



Mundane technology: Memory, Meaning and Narrative

- Going to take an ‘ethnomethodologically informed’ view of work done
- And pose a little about doing ‘ethnography’

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what it says on the tin ...

- Work is done by families in their use of mobile phones
- In Smart Houses
- And by people doing various jobs of work e.g. schoolteachers; air traffic controllers; bank clerks; museum curators; ontologists

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- All involve technology in some way ...
- ... often very complex ...
- And always made to fit our purposes ...

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- ‘why would I want to go through three menus to turn on a light when I can have a switch?’
- ‘No, it’s very good ... I can see how central locking for a house could be really useful ... but not if it means Gemma is going to be locked in the bathroom ...’
- ‘what moron designed a music system that means that I have to listen to my wife’s Barry Manilow CDs when I’m not even in the same room?’

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- An Ethnomethodological view of the mundane
 - ‘mundane’ is not a quality held by a technology
 - there is no contrast class
 - ‘mundane’ is a feature of the 'natural attitude‘
 - No interpretive work is required when confronted with the ‘mundane’

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A Critical/complementary ethnography (2007)

the SenseCam trial (one week)

- Sensecam is an existing Microsoft technology- ‘a passive memory capture device’
- It was designed as a memory aid, but no particular context in view (apart from help with Alzheimer’s etc)
- We gave six of them out to see what people would do with them

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A Fistful of Dollars

- Work done collaboratively with Microsoft (memory); the BBC (UGC), and me (money)
- Each person got a Sensecam, a laptop, and help with any problems
- Asked to complete a very small number of basic tasks e.g. ‘choose a favourite photo and caption it’

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Existing literature

“An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas.”

- Drawn from psychology and sociology
- Psychology favours explanations of recall, its failures, and variables associated with that
- Sociology favours ‘collective remembering’ of one kind or another- rituals; ceremonies, the family, etc.

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- All of it completely useless ...

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And here's why ... some results ...

- *'It's a bit 'doctor-like' ... you could use it to show people how to do things ... like helping kids repair bikes ...'*
- *'yeah, it would be really interesting to get several people wearing them to the same event ...'*
- *'I put it on a kite. We were in the park ... I wanted to know what it looks like when you fly . I'd love to know what that's like so I put it on a kite with some gaffer tape. It didn't work though!'*
- *'Yeah, I wanted to put it on my dog. the world from his level ...'*
- *'I hung it from a tree in the allotment ...'*

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Some results ...

- *'I could use it all the time in my workshops ... it's usually impossible to get candid pictures of what they're up to ...'*
- *'It would be fantastic on holiday ... you wouldn't have to pose anything ...' [there was a subsequent discussion about how Sensecam might aid in the production of 'animated postcards'.]*
- *'I put it on for my marriage rehearsal ... I liked its informality ...'*

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Some results ...

- *'It could give you a kid's point of view. That would be interesting ...'*
- *'You could use it for disability awareness training.'*
- *'I'd love to take one to a rugby match ...'*
- *'I'm partially deaf ... you could use it to give people an idea of what my world is like ...'*

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- **How are we to think about results of this kind?**

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The Enormous Room : Aesthetics and creativity ...



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- *M. Oh yeah, the bowling ones [images of a group of friends ten pin bowling] ... especially the arty ones , this one . I captioned this, 'great bowls of fire' ... I love those kind of abstract images*

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A break for the movie ...

Gareth Davies made this film

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the movie ...

- *Gareth; 'they're not actually sequential ... I moved pictures around a bit ... thought it looked better ...'*
- *'It's nice to add music ... I wanted to slow it down ... the movie is a bit 'keystone cops' so I added some nice slow music ...'*
- *'I put in some 'secret moments' ... things that are special to me that other people might not notice ...'*

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Thank you for the days ...



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S: ... cos, I'd had like the worst day ever ... I just found it ..., she'd been driving me absolutely mad ... and we were in the playground and there was no-one there ... and she was ... she won't eat properly .. she's so small ...

Q: And what you've written, is that documenting [image of daughter next to a giraffe painted on the wall]...

S: Yeah, yeah, it was like the conversation we had ... it was like, 'but Mum, when ... when am I going to be bigger? ...'

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And the text ...

MUM, WHEN WILL I BE BIGGER?
But mum when will I be bigger?
...When you eat all your meals
But mum what do I need to eat to get bigger?
...you need to eat your breakfast, lunch and dinner
But I don't like all my food. Do giraffes eat all their food?
...they do
Do they like beans, chips and chocolate cake?
...no darling they like leaves and shoots
But I like chocolate cake... will chocolate cake make me bigger?
...only if you eat your meals too
If I eat all my meals will I be as big as a giraffe?
....you'll be bigger
But mum, how big am I?
...you're 90 centimetres

But mum, will I be as big as a giraffe next year?
...but Phoebe you don't want to be as big as a giraffe.
I do I want big long legs and a long neck.
...no you don't you are beautiful as you are.
But mum when will I be bigger?

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A Mad World, My Masters

- The 'world made strange'



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The world made strange ...

- *M:.. it was a bit like being in a silent movie ... you could see over the handlebars ... it made me look at things that I'd taken for granted in a different way ...*

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Stranger in a Strange Land

- *'Sensecam is not looking the way your head is looking'*
- *S: I noticed how much I was in the car ... how much you go shopping ... how much of your day is taken up by washing up ... you know ... you see quite a lot of the insides of my house'*
- *A: you look at newspapers and it's all about lifestyle ... that's why I like this ... it actually goes into the life you're leading ... the boring bits where you're not achieving status ... they turn out quite interesting ... it focuses on the things we don't [normally] reflect on ... you make a slightly different judgement ... it can be really reaffirming, to look back on a really nice day and say, oh, it was ok ...*

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- *S:... I actually caught her on camera eating a dog biscuit and giving another one to the dog ... the guilt on her face ... I never ever could have got that if I was trying to take pictures ...*
- *N: I took it on holiday and 80% of the photos were of my boyfriend ... but what I loved about it was the way it caught his mannerisms and behaviour ... the way he'd be looking out the window or watching something else...the mannerisms ...*

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The Past Is A Foreign Country...

- *'It would be interesting to look at someone else's life 60 years ago in the same house ... or maybe how people's lives cross if more than one person was wearing them ...'*

They Do Things Differently There ...

- *Give it out to several people at the same event ... a rock concert ... a football match ... see what they all make of it ...*

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A Few Dollars More ...

- *Editorial function*
- *Curation: the wall of data*
- *Integration with other technologies*
- *persistence*

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Apocalypse Now

▪ **Terror as a mundane activity**

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'So, what are you doing in Cambridge, Dave?'

I'm doing some work with Microsoft, it's about a technology called 'Sensecam'

[describes Sensecam's functionalities]

'F*, I could have done with that in Iraq ...'**

'What? Why?'

'Cos, when you're on patrol, all you can think about is the fact that you're f*ing terrified ... but you come back and you're supposed to write a report about what you've seen ... that could almost do it for you ...'**

I immediately began thinking about how you might link Sensecam to some sort of report generating facility (and GPS) for military, police and inspection work.

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Conclusion: What the Devil Do They Think They're up to?

“a tissue of common- sense notions that the Zande apparently regard as being true on their face: that minor cuts heal rapidly; that stoves render baked clay liable to cracking; that abstention from sexual intercourse is prerequisite to success in pot making; that in walking about in Zandeland it is unwise to daydream, for the place is full of tree stumps ... it is when ordinary expectations fail to hold, when the Azande man-in-the-field is confronted with anomalies or contradictions, that the cry of witchcraft goes up.”

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