

# “How Many Bloody Examples Do You Want?” – Fieldwork and Generalisation

Andy Crabtree and Peter Tolmie

School of Computer Science, University of Nottingham, UK.

*andy.crabtree@nottingham.ac.uk, peter.tolmie@nottingham.ac.uk*

Mark Rouncefield

Computing Department, University of Lancaster, UK.

*m.rouncefield@lancaster.ac.uk*

**Abstract.** The title of this paper comes from comments made by an ‘angry’ ethnographer during a debriefing session. It reflects his frustration with a certain analytic mentality that would have him justify his observations in terms of the number of times he had witnessed certain occurrences in the field. Concomitant to this was a concern with the amount of time he had spent in the field and the implication that the duration of fieldwork somehow justified the things that he had seen; the implication being that the more time he spent immersed in the study setting the more valid his findings and, conversely, the less time, the less valid they were. For his interlocutors, these issues speak to the *grounds* upon which we might draw general insights and lessons from ethnographic research regarding the social or collaborative organisation of human activities. However, the strong implication of the angry ethnographer’s response is that they are of no importance. This paper seeks to unpack his position and explicate what generalisation turns upon from the ethnographer’s perspective. The idea that human activities *contain their own means of generalisation* that cannot be reduced to extraneous criteria (numbers of observations, duration of fieldwork, sample size, etc.) is key to the exposition.

## Introduction

“Anger can only ever be the object of the academic gaze, never the legitimate subject of academic style ... Anger frightens because it violates the codes of rational detachment but even in this fright is contained a desire to communicate and include.” (Keith 1992)

The angry ethnographer's position may at-first-glance seem untenable: fundamentally he is suggesting that general insights may be derived from very short periods of fieldwork and even single cases. At first glance this seems to be deeply wrong-headed. After all, ethnography as many people know is an anthropological and sociological approach that requires the immersion of a fieldworker in the everyday lives of the people he or she studies; surely that takes time if nothing else? However, the ethnographer goes on to remind us that ethnography is different in a systems design context. He emphasizes *in a systems design context*, telling us that context matters, that it shapes and constrains ethnography. He points us at a text and quotes from it to make his point, telling us about the "diminishing returns" that set in *for design* with long periods of fieldwork and the need to marry fieldwork to various stages in the design process if it is to be an effective resource *for design* (Hughes et al. 1994). He tells us that the demands of design curtail ethnography as it is practiced in anthropology and sociology, radically reducing something that traditionally takes years to months, weeks and even days, and that this was one of the very early understandings that came out of interdisciplinary efforts to incorporate ethnography into design.

He tells us too that immersion does not necessarily imply long periods of fieldwork. That the point and purpose of immersion is to apprehend a setting or some activities from the "native's point of view" (Malinowski 1922). He concedes that this may well take the anthropologist – who studies people in societies in which he or she is not a member – a long time to do; that he or she has to start from scratch, learn the language, and the ways in which people do things. *But*, he says, the same does not necessarily apply to the sociological ethnographer, who studies members of his or her own society. In this context, the ethnographer already shares a great deal in common with the people being studied. They share a common tongue for starters, which makes finding out what other people do much easier, and radically reduces the period of immersion. Furthermore, as a member of the same society the sociological ethnographer may even do the same activities as the people being studied – especially as design moves out from the workplace into everyday life - and this too reduces the time required to apprehend the native's point of view.

It depends on the context, of course, on what is being studied – the more unfamiliar the work, the more time it takes to apprehend. That's a practical problem the ethnographer has to contend with but it is not what the business of ethnography is all about. Immersion and apprehension of the native's point of view is not an end, rather they are means to an end. This is where the angry ethnographer becomes quite emphatic. There is a reason he is doing ethnography and from his point of view this is what underpins his claims to generality. The end, he tells us, contrary to current trends in anthropology and sociology, is not to represent the native and champion the user's cause - to become a proxy user in a design context as it were - but to uncover the *collaborative organisation* of a

setting's work. He tells us that a single case may well be sufficient for that purpose because collaborative organisation is by definition social, tied not to individuals but to the activities that constitute the work of a setting, and that the ways in which activities are ordered provides for the generalisation of ethnographic findings even from short studies of single cases.

He cites, by way of example, studies of work in London Underground (Heath and Luff 1991) and how "surreptitious monitoring" is a generalisable property of the work insofar as it is manifestly not tied to particular individuals but to the *job* of controlling trains done by *whomever* is on shift or, similarly, how air traffic controllers "order the skies" through the collaborative orchestration of flight strips (Hughes et al. 1992), again regardless of which particular individuals are "working the skies" at any particular time. The angry ethnographer put the topic to bed with that but we suspect that the logic of generalisation inherent in his argument needs unpacking further if it is to be broadly appreciated. It is readily appreciable that fieldwork *in systems design* need *not* take a long time to do a) because it needs to marry up with design and its inherently fast-paced processes, and b) because the sociological ethnographer is already in possession of a good deal of the membership competence employed by the "natives", which is not to say that he or she doesn't need to work hard to further develop it as occasion demands or to convey "what anyone knows" to designers. Nonetheless, it is clearly the case that the duration of fieldwork can do nothing to assure us of the *validity* of the ethnographer's findings. That must turn upon other more exacting criteria, such as those that provide for and warrant general claims being made. It is to this matter in particular that we turn in the rest of the paper, explicating the sociological foundation that the angry ethnographer's claim stands upon and elaborating it through concrete examples. Why does it matter? If designers are to have confidence in ethnographic studies they need to be able to determine the veracity of the results provided by ethnographers. Understanding the basis on which generalisations can be made is a key ingredient not only of sound fieldwork, then, but also of interdisciplinary work *in systems design*.

