The final version of this review is to be found in:
Human Studies (2014) 37: 597-602
(http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10746-014-9313-5)

"*More* Studies in Ethnomethodology", by Kenneth Liberman, Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2013, 310 pp. + index, 26.95, pbk, 90.00 hbk.

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I shall confess since the beginning that I have fallen in love with this book. Reasons are as varied as its merits. First, it actually constitutes what the title promises: "*More* Studies in Ethnomethodology". This is not just because of the (seemingly out of a novel) Foreword by Harold Garfinkel and the life-time collaboration of which the latter and the book itself testify between the founder of Ethnomethodology and one of his students, Kenneth Liberman —by now Professor Emeritus with his own experience of "25 years of teaching ethnomethodology" (Garfinkel, p. ix). It is especially because of the "freshness" with which the text captures "many ideas central to ethnomethodology" (*ibid*.).

Second, indeed, the book is very well written; arguments flow in an amazingly clear and vivid way. This makes it a perfect textbook for students in ethnomethodology to have a less initiate-like encounter with the discipline.[1] It allows them to see "what one can do" with ethnomethodology before having to deal with its epistemological and methodological foundations at the most theoretical and abstract level. Actually, such foundational bases —those "seminal matters" that, Liberman states in closing the Acknowledgements, "Professor Garfinkel first discovered decades ago" (p. vii)— emerge and manifest themselves to the reader through reading itself. Like it had been for Garfinkel's and then Liberman's students, the reader has "the opportunity to learn phenomenological and ethnomethodological ideas not only theoretically but from […] studies of real worldly affairs" (p. 1).

From this point of view, a further merit of the publication is the varied ensemble of detailed empirical cases it discusses: from street-crossing (ch. 1) to map-following (ch. 2), from boardgames play (ch. 3) to the (intercultural) communication of meanings in interaction (ch. 4-5), from Tibetan philosophical debating (ch. 6-7) to coffee tasting (ch. 8)[2]. Such a multiplicity also represents Liberman's life-time research work and teaching endeavor. While entering the details of each considered setting, the reader simultaneously apprehends and comprehends both (a) its quiddity, its hecceity —"the 'more' that any good phenomenological study can offer" (p. 3)— and, as heuristic precipitates, (b.i) the methods and techniques that allowed for grasping the latter, and (b.ii) the features of order* that constitute ethnomethodology's knowledge byproduct as much as foundations. Indeed, "the aim of ethnomethodology is not to 'apply' concepts, but to

1 "Garfinkel's writings are […] the reference texts, but at the same time their resistance to hasty or schematic reading make them ideal material for discussion […] on reading Garfinkel, the Nietzsche of Ecce Homo comes to mind: 'Whoever knows how to breathe the air of my writings knows that it is an air of heights, a strong air. One must be made for it, otherwise there is no small danger of being chilled by it'." (Fele, 2012, pp. 153-54).

2 The last two chapters are the most dense ones, reading benefits from some familiarity with ethnomethodology. The fourth chapter, instead, is perhaps the less enlightening for EM scholars.

'place oneself in a position' to make discoveries […]. Phenomena of social order have their origin not in any general concepts but in the *sites* of people's lives." (p. 6)

Finally, the book is relevant, at an interdisciplinary level: it discusses issues that are crucial for philosophy, particularly phenomenology, as well as —or, better, at the intersection with—social sciences, in particular sociology, and cognitive sciences. Although each chapter tackles explicitly one or two key problems, the latter are evidently interconnected, and they intertwine and mutually clarify each other along the whole text. Before touching upon them, let me consider that such interdisciplinarity —or, perhaps better, transdisciplinarity— points to ethnomethodology's peculiar "status" within the social sciences.

> Although ethnomethodology was born and developed within the disciplinary confines of sociology, it seems to have forcefully asserted its autonomy from the latter. […] did Garfinkel want simply to point out a disciplinary alternative? Was he founding a new discipline alongside sociology, as well as psychology, anthropology, etc.? (Those interested might usefully compare the case of Freud and the birth of psychoanalysis 'in opposition to' psychiatry and medicine). (Fele, 2012, p. 154-55)

Rod Watson talks of "a methodologically radically different and incompatible program" (2009, p. 496).

I shall start by considering what I deem a very good exemplification —and quite interesting specification— of the notion of accountability. Such an ethnomethodological cornerstone emerges from the analysis of "The local orderliness of crossing Kincaid", the first chapter. By examining the diverse practices people enact in order to cross the street, such as doing [Oblivious] to gain access, or doing [Keeping oneself moving] to merge into the traffic, Liberman shows that "they are not merely actions—they are demonstrations, exhibits of obliviousness […] not just merging, but merging-while-engaging-in-a-public-demonstration-of-merging" (p. 33, *passim*). He underlines, moreover, "the continuous engagement in coordinated activity", "the sociality of the occasion because *one is continuously oriented to the public observability of the action one is taking*" (*ibid*.). What I find more interesting, however, and challenging given what it entails for our understanding of consciousness, is Liberman's claim that such "methods for exhibiting" (p. 34), such "displays are made not only for the sake of receiving confirmation, thereby objectivating the practice, but also to help clarify *for oneself* the reasonableness and public availability of a method one has come upon." (p. 33).[3] Later on in the book, discussing his model of meaning communication, he states:

