenomenologists and symbolic interactionists have assumed? No. Equally amazing is that the meaning may *never* get settled, and in fact in many instances it does not have to. Can objective structures of interaction get worked out *before* those structures receive their contents? Yes! Merleau-Ponty (1962: xx) offers us a clue: “Sense is revealed where my own and other people’s paths intersect and engage each other

like gears.” It is the business of ethnomethodology to track down *just how* these gears engage each other.

Since intersubjectivity is more *objective* than it is subjective, I am searching for another name for intersubjectivity. The point here is that the events are leading the way, and parties must constantly be adjusting to the ongoing, always emerging structures, with “no time-outs.” Since a social event leads itself, things remain continuously in flux. Each occasion that takes place is a first-time opportunity for structuring and redirecting the occasion. It is just as one of Proust’s characters, a French officer engaged in fighting the First World War, observed about the ever-changing rules and structure of warfare: “War is no exception to good old Hegel’s laws. It is in a state of perpetual becoming” (Proust 2002: 60). Even today our generals complain that we are always trying to fight the previous war, which leaves us unprepared to fight the present one, which is inventing new rules as it goes along. The perpetual becoming of ordinary affairs keeps confounding us and keeps exceeding our efforts to render those affairs orderly. Happily (for social scientists at any rate), new principles are born every minute.

### Tendentiousness

The “artful practices” that Garfinkel made so much of are not highly planned doings; rather, they involve members’ keen but opportunistic watchfulness for any object that can be rigged to work for structuring the local affairs, or more simply and accurately, for locating ways that will keep them out of trouble. Early ethnomethodologists spoke of society as being like “a floating crap game,” which was an image that captured well the flux of our quotidian affairs. It was an initial way to say that a social event leads itself. Amidst the flux of our affairs, peoples’ sight extends mostly to what is ‘next,’ and not much further than that. Their sight is myopic, and principles do not always play the major role. Things themselves tend toward a direction, but that direction is not always clear or distinct, and people are mostly reactive. This is the tendentiousness of affairs. It is so “close-in” of a phenomenon that careless social analysts can miss it altogether. It can also be given the phenomenological title, “the looks of the world.”

In *The Boston Seminars* (emca-legacy.info 2015 [1975]), Garfinkel spoke about “the phenomenon as the interior course of its own production.” An event drives *itself* with its own momentum, but even the event does not know just where it is heading. It is not that local participants are not intimately involved, but society moves according to its own vectors. This is what is Durkheimian about ethnomethodology. The ‘autonomy’ of social structures has its origins in the “inside-with” that Garfinkel speaks of in *Ethnomethodology’s Program* (2002: 271). The people who staff each local occasion are embodiedly engaged inside the very displays that instruct them regarding the coherence of those local events, and the parties can only collaborate around the practical objectivities that keep emerging within each occasion, interpreting them, twisting them, and massaging them toward local solutions. And every solution is provisional. The immanence of affairs always presses upon one, and what is most *proximal* is what grabs our attention. What is key is that one thing leads to the next, and all memories are short.

Michael Moerman and Harvey Sacks (1988) are emphatic that turn-taking systems work one utterance at a time. We are oriented to a “next,” but there is only one “next” at a time.

This limits the opportunities for longer-term organizing, and solutions become restricted to what is close at hand, to what is immanent, without the bigger aims of social science always playing a principal role. Doug Macbeth, from whom I learned to appreciate this notion of tendentiousness, contends that “It is heard in a first which second is called for, and every present turn instructs what it calls for next.” This nextness and the horizon of this nextness comprise the tendentiousness of affairs.

Put in another way, people pattern after each other and pick up ways of formulating and even ways of knowing that follow from the previous speaker. An aspect about this that astonishes is that they frequently *misread* the previous speaker and so inadvertently carry affairs off into novel and unanticipated directions; nevertheless, those unexpected directions can become foundational for the local order that comes to be established. Accordingly, people must remain attentive so that they will be able to digest these new hinterlands that keep arriving on the scene without relief. And there is no time-out.

