Four months ago Gian Marco Campagnolo sent me an email inviting me to speak about phenomenology to the group here, and I emailed to Gian Marco, “Yes, I know a good deal about phenomenology, but I know nothing about Information Systems: how can I learn what would be relevant to say to them? I said I was interested because I had a long friendship with the chair of our Computer Science Department and also I had three colleagues that are ethnomethologists—Lucy Suchman, Jack Whalen, and Marilyn Whalen—and who have done interesting research for Xerox about how people actually use Xerox machines. I am aware of their work and I am also aware that I should know more.

I have, however, been spending most of the last twelve years studying the practices of reasoning of Tibetan monks, including spending three years in Buddhist monasteries, so I am not very up to date on what information systems research has been accomplishing, so I asked Gian Marco

ABSTRACT
This chapter is based on a talk presented to the Alpis Information Systems 2009 Annual Conference Carisolo, Italy. It examines the role of phenomenology, most importantly Heidegger’s notion of Befindlichkeit, in social situations. In discussing the meaning of “situated,” the chapter covers the importance of in situ studies, the problems with over-conceptualizing and the limits of Conoscenza Teoretica, Befindlichkeit, itself, and the limits of formal analysis.
again, “How can my participation be useful?” and he replied that there is a group very interested in phenomenology. He sent me an article by Claudio Ciborra to introduce me to the interest of ALPIS in phenomenology, and so I said yes. It was then that he informed me that I was to speak the first night. I rejected that idea, saying that if someone does not know what the people are thinking, you want him to speak late in the program. I added that I was certain there would be something of relevance I could say after listening to all of the papers, but it was an unreasonable expectation for the first night.

Then I began reading Ciborra’s article, “Getting to the Heart of the Situation: The Phenomenological Roots of Situatedness,” and I ran across this passage from pages 5-6:

References to phenomenology are often made, but never quite fully explored and exploited. Col- lateral aspects are mentioned, such transparency, ready-to-handedness, and so on. Yet nobody quotes Section 29 of Being and Time, where Heidegger (1962, pp. 172 – 182) introduces the notion of situatedness (Befinlichkeit), contrasting it with the privileged role attributed then (and now) to understanding, cognition, and the purely mental. … Lack of proper references to phenomenology while using its ascendance may also induce the reader not versed in philosophy to believe that what these authors say about situatedness is indeed all that phenomenology has had to say on the subject.

So I considered; if they want to know more about phenomenology and one of their founding thinkers has recommended reading Section 29 of Heidegger’s Being and Time, then instead of offering more talk about phenomenology, our meeting could be an occasion for reading some phenomenology, and I could think of no better selection from Heidegger than the Section 29 cited by Ciborra.

Ciborra’s paper “Getting to the Heart of the Situation,” could be re-titled, “How did Befindlichkeit come to be ‘Situated,’ and what has it lost along the way?” Ciborra complains about what the Americans, like Suchman, do with Heidegger when they undertake “situated studies.” I have some sympathy with Ciborra’s lament here. As a social phenomenologist, I can say that I have spent much of the past four decades wincing whenever I heard or read sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, etc. use the term “phenomenological.” During this time, the thin, shallow use of the term “phenomenology” is probably the principal reason I have rejected the manuscripts that I review for various journals and publishers.

So, let us examine Heidegger’s section on “Being as Attunement.” My discussion is divided into four parts:

1. What is the big deal about in situ studies?
2. The problem with over-conceptualizing, and the limits of Conoscenza Teoretica.
3. Befindlichkeit
4. The limits of formal analysis

WHAT IS THE BIG DEAL ABOUT IN SITU STUDIES

How can something so subjective have had so much influence? For the significant reason that the way that most of our models represent the world is deeply flawed. This includes not only our models as analysts but also the lay models that ordinary people and professionals alike employ in their everyday life.

Our lives are lived subjectively, and our models do not account for the way we actually live our lives. They idealize matters, and the real work is made invisible; worse, the real work is obscured by the aggressive employment of our most cogent models. Worse still, the more cogent the models are made, the more obscuring they do. The actual