## The Sociological Foundations of Generalisation

The angry ethnographer's claim to be able to generalise findings from short periods of fieldwork and single cases turns upon the sociological reasoning of the late Harvey Sacks. Sacks is best known for establishing the field of Conversation Analysis (Sacks 1992a), which is today a staple feature of mainstream social science, taught and practiced around the world. Conversation Analysis emerged from Sacks' dissatisfaction with the ways in which sociology conducted its business in the 1960s and his critique of sociology played an influential role in the development of Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967). Many in CSCW will be familiar with both Conversation Analysis and Ethnomethodology. The annals of

CSCW are peppered with numerous examples of such work. Rather less visible is Sacks' critique of sociology and how this impacts generalisation in both sociology and systems design insofar as the latter makes use of ethnographers and ethnographic findings.

## Sociological Description

In one of his earliest writings Sacks sought to “make sociology strange” in order to elaborate the problematic relationship between its “subject matter” and the “apparatus” used by sociologists (including ethnographers) to describe society and make generalisations about it. Sacks (1963) paints a picture of a machine to underscore the nature of the problem.

“At industrial and scientific exhibitions one encounters a machine which the layman might describe in the following terms. It has two parts; one is engaged in doing some job, and the other part synchronically narrates aloud what the first part does.

Sacks suggests that any attempt to make sense of the machine turns upon reconciling the parts of the object (i.e., the relationship between the doing and saying parts). Thus, the object might be understood by the layman as a “commentator machine”. The sociologist might understand it as it such too, though he or she will offer a much more elaborate (and even alternate) description of the machine. Nonetheless it is with *description* that for Sacks the problem of generalisation starts. He takes it that sociology is in the business of developing some kind of “scientific” account of social life, which does not necessarily mean describing society in positivistic terms only that some kind of rigour is required. However, at the outset sociology proceeds to describe social life through the use of an unexamined resource - natural language – with the consequence that the “common-sense” that is built into and ordinarily expressed through natural language descriptions is imported without scrutiny. Sacks thinks this a deeply problematic move.

“The emergence of sociology will take a different course (when it emerges) from that of other sciences because sociology, to emerge, must free itself not from philosophy but from the common-sense perspective ... The ‘discovery’ of the common-sense world is important as the discovery of a problem only, and not as the discovery of a sociological resource.”

For Sacks, common-sense ought to be the subject matter of sociology. However, insofar as it is used as an unexplicated resource then it produces a very particular methodological problem, and one that has a profound impact on sociological generalisations.

“The sole difference between the writings of sociologists and the talk about society of anyone else turns on the concern of sociologists with a single methodological problem which sociologists have ‘discovered’. I shall call this problem ‘the etcetera problem’.”

The etcetera problem recognises that general sociological descriptions – e.g., Marx’s theory of capital, Durkheim’s theory of anomie, or Weber’s theory of rational action - are incomplete. More can always be said about the objects the

theory describes, such descriptions can be extended indefinitely, and sociologists have of course been extending them for well over a century now. The upshot of the etcetera problem is that sociological descriptions are always *partial*. This means that the sociological object a theory describes cannot, as Sacks puts it,

“... be recaptured by using the description as instructions for locating it ... The reason these descriptions fail to be abstract in the sense typified by mathematics: general concepts of the latter sort retain the features of the particular cases – given the generalisation one can always recapture the particular object. Descriptions that neglect the features of particular objects prevent such recapture, and as the meaning of the etcetera problem is that even purported descriptions of particular objects neglect some *undetermined set* of their features, it is obvious that the mathematical sense of abstraction is not achievable given acceptance of the etcetera problem.”

Take Marx's description of the division of labour in society, for example, and how it fails to elaborate how work in any particular setting is organised or accomplished. Marx's description is a treatise on the social character of work per se and says little about *particular* manifestations (Button and Harper 1996).

Of course Marx is not the only sociologist whose theory fails to describe its constituent social objects in locatable detail. We cannot recapture the commonplace categorisation of “suicide” from Durkheim's theory of society (Douglas 1967), or “bureaucracy” at work in Weber's description of rational action (Blau 1964), anymore than we can recapture the social objects described by contemporary sociological descriptions. Labouring under the auspices of the etcetera problem the founding father's of sociology created a methodological apparatus that, unlike their particular descriptions of social objects, is alive and well today. That apparatus trades on common-sense, exploiting it as a resource that enables the production of general sociological descriptions but they are general, as Sacks puts it, only in the “trivial sense” that they speak about and portray *society at large*. This is in large part due to the ways in which sociologists orient themselves to describing society in the first place. Sacks (1984) again invokes the image of a machine by way of elaboration.

“The important theories in the social sciences have tended to view society as a piece of machinery with relatively few orderly products ... Such a view suggests that there are few places where, if we can find them, we will be able to tackle the problem of order ... So we can have an image of a machine with a couple of holes in the front. It spews out some nice stuff from those holes, and at the back it spews out garbage.

