

"If You Want to Understand the Big Issues, You Need to Understand the Everyday Practices That Constitute Them"

Lucy Suchman in Conversation With Dominik Gerst & Hannes Krämer

Key words:

ethnomethodology;
Garfinkel; human-
machine
interaction;
science and
technology
studies; feminism;
mundane
practices; mutual
intelligibility;
documentary
method;
intervening social
science

Abstract: With her book "Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication," Lucy SUCHMAN (1987) not only opened up a whole new domain of scientific interest but also showed how the scope of ethnomethodological inquiry can be widened in a fruitful way. Since then she is best known for her extensive contributions to the field of science and technology studies. In this interview, SUCHMAN gives insights into how she brought ethnomethodological sensibilities to new research fields, including human-machine interaction and feminist scholarship. She shares personal anecdotes of her meetings with Harold GARFINKEL and reflects upon key ethnomethodological elements such as the analysis of mundane practices and the fundamental sociality of mutual intelligibility. Discussing the relevance for material studies and how ethnomethodology can contribute to a politically engaged social science, SUCHMAN strikingly demonstrates the actuality of ethnomethodology's program.

Table of Contents

- [1. "Rather a Long Story About How I First Met Him"](#)
- [2. Human-Machine Interaction and Mutual Intelligibility](#)
- [3. The Documentary Method, Ethnomethodology and Feminism](#)
- [4. What It Means to *Do* Ethnomethodology](#)
- [5. "Ethnomethodology Is a Way of Theorizing the World"](#)
- [6. "The Strangeness of GARFINKEL's Writing Practice"](#)
- [7. "The Things That Stand Behind What We Are Seeing"](#)
- [8. Political Implications of *Studies in Ethnomethodology*](#)
- [9. Materiality, Technology, Machines](#)
- [10. "Studies in Ethnomethodology" Is What It Is](#)
- [11. "Read it as Poetry"](#)
- [12. "If You Want to Understand the Big Issues, You Need to Understand the Everyday Practices That Constitute Them"](#)

[References](#)

[Authors](#)

[Citation](#)

Biographical Note

Lucy A. SUCHMAN is professor of anthropology of science and technology in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University, United Kingdom since 2000. Her research interests within the field of feminist science and technology studies are focused on technological imaginaries and material practices of technology design, particularly developments at the interface of bodies and machines. After earning her BA, MA and PhD at the University of California at Berkeley she worked for twenty years as a researcher at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (Xerox PARC). Her dissertation "Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication" (SUCHMAN, 1987) brought ethnomethodology to the field of the design of interactive machines. A sequel to that book titled "Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions" expanded edition was published in 2007 (SUCHMAN, 2007a). In her current work, SUCHMAN, extends her critical engagement with the field of human-computer interaction to contemporary warfighting, including the figurations that inform immersive simulations, and problems of *situational awareness* in remotely-controlled weapon systems. [1]

In 1988 SUCHMAN received the Xerox Corporate Research Group's Excellence in Science and Technology Award. She was a founding member of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility and served on its Board of Directors from 1982-1990. SUCHMAN has been a visiting senior research fellow with the Work, Interaction and Technology Research Group at King's College London, an adjunct professor at the University of Technology, Sydney's Interaction Design and Work Practice Laboratory, and is currently an adjunct professor at the Information Technology University in Copenhagen, Denmark. She is also a collaborating editor for the journal *Social Studies of Science*, and during the years 2016 and 2017 she was president of the Society for Social Studies of Science. In 2002 SUCHMAN received the Benjamin Franklin Medal in Computer and Cognitive Science, and in 2005 the Outstanding Contribution to Research Award from the Communication and Information Technologies Section of the American Sociological Association. In 2010 SUCHMAN received the Lifetime Research Award from the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM) Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction. In 2011 she received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Culture and Society, Malmö University, Sweden. In 2014 she was awarded the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) John Desmond Bernal Prize for Distinguished Contribution to the Field. [2]

About the Interview

The following interview was undertaken via Skype in May 2017 as part of the project "Harold Garfinkel and the Studies in Ethnomethodology. An Interview Issue," edited by Dominik GERST, Hannes KRÄMER and René SALOMON¹. Lucy SUCHMAN was in her private workroom while Dominik GERST and Hannes KRÄMER were in their office at European-University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). The interview took about 75 minutes and was transcribed and edited soon afterwards. The present version has been authorized by Lucy SUCHMAN in March 2019. [3]

1. "Rather a Long Story About How I First Met Him"

Dominik GERST: How did you get to know the book "Studies in Ethnomethodology" (abbrev. as *Studies* afterwards)? The book has been published in 1967. Do you remember your first time with the book?

Lucy SUCHMAN: Well, it started for me with an introduction to social interactionism, more specifically symbolic interactionism, through a course that I took at UC Berkeley with Herbert BLUMER². It was an amazing course, a whole term about the book "Mind, Self, and Society" by George Herbert MEAD³ (1934). BLUMER had taken MEAD's chair in Chicago, and I had never encountered interactionism before. It was tremendously exciting. I think of it now as a kind of critical engagement with traditional sociology and structural functionalism. It was really a poststructuralist project, but it wasn't named that at the time. So that got me oriented in that direction. And then I met other students of GARFINKEL's, Doug MACBETH⁴, Richard FAUMAN⁵. And so I learned about GARFINKEL at a slight remove; I didn't have any direct contact with GARFINKEL, but I started reading him. And of course, like everyone I found the book really difficult and challenging. But I got quite excited about it. [4]

At that point I was very much interested in questions of corporate power. I was a PhD student at the University of California Berkeley in the 1970s, and this was a