In a fascinating comment that Moerman appends to their essay, “On ‘Understanding’ in the Analysis of Natural Conversation,” he acknowledges that much of the time parties do not know what they are doing. Accordingly, Moerman suggests that instead of the “understanding” in the original title of their essay, he would substitute the phrase “the events that pass or fail to pass as understandings” (Moerman and Sacks 1988: 180). This is an admission that people proceed whether or not they understand! Ordinary matters *can* be left up in the air, and are left up in the air, with no one having to be certain about the direction of matters. This only increases the attentiveness of parties since everyone must remain oriented to what *next* is impending. Further, people become myopic in their preoccupation with that next *next* that must be handled, to the point that larger scale interests are lost sight of, even forgotten. While macrosociologists are looking for the big picture, as Simmel describes, and philosophers are looking for the big theories, the parties themselves are preoccupied with not much more than looking for that next *next*, since that is what they need to know in order to survive in the interaction.

The tendentiousness is the immanent traction that people get on matters that are communicable, the ways that people come upon for finding themselves and keeping themselves on the same page. Garfinkel always insisted that accounts were necessarily “vague” and that they were subject to “indefinite elaboration” (that is known as “the et cetera principle”). Here we must also recall Garfinkel’s often repeated warning: “There is nothing hidden inside of our heads but brains.” What matters is what is there *in front of us*, in the spectacle we are sharing with others. That is why thinking is mostly a public activity. I think “tendentious,” which is a term Garfinkel did not use until the 1980s, is a way to repair being too cognitivist in our studies and to keep our analytic focus oriented to the spectacle that is the emerging world for parties. It is a consequence of the fact that things mostly run along to where they are heading on their own, and our task as social scientists is to discover them, not invent them.

## Objectivation

I have developed a model of what I'm calling Objectivation, after Husserl (1969: 34; 1970: 358-61; 1973: 199), Schutz (1967: 133-34), and Garfinkel (2006: 135), all of whom used the term. The objects that people use to organize the local orderlinesses can be notions, or they can be actual physical objects, or both. Whichever the case, these objects have a materiality that permits them to sit there in the spectacle and serve as a focal point for the collaborative attention of the parties; that is, they are used by parties for getting everyone on the same page. They are the tools at hand, the objects, that parties work with. Most importantly, people do not "construct" or "produce" these objects; rather, the objects mostly find their way to center-stage on their own. Even when people do plan for them, they are surprised by what the objects end up becoming.

Here is the model:

Account → Confirmation → Objectivation → Social Amnesia

Here we are concerned with discovering, identifying, and describing how people provide accounts of their affairs, and especially with the work of objectivation. The final stage in our model, social amnesia, will be treated in a separate essay; it involves a disengagement from the local processes of producing an objectivation, whereby people forget or ignore the role that they played in those affairs. The model describes how people produce Durkheim's immortal social facts.

## **6. THREE ILLUSTRATIONS**

I offer three illustrations of this model of accounts.

The first illustration comes from my data on Tibetan philosophical debating (Lieberman 2004). It is one of those occasions during which the Tibetan debaters become entangled in the formal analytic structures of their philosophical work, in the very way that law becomes tangled up with legal reasoning. Here they take up the topic of the difference between appearance and reality. In the transcript, A is the challenger and is standing, and B and C are defenders who are sitting. The sign ">~" indicates a loud handclap that punctuates formal theses each time one is offered.



A The reflection of a face in the mirror in the continuum of an ordinary person is posited by the mind as erroneous.

B It is. It is.

The reflection of a face in the mirror is an elementary example of an appearance that looks real but is not. The challenger (A) offers his account, and the defender (B) confirms it. A then repeats his account in a negative form, a common occurrence in Tibetan debating; and in line 6, C reconfirms it, in keeping with the negative way it was formulated. Following this, A provides his account for a third time, and it is confirmed for a third time. All this repetition is performed to objectivate the confirmed account and to establish clear lines of communication. With the main topic firmly in hand as a common possession, the parties then proceed with their analysis (lines 10-14).

5 A It does not follow that the lack of accord between the appearance of the reflection of the face in the mirror and its mode of being is posited. >~

C I reject the assertion.

A So, the lack of accord between the appearance of the reflection of the face in the mirror and its mode of being is posited. >~

C Yes.

10 T But it follows that the mind that has posited the lack of accord between the appearance of the reflection of the face in the mirror and its mode of being is not complete appreciation of the emptiness of inherent essences as it is understood according to the Middle Way. >~

C We say it is not complete.