Not surprisingly sociologists are generally interested in the “nice stuff” that the machine spews out. This is usually determined and controlled by the “big issues” of the day. The “mundane, occasional, local, and the like” – the garbage in other words - is of no interest or worth other than as a common-sense resource contingently drawn upon to embed sociological reasoning in visible features of daily life and to thereby warrant sociological description of the “big issues” that shape it (Bacchus 1986). However, treating society in this way results in the etcetera problem.

No surprise then that Sacks proposed an alternative treatment, which suspends the assumption that order is a rare beast to be found in only a few places and replaces it with a view that order is a mundane feature of everyday life and a constituent feature of the ordinary activities and common-sense reasoning that inhabits and animates it. We might therefore assume, as Sacks (1984) puts it,

“... wherever we happen to attack the phenomenon we are going to find ... that there is order at all points.”

Thus, in place of a view of society that is possessed of very few orderly products, with those products being produced through the operation of “big” social phenomenon - such as the operations of political and legal institutions, organisations and corporations - we have instead a view that suggests that just about anything and everything that occurs in everyday life, no matter how mundane, is possessed of its own orderly characteristics.

Take the following piece of text - as plain a piece of garbage as you are ever likely to come across - by way of example: *The baby cried. The mommy picked it up* (Sacks 1992c). What on earth could be sociologically significant about this fragment of ordinary language?

“When I hear ‘The baby cried. The mommy picked it up,’ one of the things I hear is that the mommy who picks the baby up is the mommy of the baby. Now it’s not only the case that I hear it that way – and of course there’s no genitive there to say ‘its mommy picked it up,’ ‘his mommy,’ ‘her mommy’ – when I hear it that way a kind of interesting thing is that I also feel pretty confident that all of you, at least the natives among you, hear that also. Is it some kind of magic?” (ibid.)

How can something as seemingly trivial as a couple of throwaway sentences have such *enormous generalisability* built into them such that “all of you”, or “at least the natives” (that is, competent speakers of English in this case), hear that it was the baby’s mommy who picked it up when the words themselves *do not* specify that? The answer, for Sacks (1984), lies in the “*machinery of interaction*” that we natives (or members) use to order our everyday affairs. The interaction in this case lies in the reading-and-hearing of the text, though the machinery which orders this reading-and-hearing is also operative in the speaking-and-hearing of the words. It consists in the use of *membership categorisation devices* or MCD’s (Sacks 1992c) - collections of natural language categories such as ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘baby’, ‘uncle’, ‘grandmother’, etc., which members employ to characterise relationships between people - and *tying rules*, which provide for our hearing that the categories ‘baby’ and ‘mommy’ are first and second parts of a pair, that they belong together, and that the mommy is therefore the mommy of the baby even though nobody actually said so (Sacks 1992a).

The point in recounting the example, both for Sacks and us, is to provide a simple demonstration of the existence of an ordinarily seen but unnoticed or taken for granted “machinery of interaction”. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly for present purposes, the machinery is generalisable. You don’t need 10 or 100 or 1000 occurrences or instances of “*The baby cried. The mommy*

*picked it up.*" to generalise MCD's and tying rules. You only need one, and you only need one because *in ordering interaction*, the machinery provides for its *own generalisation*, including its reproducibility and prediction. Thus, on each and every occasion of its occurrence "all of you" will hear the same thing again – that the baby's mommy picked it up - and you will hear it that way because that is what the machinery very specifically provides for. How can that be?

Sacks' response to the question is how could it *not* be, given that we are all individuals who only ever experience a random portion of our culture?

"... any Member encountering from his infancy a very small portion of it, and a random portion in a way (the parents he happens to have, the experiences he happens to have, the vocabulary that happens to be thrown at him in whatever sentences he happens to get) comes out in many ways pretty much like everybody else, and able to deal with pretty much anyone else ... Now if one figures that that's the way things are to some extent ... you may well find that you got an enormous generalisability because things are so arranged that you *could* get them; given that for a Member encountering a very limited environment, he has to be able to do that, and things are so arranged as to permit him to." (Sacks 1992d)

In saying that members "come out pretty much like anyone else, and able to deal with pretty much anyone else" Sacks is not saying that we are all the same, but rather that our random encounters with our culture nevertheless provide us with a shared resource for 'arranging' the things that we find ourselves engaged in, even if we are familiar with those things or not.

"... in a great deal of the stuff I've been considering, I've been regularly pointing to the fact that people do it with persons they've never met, extend things to occasions they've never dealt with, etc., and do it with assurance and some success." (ibid.)

The shared cultural resource is *order* and it is provided for not by the operations of overarching political and legal institutions, organisations, corporations, *etcetera*, but through the operation of a machinery of interaction that may well have "enormous generalisability" built in to it because members use it *to arrange* their everyday affairs.