-
- 1 See the Introduction by Dominik GERST, Hannes KRÄMER and René SALOMON (2019) in this issue.
 - 2 Herbert BLUMER (1900-1987), sociologist, founding father of symbolic interactionism. Professor in Chicago from 1927 to 1952 and in Berkley from 1952 to 1967; editor of the *American Journal of Sociology* from 1941 to 1952 and president of the *American Sociological Association* (in 1956). Major areas of work include symbolic interactionism, sociological research methods, race, industrialization (see BLUMER, 1969).
 - 3 George Herbert MEAD (1863-1931), philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, leading figure in the pragmatist tradition and mastermind of symbolic interactionism. Professor in Chicago from 1894 till his death. Major areas of his work include identity formation, social psychology, behaviorism (see MEAD, 1934).
 - 4 Douglas MACBETH, sociologist. Faculty emeritus at the Ohio State University and member of the steering committee of the International Institute of Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis. Major areas of his work include workplace studies, esp. classroom interactions, epistemics, instructions and authority, qualitative research (see MACBETH, 1990).
 - 5 Richard FAUMAN, sociologist and filmmaker, student of GARFINKEL writing his dissertation about filmic narrative in reportage and documentary. The dissertation remained unfinished, as he became a camera operator and videographer (see FAUMAN, 1980).

time of tremendous political unrest, in relation to the war in Vietnam, to race in America, and within the field of anthropology as well. I thought the idea of actually being able to understand everyday practices of what we call *power* was a really important project. In the end, I went to Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (Xerox PARC)⁶, where I ended up doing my dissertation (SUCHMAN, 1987). And one of the people on my committee was Hubert DREYFUS⁷, professor in philosophy at Berkeley, and it was actually DREYFUS who sent my PhD thesis to GARFINKEL. [5]

Hannes KRÄMER: Without asking?

Lucy SUCHMAN: Yes, because I hadn't had any direct contact with GARFINKEL. I was basically rather afraid of him. You know, from everything I'd heard from my friends who were his students, who had kind of love/hate-relationships with him. [6]

Hannes KRÄMER: That's what everybody tells.

Lucy SUCHMAN: GARFINKEL could be mean, which is why he had a very complex set of relations with his students. I would never have had the nerve or courage to send anything I'd written to him. But DREYFUS sent it to him. So, I opened my email one day and there was a message from Harold GARFINKEL, which completely ... you know, I couldn't believe it. And it was just this very enthusiastic message saying that DREYFUS had sent him my thesis and that he was so excited about it. And I think that part of that was that he really wanted ethnomethodology (EM) to make a difference in the world. He had this idea that EM had really practical implications in many, many areas. And he saw in my work a way of applying EM in the worlds of design and computer science and cognitive science. So of course I responded to his message. [7]

I forget when I first actually met him, but he was always very, very kind to me. I think partly because I'd never been his student. He was like a very kind uncle. And then he came and visited us at Xerox PARC several times. I have drawers full of audiotapes of the conversations that we had when he came to visit, because he was obsessed with taping. I don't know if other people have mentioned this: whenever he was having a conversation or there was a discussion of some kind, he would always be running an audiotape. It's actually a really interesting practice. I think he recognized that so much thinking is done in conversation and it's in talking to people that you actually formulate things. He knew that as he was talking, he was going to be formulating things and he wanted to have a record of that so that he could go back to it. Anyway, that was rather a long story about how I first met him! [8]

6 The Xerox Palo Alto Research Center was established in 1970 as part of the Xerox Company, founder of the first photocopy machine. After Xerox lost its patent for xerography, the Research Center was installed to develop major achievements within the fields of information technology and office technology such as the Ethernet, the graphic user interface and laser printers.

7 Hubert DREYFUS (1929-2017), philosopher, most renowned for interpreting and extending recent European philosophy, esp. the work of Martin HEIDEGGER for the English-speaking world. Professor in Berkeley from 1972 till his death; member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (since 2001). Major areas of his work include existential philosophy, phenomenology, artificial intelligence, philosophy of literature and arts (see DREYFUS, 1992).

2. Human-Machine Interaction and Mutual Intelligibility

Dominik GERST: In which way did the *Studies* influence your own sociological questioning or imagination?

Lucy SUCHMAN: For me, it came out of this interest in interactionism, and I was also interested in conversation analysis (CA). I first went to Xerox PARC not because it was the Palo Alto Research Center, but because it was Xerox. I had this idea of looking at everyday practices of power and so I was looking for a corporation in which to do that. And I had no relationship to any corporations at that point, but then through a series of circumstances, because those were the connections that I had followed, I ended up at PARC and got drawn into all of the research going on there. It was in the heyday of artificial intelligence (AI). And the thing that I really hooked onto, that became the center of my own thesis, was the idea of *human-machine interaction*, which was not a common, widely circulating idea at that point. But of course, I was very attuned to the premise that this was interaction. And I thought: Okay, what if we take that seriously and we actually bring the theoretical and methodological orientation of EM and CA to looking at the interface. And that then became my dissertation. [9]

Most importantly, my thesis was about the question of what constitutes mutual intelligibility. And GARFINKEL's analysis of the kind of practical contingencies of our mutual intelligibility, of the production of social order, were really, really core to the way that I was able to think about what I was seeing at Xerox PARC. I would say that the idea of mutual intelligibility and the idea that as humans we achieve that not by reading each other's minds or mapping each other's mental models, but through these very contingent, good enough "for all practical purposes" (GARFINKEL 1967, p.vii) kinds of ongoing negotiations of some kind of shared understanding. And that we are also not acting in situations that are already predefined, but that the situations in which we act are being reflexively generated in an ongoing way. I still talk about those issues because they are very profound problems for AI and the idea of intelligent interactive machines. Machines just didn't really have the ability to do that. And they still don't. [10]

3. The Documentary Method, Ethnomethodology and Feminism

Hannes KRÄMER: Are there certain parts of the book which were or are more interesting for you than other ones? Are there any chapters you read and like more?