There are many ways to objectivate an account that has been confirmed, and the way here is to invoke repetition of the confirmed account. This local work, while seemingly repetitive, facilitates the abiding concern of the Tibetan debaters to maintain orderliness in the thinking to which the debaters are oriented as a collaborative task.

In the next illustration, taken from my study of games-with-rules (Lieberman 2013: 83-134), the confirmed account is objectivated in a different way. After a group of four players have read the rules to a game that none of them had played before, they commence their play by rolling the die:



Player D (far left of photo) rolls the die so strongly that it threatens to fall to the floor. Player A (far right) anticipates the problems that this could cause: a player who rolls a die onto the floor may first check to see if the roll is a good one, and if it is they will move their piece; but if it is not, they may try to re-roll. In order to prevent such a player from taking advantage in that way, player A asks about what policy the players should adopt:

- A What do we do if the die rolls on the floor?
- B Well if it's offensive. /            // Re-roll.
- C                            / Re-roll. //.
- D House Rule of *Aggravation*.

Player B, who is second from the left, offers a response that is tentative, as he waits to see what consensus emerges. Player C (second from right) quickly offers the account that a re-roll of the die should be the policy, and player B swiftly confirms that account. All that remains for the policy to go into effect is to objectivate the confirmed account, so that everyone can be certain that they are on the same page, and so that they can see that page. Player D accomplishes this in an elegant way by suggesting that it become a “House Rule.” A house rule is a rule that is not in the instructions or rule-book but is a policy regarding game-furnished conditions that players, or a house of gambling, must set for themselves so that orderly play can take place. Player D’s suggestion is one way to ennoble the confirmation and elevate it to a status that is beyond the hands of any one of the parties. Eventually, according to our model players will forget that they themselves produced it and will simply accept it as a social fact and act accordingly. This is another illustration of the progression, Account → Confirmation → Objectivation.

Our third and final illustration comes from my study of coffee tasting in Trento. Here seven tasters and the head judge are tasting coffees that were roasted at the Casa del Caffè. I have underlined the accounts and provided indications of the local work of the parties in brackets:





- A *Cioccolato /fondente* [Account]  
Dark chocolate
- B */Cioccolato* [Confirmation]  
Chocolate
- C *Molto leggero come cioccolato fondente.* [Contention]  
Very light tasting, like dark chocolate. [Sarcastic]
- D *No, anche perché ho detto il cioccolato.* [Re-Confirmation]  
No, because I also said chocolate.
- 5 C *Positivo o negativo non lo so.*  
Positive or negative, I don't know.
- E *Positivo, positivo ... a me ricorda un'arach-l'arachide.* [Extension of Account]  
Positive, positive ... for me it recalls peanuts.  
*Il sapore dell' arachide.*  
The taste of peanuts.
- C *Quindi sempre un seme olioso.* [Summary Account]  
Therefore always an oily seed.
- E *Si! Proprio quel sapore.* [Confirmation]  
Yes! That's the very flavor here.
- 10 C *Allora, quest'olio qui è tipico del, dell'estrazione all'italiana.* [Objectivation]  
So then, this oil here is typical of the "Italian extraction."

Taster A quickly offers a candidate account that describes the taste as "chocolate" and receives confirmation for it. The head judge (C) disagrees and mildly satirizes the description, but taster D contests this dismissal and also confirms the account. The judge wonders whether the account is something positive or negative (it seems that he thinks it is negative, while the others think it is positive, the sort of confusion that is very common in sense making), and taster E suggests that it is positive (line 6) and then adds an additional taste descriptor, "peanuts" (line 7, while gesturing). The judge then *combines* the two accounts, chocolate and peanuts, into the summary account "an oily seed" ("*un seme olioso*," line 8). This

summary account receives confirmation (line 9), and it seems to provide a happy medium for consensus (it is not unusual for the desire to reach consensus to be an important factor in driving the direction of the sense making since maintaining good relations may be more important than communicating accurately, which is another case of local microstructures prevailing over sense). Once the tasters have settled upon an account, it remains for them to objectivate it. The head judge does this nicely by referring to oily flavor as “this” oil; his use of “this,” instead of “an” or “the,” reifies the judgment, and it is assumed that the confirmed summary account is an accomplishment in-hand. Moreover, the account is further objectivated by his suggesting that the judgment is universal, being “typical of the *estrazione all’italiana*.” By that time the confirmed account has achieved a degree of objectivation that makes it difficult for anyone to contest it.