Sacks' respecification of sociology brings an unsuspected phenomenon into view: the machinery of interaction whereby everyday affairs are ordered. The machinery not only consists of MCD's and tying rules. Sacks' work (1992a) revealed a great many other parts of the machinery ordering talk, not that he was interested in conversation per se, he "just happened to have it" available. His writings make it clear that he recognised there was much more to everyday life and that a great deal is left untouched and unexplicated by his work. In transforming sociology's subject matter Sacks didn't simply want sociologists and ethnographers to become Conversation Analysts, but rather he set up the broader problem of uncovering the machinery of interaction as sociology's goal. Thus, on any occasion of inquiry, no matter the social object,

"Our aim is to get into a position to transform ... our view of 'what happened', from a matter of particular interaction done by particular people, to a matter of interactions as products of a machinery. We are trying to find the machinery." (Sacks 1984)

The machinery of interaction has been characterised by various labels, including members' methods, procedures, and most notably in the context of CSCW, work practices. Whatever the nomenclature, elaboration of the orderly ways in which people arrange their affairs in interaction reveals the "operational structure" of ordinary activities (Garfinkel 1967); in short, *how they are done* and reflexively *organised* as a *social* or collaborative enterprise in real time interaction. A single case of the machinery of interaction at work on any particular occasion is generalisable because it is a *shared cultural resource* for arranging the everyday affairs it elaborates. It is in this sense that activities may be said to contain their own means of generalisation. What we want to do next is move beyond an abstract elaboration of the foundations of sociological generalisation to examine a concrete example of it at work in design.

## Shaping PlaceBooks

The approach advocated by Sacks and the angry ethnographer was adopted in the development of a system called PlaceBooks. It is not our aim here to provide a detailed description of the system but to *explicate the nature of ethnographic study and generalisation in its development*. Suffice to say that the development of PlaceBooks was occasioned by the recognition that multi-media solutions such as Google Maps provide inadequate support for people to map rural places. While it is possible to add a variety of user-generated content (trails, text, photos, video, etc.) the results lack sufficient granularity to be of much practical use in rural situations. The problem becomes more apparent when we contrast current solutions with the simple pen and ink sketches produced by the late Alfred Wainwright of the Lake District in the UK, which have sold in their millions since their initial publication in 1965. To this day there are no digital equivalents.<sup>1</sup>

Wainwright's sketches *contextualise place*, exploiting maps, text, diagrams of routes and landscape drawings to elaborate features of a location that are *salient* to human interaction with it: in this case features that are salient to 'walking the fells'. Researchers involved in the development of PlaceBooks sought to enable people to purpose digital resources to contextualise place and support a wide range of rural activities. Not only walking, but also cycling, climbing, surfing, sailing, bird watching, and the rest. The initial problem that confronted the design team was how to get handle on what kind of system they should build? A range of approaches were adopted to help develop answers to the question, including envisioning new means of documenting people's experience of place using

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<sup>1</sup> Compare, for example, the various representations provided by Google Maps of Eskdale in the UK with Wainright's: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-TuXyhpJX7tc/TmC9lZBtYbI/AAAAAAAAsE/w2hfYfBaAms/s1600/WainwrightPage.jpg>

ubiquitous computing technology, new forms of map representation, and commissioning an ethnographic study to understand the cooperative work involved in the act of visiting place based on the premise that no matter what one is visiting a place for there may well be generic features of the *act* that frame engagement and raise requirements for systems design.

## The Act of Visiting Place

The act of visiting place falls more generically under the umbrella of tourism and a large body of work has emerged over recent years that focuses on the invention of the rural as *a place of leisure* (Agyeman and Neal 2006). Labouring under the auspices of the etcetera problem, a range of different theoretical perspectives jostle together to elaborate that generic sociological character of visiting rural places. It is seen as response to the ways in which modern living conditions 'numb' us (Le Breton 2000), for example, and as a means of 'reconnecting' with ourselves at both a sensorial and spiritual level (Sharpley and Jepson 2010). Postmodern and critical treatments urge us to consider tourism as a performance enacted in place (Edensor 2001) and place itself as multi-layered and interconnected 'text' (Staiff 2010) whose intelligibility resides in the tourist 'gaze' (Urry 2002). Whichever way you construe of it, the turn to the countryside as a major site of leisure is of demonstrable economic benefit to rural communities, and this in turn shapes a wide variety of theoretical views on the pros and cons of 'ecotourism' (Higham 2007).

Nonetheless, as we seek to treat the common-sense world as a topic for investigation - rather than as a resource for theorising tourism in rural contexts - we focus upon what visiting involves as a *practical sociological* matter (Crabtree et al. 2012), as something which requires collaborative work and organisation *by the parties involved* if they are to bring the act of visiting about. The specific visit we observed was that of a family of six to the 'Parc Naturel Regional de Chartreuse' in South-Eastern France, about an hour's drive away from where the family lived, in November 2010. The family itself was composed of Dave (50), Chloe (42), Paul (20), Jane (16), Marcus (14), and Sarah (8). The visit took place at a weekend and the nature reserve in question had recently experienced one of the first major snowfalls of the year (much of the reserve is above 1,000 metres). All of the data was gathered through natural, in situ observation and involved a mixture of video and audio recordings, photographs, and handwritten notes. All in all the study involved 20 hours of fieldwork distributed across 16 days, with over half the fieldwork taking place on the actual day of the visit. It is not possible in the space available to provide an extremely detailed account of the collaborative work involved in making the visit happen (c.f. Tolmie and Crabtree 2013). Instead, and in sequential order of their occurrence, we elaborate the key organisational features of that work.