> What ethnomethodology has located is not, strictly speaking, a subjective point of view since the intelligibility of the scenes examined usually has an objectivity that *precedes* its meaning. The intelligibilities reside in the display that parties use to demonstrate—to themselves—what they are doing. (p. 144)

Such accountability work gives one the sense of one's own being and doing in the world, during its unfolding and within the (intersubjective) frame of the surrounding phenomenal field and of the local (self-organizing) gestalt contexture. "Consciousness is to be defined with reference to a sphere of meaning. To experience an act is the same

3 "Only by objectivating their thinking and redrawing it into formal, public structures can [Tibetan philosophers] proceed with their philosophical work." (p. 192)

as to actualize the meaning. […] Intentionality means the objectivating function of consciousness." (Garfinkel, 2006, p. 135)

These issues' relevance for philosophy, social, and cognitive sciences becomes even clearer by considering the phenomenological notion of salience, which indeed Liberman introduces quite soon. Borrowing from Aron Gurwitsch and Garfinkel, he defines a salience as "an opportunity that is segregated from the phenomenal field and seized upon", "an opening to skate through", something "that emerges autochthonously and disappears suddenly", so that "the bulk of the actions […] are largely unavailable to rational planning." (pp. 20-21, *passim*) When describing methods of way-finding by following sketched maps, he further clarifies, referring also to Maurice Merleau-Ponty[4] and Alfred Schutz, that "[o]ne does not so much follow a map as follow the *developing looks of the world* as it is configured with the aid of the consulting map" (p. 49, emphasis added), whose cogency "is grounded in the *tangible* contingencies of the worldly traveling" (p. 48).[5] Therefore, "the coherence way-finders develop for, and with, a map is a coherence that must keep itself *open* to what it does not yet know while at the same time *keep tamed* the very wide-ranging, perspectival orientations that proliferate during the map-reading. This is practical reasoning" (*ibid*.), and it is accomplished "while having something less than analytic clarity" (p. 69). This applies to map-following as much as rule-following in playing previously unknown games: "Let's just drive" is akin to "Let's just play", and the coherence of rules, like that of maps, comes about during and through their (interactional) practical usage (cf. pp. 69, 83-85).[6] Also notice that, in his seminal work on trust, starting from the discussion of basic rules in known games,[7] Garfinkel (1963) talks of "assorted *perceptual and judgmental* work" in which people engage "[o]n occasions of *discrepancies* between expected and actual events" in order to normalize such discrepancies (p. 188, emphasis added) —the opposite but same endeavor than "building" in the first place a sense, a coherence, something to (be) expect(ed) and recognize(d).[8]

Practical reasoning —or "the immanent activity of thinking which includes how ideas are shaped and formed, shared and objectivated, and when necessary evaded and transformed" (p. 45)— is another topic central to the ethnomethodological effort of accounting for the accomplishment of orderliness in social action-in-interaction, and brings us closer to another classic "problem" in philosophy and the social sciences: that of meaning, and its intrinsic ambiguity, its necessary equivocality. If any "behavior signifies an action in terms of an assumed normative order" (Garfinkel, 1963, p. 195), still judgment and deliberation are left to people with respect to which order of events is *salient* at the moment given the interaction's contingencies —and this is particularly

4 Garfinkel's favorite author, apparently (Liberman, 2012, p. 274).

5 "Maps suggest to people what to look for, and what they find permits them to arrange the orderliness of the map, which then is capable of providing them further assistance in how to scrutinize the landscape." (p. 57) "We freely employ our capacity to tweak the particulars we have in hand into an interpretation that can be made to seem reasonable." (p. 75)

6 "'Let's just play and see.' See what? See what the rule mean, in the only place they can have meaning— in the context of game play. […R]ules are used as a fabric for collecting procedures of orderly play; and the procedures they collect become just what the rules mean." (p. 85).

7 Garfinkel (1963, p. 208) briefly considers the other case. I think the notion of passing (Garfinkel, 1967, ch. 5) has its roots there.

8 See also Garfinkel (2006, p. 123) on the "temporal mode of apprehension".

true in intercultural conversations, where breakdowns and hermeneutic incidents are indeed frequent (cf. ch. 5). Liberman's *dynamic* account of thinking —his analysis of the "ordinary expertise that is required to make sense of the world, in just the ways that people make sense" (*ibid*.)— constitutes the core of his life-time research endeavor, and anchors his discussion of the manifold settings he focused on during his career (see also Harris, 2009). The necessary indeterminacy of meaning (p. 139) and the reflexive character of understanding (p. 136) feature, Liberman has shown, in the "jointly made" (p. 147) sense-building work we ordinarily do with (sets of) signs on maps, (sets of) game rules, (sets of) taste descriptors (ch. 8; cf. also Liberman, 2012a), (sets of) concepts and logical relations (ch. 6-7; cf. also Liberman, 2004), and (sets of) words alike (ch. 4-5; cf. also Liberman, 2011, 2012b).