These illustrations present three different ways in which a confirmed account can be objectivated, that is, made into a social fact that parties orient to as something external to themselves. This is how accounts can be made the objective property of interacting parties, i.e. how what is intersubjective is made objective. This is the neglected objectivity of social facts. It is time that we stop neglecting it and begin to study this phenomenon of objectivation in its lived details.

I want to be clear here: these events surely do not take place because I have developed a model. In the spirit of Garfinkel, I understand that models can make one blind to what is actually going on; and this model is intended to disclose details, not conceal them. Used in an apt way, this model can lead us to locate, identify, and describe the local work of parties who are objectivating the accounts that they have agreed upon. My students and colleagues have found this model helpful in guiding their inquiries into some of the more interesting aspects of ordinary “sociation.”

## 6. THEORETICAL REVIEW OF OBJECTIVATION

In his studies of accounts, Garfinkel observed that any formulation of local affairs was always “subject to review by others.” Accounts, or formulations, are the corporate means by which candidate understandings become public objects. Objectivating an account means to construct a unity for it that can be shared, and Husserl persisted in inquiring about objectivation from *Logical Investigations* in 1899 until his final lectures in 1936, including “The Origin of Geometry,” where Husserl (1970 [1936]: 360) emphasized the importance of how concepts are objectivated in the social world: “In the unity of communication among several persons, the repeatedly produced structure becomes an object of consciousness, not as a likeness, but as the one structure common to all.”

For Schutz, objectivation became the key to tracking intersubjectivity, and he explained that it involves the public work by which something is “given equally to all” (Schutz 1967: 32); according to Schutz an “intersubjective thought object” (Schutz 1971: 12) is formulated by and for the parties. This was an early clue for Garfinkel. For Schutz (1967: 133-34), the “objective meaning” refers to “the already constituted meaning-context of the thing produced whose actual production we meanwhile disregard” (this “disregard” is the social amnesia, the

disengagement). One of Garfinkel's extraordinary discoveries was that parties are not always motivated to know the meaning of an account as much as they are motivated by the demand that they produce an "objective meaning," use it to organize their local affairs, and thereby keep those affairs orderly.

One way that people learn what they mean is to objectivate their notion and then observe what it comes to mean. Once an understanding is *discovered*, as something begins to be played out in local affairs, that understanding can be *displayed* by anyone to everyone present, and then that understanding can be made objective too. Such displays are part of the local work that any party to an occasion can participate in doing. Hence, there are two steps to the "sociation" here – discovery and objectivation. In the words of Husserl, which were adopted and extended by Garfinkel, parties gradually work to substitute "objective expressions" for "essentially subjective and occasional expressions." Garfinkel's thinking here uses Husserl's terminology but departs from Husserl. Since Husserl never investigated the local contingencies of this substitution, Garfinkel (2002: 204-5) took that task up as a principal topic for ethnomethodological research. In undertaking these studies, Garfinkel and his students discovered something fantastic – this local work includes situations where words, glosses, and categories can exist as objects for everyone *before* their practical intelligibility is fixed. In fact, *using* the glosses *in order to* fix their sense and reference is a typical part of the work that a local cohort of actors performs when organizing the objective intelligibility of an occasion. The fascinating part about this, and the part that is arational about it (and here I do not mean non-rational), is that general agreement can take place before people understand just what it means; but despite the blind into which a cohort is willing to head, any confirmed and objectivated resolution remains commonly binding upon everyone from the outset, even before its sense and reference has been fully determined.

Let me specify what I mean by offering a some data from a round of coffee tasting by subjects in a café in Eugene, Oregon:

- A It's definitely bold.  
B It's a very bold coffee.  
A I definitely agree with the boldness.  
....  
A It was really sour, bitter, too strong, but bold.  
Interviewer: What do you mean by "bold"?  
A He was the one that said "bold"! How is "bold"?