### *Occasioning The Possibility*

The first step towards a visit occurring is the *occasioning of it as a possibility*. There are a variety of ways in which such occasioning might take place. It might be that it arises apropos of nothing much in particular - ‘because we were bored’, ‘because the weather is nice’, ‘because we need to get out of the house for while’, ‘because the kids are driving us crazy’, and so on – or it might be occasioned in a variety of other ways and for a variety of other reasons. Previous promises, for instance, or as a way of encouraging someone to do something else, such as a particularly onerous project for homework, or as a reward for doing something else. The time of year and recurrence of events might occasion the possibility. Recollections of places already visited, triggered by photographs or someone mentioning someone else is going to a place you’ve already been to and liked, often occasion visits too. But perhaps the most commonplace occasioning of all is the occurrence of some special event, such as Mum’s birthday, or it being Easter Monday or some other one-day holiday, or an anniversary, and so on. In our case, what occasioned the visit was that we asked the family to ‘go and have a day out in the country’ so that we could study it. Whatever occasions the possibility, the occasioning itself brings with it a certain body of interactional work, which we shall explicate as we work our way through the sequence.

### *Making The Possibility Concrete*

Having agreed on the possibility to visit a place the next organisational matter the cohort must address is to make it concrete by *deciding where to go*. This is wrapped up with such practical matters as deciding *when* to go and *what to do* when you get there. Family routines rarely allow for total spontaneity. Decisions about when to go on a visit have to accommodate the routine and the reasoning implicated in decision-making must here take the various commitments and obligations of family members into account (what about school, what about work, what else do we have to do, what time can we leave, when must we be home by, etc.). Decision-making here also turns upon matters such as what the weather is likely to be like on the day, whether the place might be heaving with people (for instance on a bank holiday), and whether there are things to be done the next day that might be impacted. Decisions of when to go are also quicker to make than decisions of where to go, but have to be made by a certain time, as the visit may occasion planning and preparation and space needs to be allowed for this, though they are more quickly resolved than decisions of where to go.

Deciding where to go depends upon the potential cohort. Not all days out will necessarily encompass everyone in a household, so not everyone has a say. Furthermore, some members of the household have limited discussion and decision-making rights, particularly young children. On the other hand, strong differential rights may be operative (e.g. if it’s your birthday, you decide). For a whole family day out, when no one has particular rights of choice (such as the one

we are looking at here), everyone is potentially involved in deciding where to go and this can make it hard for the group to ratify a decision. So it's not a case of saying "right, we're going hang-gliding", for example, but rather "shall we go hang-gliding?" which can then implicate either acceptance or rejection by the cohort. Once an initial proposition has been floored, subsequent suggestions may be considered iteratively. Consider, for instance, the following vignette.

Chloe: Dad suggested visiting a glacier. A guided walk up into the mountains.

Jane: Yeah, that sounds good.

Dave: That's what I was thinking because the Alps are within striking distance and we could do that within a day trip.

Paul: (dubiously) Mmm.

Chloe: What else could we do up in the mountains?

Dave: I don't know.

Chloe: Bobsleighing.

Dave: It depends whether there's snow'

Paul: I'd like to do that'

Jane: I'd be happy to go up into the Alps just to take photos.

Paul: Go skiing? Family skiing trip.

Chloe: Well I like skiing.

Paul: I haven't tried yet'

Chloe: And if we go to a centre there's not just skiing. Ice skating! There could be ice skating.

Jane: I don't like ice skating any more.

Chloe: No?

Jane: Well every time I do it I keep getting knocked down.

What can be seen here is that an initial proposal provides for the subsequent utterances to be ratifications or counter-proposals. Furthermore, two or more suggestions open the floodgates because apparent uncertainty provides the rights for proposal across a broader cohort. Add to this that there are numerous grounds upon which the appropriateness of a suggestion may be considered: time, cost, distance, weather, relative interest, majority and minority interest, novelty, risk, excitement, proximity, adherence to the original proposition, and so on, can all enter into the discussion. All proposals are potentially accountable to these considerations and rejections can be articulated on the same grounds.

Arriving at suggestions, let alone decisions, takes work then and not all of it discursive in the first instance. Dave had anticipated that making a decision on where to go could be problematic and had prepared a list of links in a text file prior to the discussion. This involved a substantial body of work on his part, with a range of Google searches, examination of specific websites, and copying over of links from the browser to the text file so that they could be quickly transported to the machine in the living room and thus made visible to everyone at the same time. In this way group discussion came to revolve around physical presentation and display of a range of different resources associated with the possibility of visiting *some* place, including websites, brochures, advertised events, maps, and so on. This meant that discussions of where to go bled into discussions of what to

do and vice versa. Nonetheless, a decision was eventually arrived at and the Chartreuse Natural Park agreed upon.

### *Making Ready For The Visit*

Decision in hand the next organisational matter to be addressed consists of *making ready for the visit*. In this case, making ready drew upon the use of a range of physical and digital resources, with some aspects being directly collaborative (e.g. deciding what to do about food), whilst other aspects may be undertaken by dedicated individuals (e.g. buying food to take on the trip). A number of considerations are potentially relevant here, including deciding what route to take, what things to take, what time to leave, financing, who to tell, contingencies to cover, and who should do what and when. Families do not just go out on day trips by walking out of the door. There is a whole range of mundane and taken for granted work implicated in *getting out of the door*. Things of relevance, things to be taken, have to be brought together and much of this cannot be done days ahead of departure. Often it is work that has to be done just before you go. So people have to be got up and organised in readiness for departure, and this itself may have to be discussed the day before. In this case Dave and Chloe decided an exact order of who would get up and wake who in turn in the morning. Things to be taken – especially food and drink – may take active preparation no sooner than the night before, perhaps even on the day itself. Houses may have to be prepared for a day of absence by locking doors, shutting windows, changing the heating, and so on. Things have to be loaded into cars. Verification may happen at a number of places that the right things are being brought together and prepared, as we can see in the following interaction between Dave and Chloe.