Words, indeed, are not different from maps, rules, or "tasting cards" (see pp. 234-35 in particular): "people witness the drift of meaning over the course of their conversing, and when they spot opportunities for taming the equivocality of words, they can seize them." (Liberman, 2012b, p. 265) The success or failure of communication depends "*on the immediate local details* of the interaction's organization" (p. 176), since "the sign and the order are *mutually elaborative*" (p. 148): "the prior utterance does not determine its own sense but *collects* its sense from what it elicits in the social interaction" (Liberman, 2012b, p. 267), so that "talk itself […] becomes another contingency of that interaction." (Garfinkel & Sacks, cit. p. 148)[9] What happens in conversation is that "words and meanings are displayed by speakers, and in turn by listeners […], and once displayed become available for copy, further invention and elaboration, or adoption as what was meant 'all along'." (p. 148)

The "problem" of meaning is that of its fixation, stabilization, *normalization* — that is, that of objectivity and objectivation, perhaps the most classical philosophical concerns among those considered in the book. Liberman explicitly focuses on such issues in two chapters, "The reflexivity of rules in games" and "The phenomenology of coffee tasting", but, as you have probably noticed by now, it is about a *fil rouge* that underlies his entire reasoning. To objectivate is to make a public object of something; it is a practical, jointly made work in which "*the sharing precedes knowledge*, and knowledge is its precipitate." (p. 118) Such local work is essential to organize and carry out the activity at hand —whether it is conversing, playing games, philosophical debating, or coffee tasting. On the one hand, it serves to organize the intelligibility of phenomena and the local orderliness of affairs: "once a sense emerges autochthonously *it needs to be exhibited* so that all can witness and get on the same page […]. As players see what the practices are and repeat them, the game's practices become more stable." (p. 120) Similarly, once tasters "*accomplish some stabilization of the meaning of the descriptors*, each taster can use the descriptors consistently, […] and better ensure that what one taster means comes to approximate what the next taster means." (p. 234) On the other hand, it serves the reflexive understanding of one's own experience: "coffee tasters' de-

9 And indeed "the first rule of a conversation is survival." (p. 178; see also: pp. 144, 158, 284 note 6; Liberman, 1980; 2012b, p. 273) In Goffmanian (e.g., 1967) fashion, Liberman underlines that social "obligations can, and usually do, overshadows the semantic issues." (p. 174; see also p. 129) Since sometimes this may prove quite problematic for the activity at hand (as also Liberman notices, see pp. 157, 177), I deem interaction self-preserving tendency a crucial notion, worth further inquiry (see also Bassetti et al., 2013).

scriptions are addressed to other tasters to whom they look for confirmation and some elaboration, *perhaps even for what they mean by they own descriptors*." (p. 220) In sum, "[t]hought is able to know itself only to the extent that it objectivates itself, and such objectivation is a social event." (p. 121; see also p. 230) "Noema (what is meant) […] is the object intruding upon thought as thought is engaged in encountering itself." (pp. 271-72) Ultimately, "it is by enhancing the role of subjectivity that objectivity can be witnessed." (p. 259)

I shall close with Liberman's warning against concept-centered analysis, and his pleading for the study of nonconceptual phenomena of order, such as rhythms:[10] "there is a danger of too narrowly constraining what meaning can be. […] It may be the case that for ethnomethodology to make further progress, it will need to more deeply explore wordless phenomena" (p. 42). Otherwise, one may miss how the aesthetic properties of Tibetan philosophers' debating "are vital for organizing their local orderliness. It is the way they manage to conjoin the two mental flows of the participants." (p. 193; see also p. 190) One may overlook the fact that if coffee tasters "find something in the taste that resist being said […] this is where they focus their attention." (p. 248) Or the fact that dancers' capability of "sensing one another" is what allows for reciprocal kin(aesth)etic and rhythmical homogeneity, and for jointly creating and inhabiting the ongoing "meaningful context" the performance itself consists of (Bassetti, 2014). Rhythmic contours, after all, may also foster the stabilization of meanings and signifying practices in conversation, with all this entails in terms of shared commitments to, and moral force of, such meanings and practices (p. 149).

I share Liberman's interest in wordless phenomena, and I am convinced of their transdisciplinary relevance, yet I am afraid we will still face a problem —that Liberman's book does not solve: we are in need of ways for returning the detailed exploration of worldly phenomena of order —wordless ones especially— in their vivid quiddity, and sensitively to lived experience. The forced reduction of the video-recordings on which the analysis is based to transcripts and (blurred) pictures deprives Liberman's arguments of part of their force and explicative power. I had had various opportunity to watch such recordings; when I borrowed Liberman's book to a colleague (a philosopher) and then discussed it with him, who was fascinated as much as critically engaged by/with it, I suddenly found myself saying: "Wait, you should see the videos, this does not render at all. That [what Liberman describes] is precisely what happens!" In the shared commitment to knowledge objectivation, I felt the need of a better "resemblance" to the gestalt contexture.

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10 This could also be a good way to "reconcile" phenomenology and cognitive theory, as Ralph Ellis (2013) wishes for.

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