Lucy SUCHMAN: Certainly the first chapter "What is Ethnomethodology?," well, and chapter two "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities," which really set out this argument for studying the mundane enactment of social order, that social order is enacted in everyday activities. Those were quite radical ideas at the time and I thought really powerful. And also definitely the third chapter "Common Sense Knowledge of Social Structures: The Documentary Method of Interpretation in Lay and Professional Fact Finding" which presents the idea of the documentary method—the idea that members themselves are continually engaged in treating the things that they encounter as evidence, as kind of

indices, and the mutual constitution of evidence and that which it is taken to stand for. And so, the idea that in fact there aren't underlying social structures, but rather we are continually constituting those relations and orderings. Those things are really important, because for example for me in doing that kind of critical engagement with AI that I was doing in my PhD thesis, where AI was very much based in this planning model, you know, the idea that—which seems really crazy when you think about it—but the idea that all of our actions are preceded by these mental operations, which are then executed in action. And that interaction is about the inference of each other's mental models, which is so antithetical to an ethnomethodological understanding. So, you can do a kind of ethnomethodological analysis of AI and how it formulates that as a method for action and interaction. But again, that model so underestimates the place of contingent sense-making. I think the documentary method is very much about contingent sense-making as an ongoing foundation, or rather not foundation, but an ongoing constituent of social order. [11]

I also really liked of course chapter five "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an Intersexed Person, Part 1," the *Agnes* chapter. That's a chapter that I've taught with. I think it's really interesting that GARFINKEL in 1967 brought EM to bear on questions of intersex. It's also interesting to me, because as well as being a fairly dedicated ethnomethodologist I also have a longstanding engagement with feminist scholarship. So, it's a really interesting demonstration that GARFINKEL was himself in a way, even though he never would have formulated it in those terms, he was attentive to the performative constitution of sex and gender. And yet EM and feminism have historically been placed in opposition to each other. I think that's pretty interesting. And "'Good' Organizational Reasons for 'Bad' Clinic Records," chapter six, is just incredibly important for understanding the relationship between records and the practices of their production, and what they can and can't be read for. You could map that onto the idea of the creation of prescriptive representations like plans. Part of my argument has always been that things like plans or policies are best understood as artifacts that are produced in specific circumstances (SUCHMAN, 1987). And then the interesting question is: What's the relationship between the circumstances of their production and the circumstances of the places in which they are then mobilized? The chapter on organizational records is really important for showing the contingency and the specificity of the circumstances in which records get made, and how there is no universal kind of evaluation of their goodness. It's relative to practical purposes of their production and use. [12]

4. What It Means to *Do* Ethnomethodology

Dominik GERST: Many people especially mention the methodological aspects of the book and how they got influenced in their methodological thinking. Is there a *methodological clue* that the book contains?

Lucy SUCHMAN: It is interesting, because I think this is one of the areas in which EM and CA parted ways (HERITAGE, 1984). For GARFINKEL EM is not about methods in the social science sense. It is the *resource-topic-argument* of his, that methods are our topic (POLLNER & ZIMMERMAN, 1970). I think his own methods were pretty hard to translate into any kind of instructions in themselves. I think that his teaching was more of a weird kind of apprenticeship. I have learned more about how to actually bring EM to particular topics or issues from people like Mike LYNCH⁸ or Chuck GOODWIN⁹, than directly from GARFINKEL, because he was so idiosyncratic. His *breaching experiments* (GARFINKEL, 1967) are very famous, but they are way overrepresented. That was just one pedagogical device of his. I think EM is more of a sensibility and an orientation than it is a method. But of course, I'm also an anthropologist and all of my engagement with EM was in the context of programs in anthropology. So, there was always a strong mix of ethnography and of anthropological sensibilities as well. I don't think that EM is about methods. It has profound implications for how we go about studying the social world. And part of the tension with CA is that CA is very much a methodology. GARFINKEL was not comfortable with that, with the formalization of that. [13]

Hannes KRÄMER: But what does it mean to *do* EM then. It's about doing, isn't it?

Lucy SUCHMAN: That's a great question. It is about doing, exactly! It is about doing EM, reflexively, in the same ways that EM constitutes the world as doings. It is about an irreducibly enacted practice, informed by the sensibilities of EM, which I think is also deeply theoretical. You know, not in the kind of big T-sense, but in the sense of ways of theorizing the social world. Doing EM is about delineating topics in the world that you can look at through ethnomethodological sensibilities. That will always involve very close attention, in whatever ways are available, to mundane practices, from laboratory studies (LYNCH, 1985) to courtrooms (ATKINSON & DREW, 1979) to police practices (MEEHAN, 1986). So, I think it has a strong ethnographic orientation to everyday practices as well (POLLNER & EMERSON, 2001). At the same time, everything that GARFINKEL did was about resisting translation into any kind of formulaic prescription. A lot of the things that are most idiosyncratic about his writing are about his continual commitment to resisting those translations. Which I think is part of what is so refreshing and enlivening about his work and about EM done in the spirit of his work. [14]

8 See the interview with Michael LYNCH in this issue (LYNCH, GERST, KRÄMER & SALOMON, 2019).

9 See the interview with Charles GOODWIN in this issue (GOODWIN & SALOMON, 2019).

5. "Ethnomethodology Is a Way of Theorizing the World"

Dominik GERST: Previously, you talked about the specific sensibility towards *what is going on* that EM tries to give at hand. I think Harvey SACKS¹⁰ lectures (1992) sensitize for such an attitude as well, while concurrently challenging classical understandings of theory. Can you elaborate a bit on that sensibility?