Dave goes out to car with coat and boots - Opens the boot and puts them in - Goes back into house and gathers up all the other coats and brings them out to put in the boot as well - Goes back into house and brings out another pair of boots and a rucksack and plastic bag to pack - Goes back into house and gets stuff on table (batteries, cameras, wallet, phone, etc.) pulled together in one bag - Others getting coats and scarves on - Dave checking with Chloe whether there was anything else that needed to go in the car - Chloe comes over to look – Jane's stuff but she'll sort for herself - Other boots are going to stay there

Then people also have to be loaded into cars, which can itself involve extensive negotiation as family members vie for what they consider to be preferred positions within the car. The work of making ready is distributed, collaborative work that may implicate and render accountable anyone in the household, yet only certain individuals may initiate certain activities (e.g., not just anyone decides it's time to load the car). Such matters fall within the larger organisation of relationships within the household and just who may appropriately ask what of someone else.

### *Making Your Way There*

Making your way to a place can be an important feature of the visit, particularly if it takes a substantial amount of time to get there. Journeys occasion leisure activities – games and entertainment (whether it be watching a movie or remarking upon scenes of interest passing by) – and mundane work (fuel stops, toilet stops, food stops, etc.). It can also be the case that the exact proposition and details of the plan shaping the both the journey and the day out itself will get fine-tuned once the trip is under way, especially if delays, diversions or other unexpected contingencies arise along the way. In this particular case the priorities were established en route as the family decided that they'd go for a walk first of all, then eat, then do other things as they came across them. Although it's a vital part of how visiting is accomplished, the plan is neither complete nor rigid. Rather it provides a set of orientations and provisions that are negotiated into actual practice along the way as they are made to fit with the *in situ* and contingent events the family find themselves confronted by (Suchman 1987). This proved to be recurrently the case as the day out was seen to unfold and became especially apparent when the family arrived at their destination.

Arriving, especially when it's a visit to somewhere you've never been before, can itself involve a measure of work. Some of the attendant problems here include recognising you're there, deciding it is where you actually want to be, knowing where to stop, and ascertaining whether it's the right place to stop. Consider the following vignette by way of example.

Dave: Right, this is Saint Hillaire. Next question is where to stop. Just stop in the centre and hope we find it?

Sarah: I'd like to get out and stretch my legs

((Carries on driving through village))

Chloe: Now we're coming out of town

((Carries on driving))

Chloe commenting on coming into next village

Dave saying looking for signposts

Chloe noticing signpost for station de ski

Dave: Yeah, I think stop somewhere around here and see.

Chloe: What about going up to the ski station?

Dave: What I want to do is make sure we park where we're not too far from where we can eat - like near an auberge. I'm not going to be doing too much driving because I don't want to drive up into the high Chartreuse where we'd need snow tyres.

((slowing down))

Dave: How about there?

Chloe: There's a cafe restaurant

Dave: Shall I park up here somewhere?

Chloe: Yeah

Dave turns off road into parking area. Pulls into parking space next to other cars and stops.

Near tourist information office and just after cafe-restaurant Chloe pointed out.

There had been no prior decision made about an exact place to stop and it takes work in the course of driving just to figure out what an appropriate place might

be. It starts with a vague effort to locate relevant signposts, but concretises around the spotting of a café restaurant by Chloe, which will facilitate part of the plan in view of providing somewhere to go and eat as well. However, parking near the restaurant had not been formulated as a part of the plan. Rather, it presented itself as an appropriate proposition *in situ*.

Once you have arrived there are still things to be done. The bringing together of things while making ready is essentially a provisional and contingent assembly of potentially required things. There is now the work of ascertaining just what should actually come along. Here, too, there are those who have the right to decide and do the actual apportioning, and others who are expected to do what is asked of them. A detail in this case is that it is snowy outside and everyone needs to don certain appropriate pieces of apparel. Once everybody is out of the car and ready there is still work involved in seeing what it will take to actually begin the visit. Just where do you go next? In this particular case the work involved is extensive. It involves decisions about whether to eat first or walk first, it entails researching what information is available *in situ* (the work of locating meaningful signs, of ascertaining what routes might be followed and what grounds would make them appropriate, such as duration), and preliminary to all of this, the work of uncovering just exactly where you are in relation to everything else that might be of interest.

Family walk across car park together to look at tourist information office

Get to map on board showing footpaths around the area

Chloe and Dave work out together which car park (marked P) they are at on the map

Chloe: OK, so there's a sentier [footpath] (pointing to map) just here

Dave: Just there, yes. Towards the parapente.

Chloe: (tracing path around in a circle and back to P sign)

Chloe: Perhaps we can do that. (Looking up at tourist information office) It looks shut to me up there, but I'll go and look anyway

Dave: It is shut, yeah. There's no lights on or anything

Chloe: So, if we're here (pointing to map again) La Chappelle is there.

Dave: We're at the tourist information anyway, aren't we. We're on the main road. I think we're here (pointing to map where there's an 'i' symbol)

Chloe: Which way are we facing then?