This interaction wonderfully depicts a case in which parties agree to an account without knowing what it means. "Bold" serves as an empty palette upon which whatever it might become can be placed. When A is called upon by the interviewer to explain just what is on the palette, A accuses his partner of having introduced the term, which is not true; however, since B did play a role by confirming the account "bold," A is not being entirely disingenuous. The process of Account → Confirmation → Objectivation is what has accomplished the work, and the parties are largely anonymous participants.

John Heritage and Geoffrey Raymond (2005: 15) suggest that “Within the general framework of agreement on a state of affairs, the matter of the terms of agreement can remain,” and Heritage (2013: 383) tells us, “In the midst of agreeing with one another, speakers are still addressing the *terms of agreement*.” Heritage and Raymond (2005: 17) emphasize that there can be a “raw affiliation” that lacks content and amounts to only “a simulacrum of agreement.” I am fascinated with these simulacrums. Once a local cohort has accepted an account, it will gain the moral authority of a social fact that Durkheim elaborated even before it means very much. A good deal of what makes conversations interesting, even exciting, is that the meaning of an interaction is left unresolved, presenting participants with the highly engaging task of resolving matters, at least for practical purposes. Here I am not speaking about how individual understandings get “negotiated.” If no one knows what is going on, which is a commonplace occurrence, and parties only serendipitously discover in the emerging affairs some ways to get on the same page, how can one speak of “negotiation”? It is even worse than I am describing, since parties are not necessarily even on the same page, they only think it is the same page. This too is sociation. The local social structure that provides parties with the means for organizing the orderliness of their affairs can get worked out *before* the participants themselves have recognized the meaning of what they have worked out. Eventually, they receive the results as if it was an inheritance.

## 6. MORAL AUTHORITY AND ANONYMITY

Durkheim’s immortal social fact was an orientation he developed in part by considering Montaigne, who spoke of the mystical authority of the law. What is the origin of this “mystical authority”? And why do people have a sense of responsibility to meet other’s expectations?

Remember, there are two aspects to accountability: the first is how the emerging affairs can be summarized in an account, and the second is how we are oriented to the expectations of others and so are made “accountable” to those expectations. The other expects that we will be cooperative, and this expectation can be read on the face of the other. Garfinkel begins his “Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities” (which remains the name for our “studies” even today) by discussing Kant, for whom there were two mysteries – the stars in the heavens and the moral order within. Garfinkel (1967: 35) writes, “For Kant the moral order ‘within’ was an awesome mystery; for sociologists the moral order ‘without’ is a technical mystery.” We are examining the moral order ‘without.’ This responsibility that I’m speaking of is *anonymous*; it is any member’s practice.

Let’s take a close look at it in one final transcript from my coffee tasting studies in Trento.

- A *Beh inizio io, tanto bisogna farlo.*  
Well, I’ll initiate. I have a need to do that.
- B *Ababab!*
- C *Bhabab...*
- A *Beh bisogna ogni tanto.*

- Well, sometimes we have to.
- 5 A *Allora, io ho scritto, va ben.. “amaro”. E noce, ho cerchiato.. però poi ho scritto*  
 So, I wrote, uhh alright, “bitter.” And “walnut,” I circled, but then I wrote  
 A *“poco corposo.” A me non è proprio realtà tra... Devo dire anche i numeretti?*  
 “little body.” For me it was not really pleasant... Do I have to tell the numbers?  
 E *Si, se vuoi sì.*  
 Yes, if you want to, sure.  
 A *Va ben. Aroma 6, corposità 3, equilibrio 5, dolcezza 5, vellutato 3 e retrogusto 7.*  
 Alright. Aroma 6, body 3, balance 5, sweetness 5, velvet 3, and aftertaste 7.  
 C *Hm..*

Taster A begins by reading the descriptive adjectives that she wrote down while tasting the sample coffee. She begins to offer an overall assessment, but breaks off to ask, “Do I have to tell the numbers?” She is ready and willing to comply with any requirements that are part of the social situation, but the problem is that she is uncertain about what those requirements are. It is typical for parties to be willing to do whatever it takes to stay out of trouble, and their only difficulty lies in ascertaining what that is. Another student is serving as head judge in this case (E, in upper right of photo), but E has set no preconditions for how the tasters must organize their ratings of the coffee. He would not insist upon numeration, unless the parties themselves wished to do it that way, and he does not really care one way or the other.