Lucy SUCHMAN: I think the tricky thing when talking about an ethnomethodological sensibility it is not to mystify it. There is extensive debate about theory and EM, and GARFINKEL's aversion to theory (LYNCH, 1999). I think that was an aversion to social theory in the modes that he was intervening in. But I do think that EM is a way of theorizing the world. And at this point for me, through my engagement with EM and then my subsequent engagement with post-structuralism, feminism and so, the poststructuralist turn to the performativity of social orders is so consistent with EM (SUCHMAN, 2011). I first learned to think about the world in that way through EM. But subsequently, I found many other elaborations and reinforcements of that way of thinking about things, through feminist theory, post-structuralism, actor-network-theory. Those resonances may be partly why EM has now become much more recognized, even celebrated within sociology, than it had been. Because there are so many other strands that are kindred, supporting strands of theorizing now than there were when GARFINKEL first started talking about this. [15]

6. "The Strangeness of GARFINKEL's Writing Practice"

Hannes KRÄMER: You mentioned that EM has become much more recognized; would you say there is a difference in the reception of the book back then compared to now?

Lucy SUCHMAN: Oh, yes. It is interesting to think about the context in which this book first appeared. "Symbolic interactionism" (BLUMER, 1969) had broken some ground. But in general, this was really peculiar stuff, certainly in relation to American sociology. And I can imagine very differently in relation to German sociology¹¹. So, it was a bit of a crazy fringe. And then those people who came across it and were really moved by it, became real enthusiasts. Very importantly, it was an intervention into the field of sociology. I don't know what it would be like to pick up the *Studies* now. But I think the context in which it would be read now would be so much different, there would be so much more resonance with other approaches. I suspect there are all sorts of new internal factions within sociology that I haven't been tracking. But it seems as though ... maybe because, you know, now GARFINKEL is gone and so he is safe. Even before he died there was much more recognition within the field of the importance of EM. [16]

10 Harvey SACKS (1935-1975), founder of conversation analysis and prominent figure of early ethnomethodology, had a huge impact on sociology, linguistics and discursive psychology. Lecturer in Los Angeles and professor in Irvine (1964-1975). Major areas of his work include sequential analysis, membership categorization, social science methodology (see SACKS, 1992).

11 See the interviews with Jörg BERGMANN and Christian MEYER (BERGMANN, MEYER, SALOMON & KRÄMER, 2019), Stephan WOLFF (WOLFF & SALOMON, 2019) and Jürgen STREECK (STREECK, KRÄMER & SALOMON, 2019) in this issue.

Certainly, people would still feel the strangeness of GARFINKEL's writing practice. His writing practice is unique. It's very irritating for many people, I think that they just dismiss it. But then, if you start to appreciate that he is always trying to break, to interrupt the tendencies that we have to try to translate what he is saying into more familiar, conventional terms. He is always formulating and reformulating things for himself, to try to get himself out of those conventional frames. It is not just perverse, there is a reason for it. It does have that effect of turning your head around when you really engage with what he is doing through his formulations. [17]

Hannes KRÄMER: Did the book influence your writing style and the way of presenting research findings as well?

Lucy SUCHMAN: That is a very interesting question, because that was a real struggle for me. In the 1960s and 1970s, there certainly was a kind of orthodoxy of EM for what constituted proper formulations. And so, I worked hard at that time to try to write correctly as an ethnomethodologist. That was probably a good exercise, but I also found it tremendously constraining. I think to some degree this tension is reflected in my PhD-thesis. I was in the anthropology program, and I had quite a diverse committee. There are ways in which I formulated things that I now find extremely strained and tortured. And I know I did that because I was trying to write like a proper ethnomethodologist. I've certainly moved away from that. I am glad I have the experience of not trying to write like GARFINKEL, but trying to take tremendous care to formulate things in a properly ethnomethodological way. Mike LYNCH's book "Scientific Practice and Ordinary Action" (1993) was really important for me. Mike writes with tremendous clarity, but also a very deep understanding of EM. Increasingly I came to see that when you move away from GARFINKEL's immediate sphere, then you can still be consistent with that way of thinking about the world, without having to have quite the same tortured writing style. [18]

7. "The Things That Stand Behind What We Are Seeing"

Dominik GERST: And besides the writing, is there any concept or methodological thought that is specifically useful for your work?

Lucy SUCHMAN: I can't think of any single one, but recognizing that whatever topic we're interested in, the topics typically come to us formulated in structural-functional ways. The idea that rather than what we see being a reflection of some underlying structure, or some underlying model, as the evidence of this thing that stands behind it, really understanding that the things that purportedly stand behind what we're seeing are themselves constituted in an ongoing way through the same practices that conventionally are treated as responsive to that underlying thing or even determined by it. That's the idea that is in some ways articulated in the terms of the documentary method. That co-constitution of the observable, the evidentiary and that which it is taken to reflect, is really important. Coming to that understanding has informed most of what I've done since then, I'd say. [19]

Hannes KRÄMER: As a sociologist or as an anthropologist, have you learned something about your own work reading GARFINKEL?