Dave: Errm, well we know that the er -

### *Making The Visit Happen*

It is in the way of a great many kinds of rural visit that exactly what route is to be followed is something that is under constant potential revision, adaptation and elaboration. Almost straight away this becomes a feature of this family's visit as the prospect of visiting a waterfall presents itself to them:

Chloe brushing snow off of signs as Dave comes up

Chloe: This is where it branches apparently

Dave: Okay

Chloe: So it's a one hour route that way (pointing to right).

Dave: Okay

Chloe: A forty minute route to the left

Dave: Okay, we're probably taking the shorter one aren't we? In view of the fact they're fretting already

Chloe: It says there's cascades as well

Dave: Oooh!

Chloe: I wonder if it's on the way? A frozen waterfall would be fantastic.

Dave: It would

Bundled up with the work of finding and taking a particular route is the work involved in actually finding one's way around. A particularly striking feature here is how much *wayfinding* is both collaborative across the whole of the family and informed by the traces left by other people.

Chloe: There's a sign over by that tree (pointing to a tree in middle of large expanse of snow).

Paul: We're not going to be able to read it from here are we?

Chloe: (Pointing to a post with two arrows on it pointing different directions) I think we have to turn right. That's our most informative post there.

Dave: Right

Chloe: We must be heading towards that signpost there

Dave: We must be

Sarah: Mum, there are footmarks leading that way

Chloe: There are. We'll go that way.

The preceding points are tightly bound up with how the family goes about managing the fashion in which it traverses the landscape. However, there are also a number of recurrently visible features that relate to what the family does as it is traversing the landscape. Something that particularly provides for the character of a specific visit is just what comes to be *taken note of* along the way. What all this amounts to is that there are things to be attended to and things that are passed by without remark, being oriented to as utterly mundane features of the environment in some way. It is also worth noting that it is not solely a case of people remarking for their own benefit. Much of what happens amongst groups is 'callings to attention' where some feature is explicitly pointed out to some or all of the other members in your party:

Paul suddenly runs ahead and stops, looking to the right: Everybody come here!

Everyone walks up to join him.

Dave: Oh wow, yeah, I see. The mountains. (Spectacular view of the mountains with clouds banking up around them)

Paul: A nice shot.

As Paul's comment makes visible, something that can feature strongly in family visits to nature reserves is the *making of a record* of various aspects of the visit, usually by means of cameras. Much of this is once again premised around what is worthy of interest and capture, with the added element that family members themselves and their actions can count as part of this. Another part of the business of uncovering aspects of the environment worthy of attention or otherwise is the work that can happen with situated displays, i.e., noticeboards or information panels of various kinds inserted in the landscape. Consider the following:

Sarah, Chloe and Dave arrive at a viewing point looking across to mountains with two boards laid across the top of posts. Chloe walks up to one and starts to sweep the snow off of it. When snow is swept off it's just a blank board underneath.

Chloe: There's not actually anything on them right now.

Chloe walks over to the other board - sweeps off snow

Chloe: Nothing either.

Dave tries to lift board and finds it is hinged so that you can raise it up.

Sarah: Mum!

Paul: It is actually a workable display that knows that it gets snowy.

Dave: Because it opens up.

Chloe: Ah!

Dave: See.

Clearly situated displays are positioned by those managing the site in an effort to explicate certain aspects of the locale in some way. A couple of things fall out of this, however. First of all something has to be recognised as a display to that purpose and, as the example makes clear, this is not always straightforward. Secondly, the explication turns upon the recognisability of the things being explicated in situ and this, too, can prove problematic. What the work of trying to disambiguate a situated display reveals is that there are ways in which it forms a part of a larger enterprise of trying to make the landscape one is passing through *situationally legible*. This is not simply another aspect of wayfinding. It is, once again, as much about trying to locate within the environment what should and could be worthy of your interest as you go about the business of visiting place.

### *Calling it a Day and Heading Home*

Days out like this do not typically come with a set end time, but of course, a stage is reached, especially where people are walking or otherwise exerting themselves in some way, where various members of the group start to voice a wish to 'call it a day'. Sometimes it is first voiced by children who are getting tired, sometimes it's voiced by teenagers who are getting bored, sometimes it's more immediately universal (for instance when the heavens open and everyone is getting cold or wet). However, it is important to note that bringing the visit to a close doesn't just happen by magic. This too involves work. Propositions or requests are made. Various people with various rights and responsibilities will ratify or otherwise, just as we have seen with regard to other matters along the way. This business of negotiation is an essential preliminary to the actual business of heading back. To ignore these interactional niceties and to just make a unilateral decision that you are heading back regardless would have powerful consequences, with others in the group immediately seeking out some kind of account. Here's how the visit was brought to a close in our principal example. Note in particular how the proposition of calling it a day is not just made on its own but also accounted for in various ways: initially it's about fatigue; then it also comes to be about the need to get back in time to eat:

Chloe: I'm tired now, let's go back.

Dave: But we haven't seen the waterfalls yet.

Chloe: Let's go back. I want to be back in time for lunch.

There comes a point where everyone in the group is back at the car (or other point of departure) and getting ready to go home. Departing retains some characteristics of both making ready and arriving. However, it is typically more constrained. The primary aspects here are: the relocation of the car; unburdening of individuals and replacement of things in the car; the redistribution of its occupants (which does not have to be exactly as it was before and can still be an object of negotiation); and the work involved in figuring out how to physically regain the route and head for home followed by the work of journeying and making your way home.