In line 7, he defers to what he thinks is what A herself (lower left of photo) is expecting, even though she is engaged in nothing more than deferring to what she thinks he is expecting. This “After you, Alphonse” routine, which results in their being obligated to a procedure that no one has really ever advocated, is a common comedy in interactional affairs.

Let us consider a hypothetical case. It can happen that A will offer an account, and B will confirm the account mostly out of politeness, while also not fully understanding it or misunderstanding it. A may be able to observe that there is a misunderstanding and be preparing to correct B just when C – having witnessed A and B reach an apparent agreement about the account – quickly offers a gratuitous concurrence too, even though C may be

unaware of just what it is to which he or she is agreeing. A, quickly (mis)reading B and C as having come to a consensus of their own, decides not to correct B's misunderstanding after all and to respect the account as it has been confirmed, whatever it turns out to be. This is another scenario in which three people can agree to an account that no one ever really advocated. The agreement is driven more by the parties' sense of responsibility to others than by any of them knowing just what they are saying. Each party's participation is practically anonymous, and everyone is ready to defer to the group harmony, which if Durkheim is to be believed has moral value.

A critical aspect of this responsibility is that frequently it operates in the midst of the objectivation practices, inside of a social process (our model) in which we are preoccupied with figuring out what must be done "next" before the time to do it arrives. And yet these bizarre procedures will result in an objectivated policy that will quickly gain the moral force that Durkheim mentioned. All this is part of what comprise the "sociality" and the "reciprocal stimulations" that Simmel discussed. Simmel (1959: 328) wrote, "Perhaps this sort of insight will do for social science what the beginnings of microscopy did for the science of organic life." I certainly hope so. Indeed, the fine-grained, turn-by-turn analyses of ethnomethodology involve just this kind of microscopy.

## REFERENCES

- Lorraine, D. and Galison, R.  
2010 *Objectivity*, NY, Zone Books.
- emca-legacy.info 2015. "The Boston Seminars" <http://emca-legacy.info/garfinkel.html>
- Garfinkel, H.  
1967 *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.
- Garfinkel, H.  
2002 *Ethnomethodology's Program*, Lanham, Md., Rowman & Littlefield.
- Garfinkel, H.  
2006 *Seeing Sociologically: the Routine Grounds of Social Action*, Boulder, Colorado, Paradigm Publishers.
- Gurwitsch, A.  
1966 *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press.
- Heritage, J. and Raymond, G.  
2005 "The Terms of Agreement: Epistemic Authority and Subordination in Talk-in-Interaction," in «Social Psychology Quarterly 68 (1)», pp. 15-38.
- Heritage, J.  
2013 "Epistemics in Conversation," in *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, edited by Jack Sidnell and Tanya Stivers, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Husserl, E.  
1969 *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E.  
1970 "The Origin of Geometry," Appendix I in Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E.  
1973 *Experience and Judgment*. Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E.  
1982 *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by Fred Kersten, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.
- Lieberman, K.  
2004 *Dialectical Practice in Tibetan Philosophical Culture*, Lanham, Md., Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lieberman, K.  
2013 *More Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Albany, NY, SUNY Press.
- Lynch, M.  
2000 "The Ethnomethodological Foundations of Conversation Analysis", *Text*, 20 (4), pp. 517-532.
- Merleau-Ponty, M.  
1962 *Phenomenology of Perception*, London, Routledge and Kegan-Paul.

- Moerman, M. and Sacks H.  
1988 "On 'Understanding' in the Analysis of Natural Conversation," in Michael Moerman *Talking Culture, Ethnography and Conversation Analysis*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 180-86.
- Proust, M.  
2002 *Finding Time Again*. London, Penguin Books.
- Psathas, G.  
2009 "The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Harold Garfinkel," in H. Nasu, L. Embree, G. Psathas and I. Srubar (eds.), *Alfred Schutz and His Intellectual Partners*, Konstanz, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, pp. 401-434.
- Schutz, A.  
1967 *Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press.
- Schutz, A.  
1971 *Collected Papers*, Vol. I. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.
- Simmel, G.  
1959 *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, NY, Harper & Row.
- Von Lehm, D. and Garfinkel, H.  
2014 *The Creation and Development of Ethnomethodology*, Walnut Creek, CA, Left Coast Press.