Lucy SUCHMAN: I certainly learned about my own preconceptions, about all the ways in which conventional social theory both is built out of and then reconnects with our common sense, familiar ways of thinking about the world. For me it was about working my way into this more performative understanding of the way that what we take to be the structures of the social order are enacted. And understanding that, for me, is so important. So, for example, my work now is more around military technologies (SUCHMAN, FOLLIS & WEBER, 2017), but very much preoccupied with the question of how the categories of friend and enemy are enacted, in the multiplicity of ways in which those categories are enacted within the military. Analytically, you have to find the sites in which those categories are being produced and reproduced, and then actually see how that's being done, materially. And then it's also really important to understanding those things as continually produced and reproduced, and also working against any kind of totalizing way of theorizing or analyzing; that is what opens up the spaces where you see that it's very messy, basically. In good ways. It's messy in the sense both that things don't go according to plan, but also that there are spaces there, where other things are happening, and other things could be happening. So, if you are interested in intervening and disrupting these longstanding practices, then that is a really important thing to understand as well, to see where those spaces and slippages are. [20]

8. Political Implications of *Studies in Ethnomethodology*

Dominik GERST: Talking about intervening and disrupting practices: are the *Studies* a political book? Or is there a political reading possible?

Lucy SUCHMAN: That's a great question, too. Of course, GARFINKEL would never have accepted the idea that EM had anything to do with politics. But I think if we're talking about *politics* with a small p, you know, as orderings, then I think it's a profoundly political book. Again, looking at the chapter on *Agnes*, or even "'Good' Organizational Reasons for 'Bad' Clinic Records," I think that's really political, in the sense that it takes the idea of either privileged perspectives or universal metrics of value and it completely undoes those things, by showing how those orderings themselves are enacted, they are not given. So yes, I think the political implications of the book, not in terms of big-P politics, but in terms of understanding social ordering are really profound. [21]

And part of the tension there is that because there is such a strong commitment within EM to work against normative sociology, then if you take politics as always normative in some sense, that in order to take a political position you have to suspend your commitments to the enacted nature of social order. And certainly, a lot of normative positions do that, but I don't think that it's necessary. I think that one way of disrupting, intervening in established institutions is by articulating the ways in which those institutions get done. And that's a way of undoing the power that they have, if you understand power as contingent, rather than fixed and

determining as it's conceptualized in a more structuralist understanding. But there is a lot of very complicated and tricky ground to navigate there, I think. [22]

Hannes KRÄMER: And could you say a little bit more about how specifically feminism and EM go along?

Lucy SUCHMAN: For me they go along in the alignment that I see between the commitments to a performative understanding of the production of social relations and identities and orders in both feminist theory and in EM. And that's not to say that ethnomethodologists have been feminists, or even that EM as a kind of intellectual community has been feminist. On the contrary. Arguably it has not been a friendly place for feminism. Do you know Dorothy SMITH? She was kind of the emblem, a lightning rod for that. She was trying to bring together EM with feminism and Marxism (SMITH, 1990a). I was at an EM conference where Dorothy SMITH spoke and I thought she somewhat misrepresented EM on that particular occasion. She was doing her brilliant work on documents at the time in organizations (SMITH, 1990b). And I remember her saying that EM never attended to documents. And that just seemed to me like a crazy thing to say, because we were just talking about "'Good' Organizational Reasons for 'Bad' Clinic Records." So, I could see her taking a combative stance rather than emphasizing alignments, probably for good reason! [23]

So, for various reasons EM and feminism have been seen to be antithetical to each other. Increasingly, though, there is a kind of opening up among sociologists who are involved in EM to the resonance and connections with feminist theory and feminist research (STOKOE, 2006). I've made the argument that there is a lot of strong kinship intellectually between the two (SUCHMAN, 2007b). I understand why they've been seen as antithetical, but I believe that there are strong connections. And certainly, for me, at this point feminist theory and EM are so completely entangled in my own ways of thinking about the world. But I also should say that when I first read the *Studies*, I wouldn't have identified myself then as a feminist or feminist theorist. That came later for me as well. So, there is a kind of historical trajectory here. [24]

9. Materiality, Technology, Machines

Dominik GERST: Bruno LATOUR and others criticized that the *Studies* lack of a concept of materiality (CALLON & LATOUR, 1981). Do you see any point in GARFINKEL's work or your own reading of the book where you see that materiality—or technology—comes back in?

Lucy SUCHMAN: I really disagree with that characterization. In fact, part of what EM did was to insist on attending to embodiment. That's all over the book, not just in the *Agnes* chapter. The phenomenological grounds of EM really bring in the body and lived experience. But they are also about artifacts. GARFINKEL's attention to artifacts was greater than others in sociology at the time. For example, taking documents seriously and really attending to them. That is the reason why EM made its way into science studies so early on. The laboratory studies that GARFINKEL did with Mike LYNCH and Eric LIVINGSTON were

attending to the material practices in ways that were really innovative at the time (GARFINKEL, LYNCH & LIVINGSTON, 1981). And so, I really find that a very odd characterization. [25]

I'm so indebted to LATOUR and I love his work, but I think that if anything he is less grounded in material practice, more of a philosopher. He's also a bit of an anthropologist, and of course, the work that he's done in science studies, for example circulating reference, soil sampling in the Amazon in "Pandora's Hope" (LATOUR, 1999), that chapter. So, he's done science studies in the sense of attending to material practices. But I wouldn't say that that's at the core of his own work. So yes, I think that's a kind of misrepresentation, and I also think that LATOUR is a great fan of GARFINKEL and EM. EM's contributions to laboratory studies, and their contributions to attention to material practices is very profound. [26]

Hannes KRÄMER: But what about machines? Or technology? There aren't that many in the book.