### *Getting Home*

Something else our study revealed that should not be discounted is that a family doesn't just arrive home and that is it. Instead it takes work to get back into the house after a visit. Some of this work is obvious but nonetheless an important aspect of the overall sequence that cannot be set aside without ramifications of some kind. Thus there is work involved in physically getting out of the car and regaining entry to the home, with various people having various rights of precedence regarding entry. Then people will re-distribute themselves around the home in accountably appropriate ways. In this case Chloe started to get herself and Sarah out of their outdoor clothes whilst Paul took himself off upstairs and Marcus doodled on the guitar. Jane, meanwhile, was co-opted into assisting Dave with unloading the car. The actual unloading of the car can itself involve significant labour. On this occasion Dave systematically ferried everything into the living room first of all. Only after this did they begin to then re-locate various things to various locations, kitchen things (cups etc.) and rubbish to the kitchen, cameras etc. to the living room table, coats and boots by the door, and so on.

Beyond these moments of first entry the immediate post-visit phase can be seen to involve the rapid re-occupancy of the home and the re-constitution of the household routine. One of the first topics of discussion in this case, for instance, was what to do about supper. Arriving home can also involve the recognition and handling of the house's own contingencies (e.g. matters of heating and hot water, animals and their whereabouts, what would normally have been done during the day and hasn't been, who may have called, and so on). After a day out in the country has taken place the relevance of the visit to other matters becomes rapidly diffuse. Talk about the visit amongst the family mostly takes place in the car or immediately afterwards. Indeed, we should note that it would become accountably odd to continue to talk about it much beyond this. Instead one finds that talk about it amongst the family from here on in will address specific features as they are occasioned, for instance by other possibilities of trips, topics of interest, or looking through the photographs.

## Informing Design

There is much that we have glossed over in our account of the family's visit, particularly the collaborative work involved in maintaining the family as a group that is collaboratively involved in having a pleasurable experience (c.f. Tolmie and Crabtree 2013 for further details). Nonetheless, we would suggest that even a single study of a single family having a single day out reveals a machinery of interaction that has broader purchase: which is, in short, generalisable. The design team, for example, recognised from their experience as ordinary members of society the operational structure of visiting place elaborated by the machinery of interaction. That is, they recognised that visiting place consists of a distinctive set of collaborative activities and cooperative work revolving around specific organisational matters. They recognised that the act of visiting place involves occasioning a visit, making the possibility concrete, making ready for the visit, making your way there, making the visit happen, calling it a day and heading home, and arriving home, and they recognised the work bound up with bringing these things about as a collaborative matter. The collaborative organisation or *social ordering* of the act of visiting – while inhabited by particular and contingent features (the particular cohort, the particular place visited, the particular mode of transport taken, etc.) – was not seen by the design team as being unique to the family but was recognised as something that their families enacted too. The *order* uncovered by the studies was seen to be *generalisable* by the design team then, and we suspect that those readers who have also enacted days out with their families and other small groups will recognise the generalisable character of that order too.

Our study had particular consequences for the design of PlaceBooks, elaborating the operational structure or embodied interactional order of the experience we could be designing for and enabling the design team to reason about the particular kinds of collaborative activity that ubiquitous computing technologies and novel map representations could be leveraged to support. The result was a suite of web-based, mobile and location-based tools that enable users to discover potential places to visit, to plan a visit, determine just what to do when they get there, to conduct the visit, and to create a record some time after that can be shared with others (see [www.placebooks.org](http://www.placebooks.org) for further details). PlaceBooks has subsequently been adopted by the People's Collection Wales (PCW), a project funded by the Welsh Government to support the public in documenting the history and culture of the Welsh landscape.<sup>2</sup> PCW is currently exploring the use of PlaceBooks in a broader European context via its involvement in an INTERREG consortium.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://placebooks.peoplescollectionwales.com>

## Conclusion

The ‘angry’ ethnography is of course a rhetorical construct, which is not to say that the issues we make him speak about are not real or of consequence. What actually occasioned the writing of this paper was a review of a paper about the PlaceBooks system, in which several reviewers stated that it is not possible to generalise the findings of an ethnographic study of one family, especially given such a short period of fieldwork. This did indeed occasion an angry outburst from the ethnographers involved in the study, including many more choice expressions than the title of this paper can or should convey. The nature of the frustration is evident but it is not the first time we have run up against *assertions* like this, they are commonplace, and we don’t expect it to be the last time we are confronted by them either. But assertions they are, rooted in positivistic and quantitative reasoning that insists upon a certain kind of generalisation procedure that has no cognisance let alone respect for the sociological grounds upon which generalisation works *within* everyday life and is ‘built into’ ordinary activities (Sharrock and Randall 2004). Not only *did* we find a generalisable social object in our ethnographic study of *one* family’s day out, we found it through a very short period of fieldwork covering only sixteen days. What we found – and what warrants generalisation – is a machinery of interaction whereby the members of a culture *order* a visit to a place for the purposes of having a family day out. That order does not belong to the particular family we studied. While locally enacted by them it is not theirs alone but belongs to the culture that they are members of. It is *a resource that the culture provides* for all families wanting to visit a place for a day out together, and other small groups too. As this kind of visit is extremely commonplace, then so too is the order that articulates it. The orderliness of other activities – controlling trains or planes, for example – may have much less scope or scale but is nonetheless generalisable across the cohort whose business it is to conduct such activities. Scale should not be confused with generalisation, however, and neither should the duration of fieldwork with validity.

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