Lucy SUCHMAN: That may be part of why GARFINKEL was excited about my thesis. And I also remember that very early on when I was still a PhD-student, in 1986, I gave a talk at the Talk and Social Structure conference at UC Santa Barbara (BODEN & ZIMMERMAN, 1991). And I talked there about this idea of looking at human-machine-interaction through the methods of CA. And Manny SCHEGLOFF¹² was in the front row and Gail JEFFERSON¹³ was convening the panel. And at the beginning of the panel she said to me: "Well, I have absolutely no idea who you are," explaining how she couldn't introduce me. She obviously was a bit annoyed. It was a terrifying experience. But I gave this talk and I remember, Manny SCHEGLOFF loved it, I could see that he loved it, and that was tremendously reassuring. My work kind of brought machines into the picture in a way that the people at the conference found very interesting. And of course, in some ways laboratory studies are full of machines of various kinds. It's very true, there are no machines in the *Studies*, that I know of as such. But I think that would be asking a lot in 1967 for sociology. Part of what has happened within *science and technology studies* is the placing of machines at the center of legitimate sociological attention (HACKETT, AMSTERDAMSKA, LYNCH & WAJCMAN, 2008). But I do think that came somewhat later. [27]

12 Emanuel SCHEGLOFF (*1937), co-founder of conversation analysis and best known for transferring CA into a discipline of its own right. Distinguished professor in Los Angeles (since 1996). Member of the editorial board of numerous sociological and linguistic journals. Major areas of his work include sequential analysis, membership categorization, repair in conversation (see SCHEGLOFF, 2003).

13 Gail JEFFERSON (1938-2008), sociologist and co-founder of conversation analysis, is best known for developing notation conventions for transcribing talk and for editing Harvey SACKS' "Lectures on Conversation" (SACKS, 1992). She held various research positions in the US, the UK and the Netherlands. Major areas of her work include sequential analysis, turn-taking, laughter in conversation, trouble talk (see JEFFERSON, 1988).

10. "Studies in Ethnomethodology" Is What It Is

Hannes KRÄMER: But is there any other critique of the book then? Do you have any or any part that you totally disagree with?

Lucy SUCHMAN: There are points at which the question arises whether GARFINKEL's writing practice needs to be as difficult as it is. If there aren't ways that things could be formulated in a less convoluted way and still hold on to the conceptual commitments. My sense is that GARFINKEL had a really hard time writing. I know he struggled over "Ethnomethodology's Program" (GARFINKEL, 2002). It was years and years and years in the making. Many versions got sent out to people and then revised. I don't think that book would ever have come out if it wasn't for Anne RAWLS¹⁴ holding his hand. I don't know what all the reasons were, but I think he had this kind of anxiety about saying it right. And that really limited his writing. But *Studies* is just a very unique book, you could critique it on all sorts of grounds in terms of what's not there. But it is what it is, in the sense it is his collection of writings at that particular moment that *really* introduced this way of thinking about things. [28]

11. "Read it as Poetry"

Dominik GERST: As the book is more of a collection of writings, do you have any recommendations for people who try to read the book for the first time?

Lucy SUCHMAN: I would say read it with other people. This is a book that should be read in a reading group or in a course where you have some guidance, some help in unpacking it. And then in some ways read it in a context where you can talk to other people about it. And in the most difficult sections, you have to read it as poetry, as you would read poetry, in the sense that, it's going to take multiple passes. I feel this way about reading some of Donna HARAWAY's work as well (HARAWAY, 1997). You read it and then you read it again, and you don't worry too much if you don't get it all. It's an interesting question. What is your experience of reading it? And also, you're reading it in English, which is another thing. Even for native English speakers it's extremely challenging. Maybe it's more if you're not an English native speaker, I don't know. [29]

Dominik GERST: Well, at least there is no German translation yet. It will come out this year, hopefully.

Lucy SUCHMAN: I would think translating it would be extremely difficult, because I mean it's so convoluted grammatically. [30]

Hannes KRÄMER: There is a German translation of the "'Good' Organizational Reasons for 'Bad' Clinic Records," where you can see how hard it is to translate this book (GARFINKEL, 2000 [1967]).

14 Anne Warfield RAWLS (*1950), sociologist, director of the GARFINKEL archive. Professor at Bentley University. Major areas of her work include "Ethnomethodology, Interaction, Workplace Studies, Social Theory and Political Philosophy, Ethics and Social Practice" (RAWLS, 2008).

Lucy SUCHMAN: Perhaps it's one of those books that's really not translatable because it's so idiosyncratic in the way that it uses English. I haven't been in the position of teaching this book but I'm sure people who teach with it have a much stronger sense than I do of how it's experienced especially by students now when they encounter it the first time. [31]

12. "If You Want to Understand the Big Issues, You Need to Understand the Everyday Practices That Constitute Them"

Hannes KRÄMER: Let us get back one more time to the role the *Studies* play today. What do you think, what parts of the book could help contemporary sociology to, I don't know, see other things? Or are there any certain aspects of the book which should get more attention within contemporary sociology?

Lucy SUCHMAN: Well, I guess it would partly depend on which contemporary sociology we're talking about. But let's just say within some fields of sociology that are already most aligned, so for example qualitative sociological research. I suspect that there is a lot about this book that still hasn't fully been taken on within contemporary sociology in terms of the kind of insistence on attention to mundane practices. There is still a tendency to take those for granted, to treat those as if there is nothing to learn about the big issues by looking at mundane practices. And what does it mean to really do that. I think doing that requires a certain kind of access to the worlds that you're interested in in particular ways that can be quite demanding. To me the aspects of the book that could find their way even more actively into sociological research have to do with that commitment to the idea that if you want to understand the big issues, you need to understand the everyday practices that constitute them. [32]

People come to that through different avenues. Some people come to that through more anthropological or ethnographic orientations, some people come to that through an engagement with post-structuralism. But within sociology, I still think there is a lot more that could be done to really take on board the basic premise of *Studies*, that it's in the mundane reproduction of everyday activity that the social world is reiterated. I think GARFINKEL is more oriented to the ways in which it's reiterated than to the ways in which it might be transformed. But for those of us interested in more interventionist kind of engagements, that understanding of the social order as reiterated also opens up spaces for intervention. That goes beyond GARFINKEL's program, but he sets the basis for that. [33]

Dominik GERST: I think this was a wonderful final point.

Hannes KRÄMER: But there remains one final question. We ask everybody we interview about a favorite part of the book. Is there any quotation you like the most?

Lucy SUCHMAN: Well, let me offer a passage from *Agnes*, which I think is indicative of GARFINKEL's extraordinarily compassionate and insightful

engagement with normative sex and gender in the 1960s. In writing about the lives of intersex subjects he observes:

"In each case the persons managed the achievement of their rights to live in the chosen sexual status while operating with the realistic conviction that disclosure of their secrets would bring swift and certain ruin in the form of status degradation, psychological trauma, and loss of material advantages. Each had as an enduring practical task to achieve rights to be treated and to treat others according to the obliged prerogatives of the elected sex status. They had as resources their remarkable awareness and uncommon sense knowledge of the organization and operation of social structures that were for those that are able to take their sexual status for granted routinized, 'seen but unnoticed' backgrounds for their everyday affairs. They had, too, great skills in interpersonal manipulations. While their knowledge and interpersonal skills were markedly instrumental in character, by no means were they exclusively so" (GARFINKEL 1967, pp.117f.). [34]

I trust that reading this passage today, most of us will be struck by GARFINKEL's prescience in seeing the work of *passing* as a kind of disclosing agent for the accomplishment of normative orders, the politics and poignancy of that in the sense of what is at stake, and the extraordinary competencies that are required to be successful, at great cost to those forced to acquire them. [35]

References

- Atkinson, J. Maxwell & Drew, Paul (1979). *Order in court: The organisation of verbal interaction in judicial settings*. London: Macmillan.
- Bergmann, Jörg; Meyer, Christian; Salomon, René & Krämer, Hannes (2019). Garfinkel folgen, heißt, die Soziologie vom Kopf auf die Füße zu stellen. Jörg Bergmann & Christian Meyer im Gespräch mit René Salomon & Hannes Krämer. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 23, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3289>.
- Blumer, Herbert (1969). *Symbolic interactionism. Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Boden, Deirdre & Zimmerman, Don H. (Eds.) (1991). *Talk and social structure. Studies in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Callon, Michel & Latour, Bruno (1981). Unscrewing the big leviathan; or how actors macrostructure reality, and how sociologists help them to do so? In Karin Knorr-Cetina & Aaron Cicourel (Eds.), *Advances in social theory and methodology* (pp.277-303), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Dreyfus, Hubert (1992). *What computers still can't do. A critique of artificial reason*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fauman, Richard (1980). Filmmakers works: On the production and analysis of audiovisual documents for the social sciences. *Unpublished paper*, Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA.
- Garfinkel, Harold (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood-Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Garfinkel, Harold (2000 [1967]). "Gute" organisatorische Gründe für "schlechte" Krankenakten. *System Familie*, 13, 111-122.
- Garfinkel, Harold (2002). *Ethnomethodology's program. Working out Durkheim's aphorism* (ed. and introduced by A. Warfield Rawls). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Garfinkel, Harold; Lynch, Michael & Livingston, Eric (1981). The work of a discovering science construed with materials from the optically discovered pulsar. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 11, 131-158.

- Gerst, Dominik; Krämer, Hannes & Salomon, René (2019). Harold Garfinkels "Studies in Ethnomethodology" – ein Interviewprojekt. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 25, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3288>.
- Goodwin, Charles & Salomon, René (2019). Not being bound by what you can see now. Charles Goodwin in Conversation with René Salomon. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 11, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3271>.
- Hackett, Edward J.; Amsterdamska, Olga; Lynch, Michael & Wajcman, Judy (Eds.) (2008). *Handbook of science and technology studies* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Haraway, Donna (1997). *Modest_witness@second_millennium. FemaleMan_meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and technoscience*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Heritage, John (1984). *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jefferson, Gail (1988). On the sequential organization of troubles talk in ordinary conversation. *Social Problems*, 35, 418-441.
- Latour, Bruno (1999). *Pandora's hope. Essays on the reality of science studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lynch, Michael (1985). *Art and artifact in laboratory science: A study of shop work and shop talk in a research laboratory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Lynch, Michael (1993). *Scientific practice and ordinary action. Ethnomethodology and social studies of science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lynch, Michael (1999). Silence in context: Ethnomethodology and social theory. *Human Studies*, 22, 211-233.
- Lynch, Michael; Gerst, Dominik; Krämer, Hannes & Salomon, René (2019). "Studies are probably the best thing that Garfinkel ever wrote." Michael Lynch in conversation with Dominik Gerst, Hannes Krämer & René Salomon. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 13, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3251>.
- Macbeth, Douglas (1990). Classroom order as practical action: The making and un-making of a quiet reproach. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11, 189-214.
- Mead, George Herbert (1934). *Mind, self and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Meehan, Albert J. (1986). Record-keeping practices in the policing of juveniles. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 15(1), 70-102.
- Pollner, Melvin & Emerson, Robert M. (2001). Ethnomethodology and ethnography. In Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland & Lyn Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp.118-135). London: Sage,
- Pollner, Melvin & Zimmerman, Don H. (1970). The everyday world as a phenomenon. In Jack D. Douglas (Ed.), *Understanding everyday life: Towards a reconstruction of sociological knowledge* (pp.80-103). Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing,
- Rawls, Anne W. (2008). Harold Garfinkel, ethnomethodology and workplace studies. *Organization Studies*, 20(5), 701-732.
- Sacks, Harvey (1992). *Lectures on conversation, Vol. I and II* (ed. by G. Jefferson). Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. (2003). On conversation analysis: An interview with Emanuel A. Schegloff. In Paul Thibault & Carlo L. Prevignano (Eds.), *Discussing conversation analysis: The work of Emanuel A. Schegloff* (pp.11-55, 165-71). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Smith, Dorothy E. (1990a). *The conceptual practices of power. A feminist sociology of knowledge*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Smith, Dorothy E. (1990b). *Texts, facts, and femininity: Exploring the relations of ruling*. London: Routledge.
- Stokoe, Elizabeth (2006). On ethnomethodology, feminism, and the analysis of categorial reference to gender in talk-in-interaction. *Sociological Review*, 54(3), 467-494.
- Streeck, Jürgen; Krämer, Hannes & Salomon, René (2019). Zwischen den Stühlen der Konversationsanalyse und der Ethnomethodologie. Jürgen Streeck im Gespräch mit Hannes Krämer & René Salomon. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3269>.

Suchman, Lucy A. (1987). *Plans and situated actions. The problem of human-machine communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Suchman, Lucy A. (2007a). *Human-machine reconfigurations: Plans and situated actions* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Suchman, Lucy A. (2007b). Feminist STS and the sciences of the artificial. In Edward Hackett, Olga Amsterdamska, Michael Lynch & Judy Wajcman (Eds.), *The handbook of science and technology studies* (3rd ed., pp.139-163). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Suchman, Lucy A. (2011). Practice and its overflows: Reflections on order and mess. *Tecnoscienza*, 2(1), 21-30.

Suchman, Lucy; Follis, Karolina & Weber, Jutta (2017). Tracking and targeting: Sociotechnologies of (in)security. *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 42(6), 983-1002.

Wolff, Stephan & Salomon, René (2019). "Wenn Ihnen der liebe Gott zwei Zehntelsekunden oder das 'Mhm' schenken würde, dann könnten Sie die Welt verändern." Stephan Wolff im Gespräch mit René Salomon. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3285>.

Authors

Lucy A. SUCHMAN, professor of anthropology of science and technology in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University since 2000. After earning her BA (1972), MA (1977) and PhD (1984) at the University of California at Berkeley she worked for twenty years as a researcher at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. She has been a visiting senior research fellow with the Work, Interaction and Technology Research Group at King's College London, an adjunct professor at the University of Technology, Sydney's Interaction Design and Work Practice Laboratory, and is currently an adjunct professor at the Information Technology University in Copenhagen, Denmark. Her research interests within the field of feminist science and technology studies are focused on technological imaginaries and material practices of technology design, particularly developments at the interface of bodies and machines.

Contact:

Prof. Lucy A. Suchman, PhD

Lancaster University
Department of Sociology
Bowland North, LA1 4YN Lancaster, UK

Tel.: +44 (0)1524 / 594185

E-mail: l.suchman@lancaster.ac.uk

URL:

<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/sociology/about-us/people/lucy-suchman>

Dominik GERST, born 1986 in Kassel, studied sociology and German philology at the Georg-August University in Göttingen. From 2014-2016 he received a doctoral scholarship in the post-graduate program "Perceiving and Negotiating Borders in Talk." From 2017 till September 2018 he was research associate in the research group "Border & Boundary Studies" at the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION. Since October 2018 he is research associate at the Institute for Communication Studies at the University Duisburg-Essen. In his dissertation project at the faculty of cultural and social studies at the Viadrina he is working on border knowledge in the German-Polish field of security. His research interests are border & boundary studies; ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, esp. membership categorization analysis; sociology of knowledge; qualitative methodology.

Contact:

Dominik Gerst, M.A.

University Duisburg-Essen
Institute for Communication Studies
Universitätsstraße 12, 45141 Essen, Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)201 / 183 3440

Fax: +49 (0)201 / 183 3129

E-mail: dominik.gerst@uni-due.de

URL: <https://www.uni-due.de/kowi/instikom/dgerst.php>

Hannes KRÄMER, born 1980 in Weimar, studied communication studies and social sciences at the universities of Duisburg-Essen, Maynooth and Bern. He was research associate at the Excellence Cluster 16 at the University Konstanz. He received his PhD in 2013 for his work on creative work at the faculty of cultural and social studies at the European-University Viadrina. From 2014-2016 he led the research project "Temporal Boundaries of the Presence" and afterwards he led the research group "Border & Boundary Studies" and was scientific coordinator at the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION. Since 2018 he is professor of communication in institutions and organizations at the University Duisburg-Essen. His research interests are studies of work and organization; cultural sociology; practice theory and micro-sociology; border & boundary studies; sociology of time; mobility studies; ethnography.

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Hannes Krämer

University Duisburg-Essen
Institute for Communication Studies
Universitätsstraße 12, 45141 Essen, Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)201 / 183 3540

Fax: +49 (0)201 / 183 3129

E-mail: hannes.kraemer@uni-due.de

URL: <https://www.uni-due.de/kowi/instikom/hkraemer.php>

Citation

Suchman, Lucy; Gerst, Dominik & Krämer, Hannes (2019). "If You Want to Understand the Big Issues, You Need to Understand the Everyday Practices That Constitute Them." Lucy Suchman in Conversation With Dominik Gerst & Hannes Krämer [35 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3252>.