

**Media Anthropology Network
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
E-Seminar Series**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

**E-Seminar 50
Energy and Digital Living**

**by
Sarah Pink
RMIT University, Australia**

**Discussant
Mark Pedelty
University of Minnesota, USA**

25 February – 18 March 2015

Dear All,

Welcome to the 50th EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar! For those of you who are new to this mailing list, these sessions run for two weeks on the list and all subscribers are welcome to participate.

For this special occasion we will not be discussing a paper, but rather a website, which relates to the latest project by Prof. Sarah Pink's (RMIT University).

Energy and Digital Living

<http://energyanddigitalliving.com/>

Energy and Digital Living is based on the sensory and digital ethnography methodologies and design research undertaken at Loughborough University, UK, as part of the EPSRC funded Lower Effort Energy Demand Reduction (LEEDR) project (2010-14).

The site aims to disseminate both the ethnographic findings and design interventions developed from our work, as well as the digital-sensory ethnography methodology that we developed as a way of researching energy and digital media in the home. In doing so it makes an argument for a sensory-digital design ethnography, and demonstrates how we both used this approach to research digital media and energy consumption in everyday life, and to develop concepts to inform digital design interventions. The project was an process of learning to work across digital ethnography and digital design and in that sense also offers examples that invite reflections on the 'next steps' in bringing together such approaches.

The site is intended to be used by scholars and practitioners from different disciplines who are interested in this field, researchers and designers interested in video methods and digital-sensory ethnography practice and in interdisciplinary work, and has the potential to be used for teaching around a number of areas. It may have other uses. It is not so much a 'how to' site, but an example of what has and can be done, from which new ideas might be launched.

Energy and Digital Living was Directed by Sarah Pink. The content was written and produced by the Social Sciences team (Sarah Pink, Kerstin Leder Mackley and Roxana Morosanu) and the Design Team (Val Mitchell, Tracy Bhamra, Carolina Escobar-Telo and Garrath Wilson). The web site was developed by Paper Giant Chris Marmo and Reuben Stanton. The project would have been impossible without all the people who generously participated in the LEEDR project, and the wider team of LEEDR researchers with whom we collaborated.

Professor Mark Pedelty (University of Minnesota) has kindly agreed to act as discussant, and you will receive his comments tomorrow. Mark Pedelty is a Professor of Communication Studies and an affiliate Professor of Anthropology. His research deals with music and sound as environmental communication.

As always you are all very welcome to contribute comments and questions after we've had the presenter's response to the discussant who will be posting her comments.

Veronica

Veronica Barassi [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk] February 25th 2015

Dear All,

Please find below the comments by our discussant. As always, I will open the seminar to all once Prof. Sarah Pink has had the chance to respond to the comments.

Veronica

DISCUSSANT COMMENTS - Energy and Digital Living

Mark Pedelty (University of Minnesota)

“Writing about music is like dancing about architecture;” that quote has been attributed to many but owned by no one. Fitting, because it is a dilemma we all deal with in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The written text is often inadequate to convey the depth and meaning of musical, visual, and kinesthetic communication.

Perhaps nothing has demonstrated that conundrum better than the so-called “affective turn” (a curve that we, as anthropologists took a long time ago). Writing and academic language struggle to convey embodied, emotional, and aesthetic truths that other forms of communication express quite well. Or, perhaps more accurately, text must combine with other forms of expression to achieve the author's/composer's/scholar's goals. Energy and Digital Living is an excellent case in point, a multi-modal model worth exploring and emulating. It is my pleasure to provide a few cursory comments on this incredible effort.

As is always the case with the MedianAnthro e-seminars, I will assume that everyone has “read” the site. Of course, one does not simply “read” sound, visual media, relationships, bodies, and emotions, but that is the point. The textual fetish of post-structuralism often reduced the world(s) to textual semiotics, but that has been a fairly limited way to understand media forms that are, quite simply, more than the sum of their words.

“Dancing about architecture” is, therefore, more than a absurd metaphor meant to shock us out of textualizing everything, it is an indication that there are, in fact, other ways of being and communicating while still holding true to the core goal of scholarship: explanation (whether analytical or synthetic). Quite literally, dance is a fairly good way to communicate about (and literally “around”) architecture, for example. That is why ritual has been such an important focus of ethnographic research.

To bring it back to the matter at hand, this multi-modal website is a great solution to the problem of ethnographic explication. In Energy and Digital Living we gain not only a window into the subject of mediated, digital practices in and around the home, but also a deep intersubjective involvement via images, colors, and sounds that involve us more deeply in a highly collaborative ethnographic experience. That experience did not end out there in “the field” but is rather being inter-subjectively developed and enhanced with each visit to the site. The site is the field, as are the informants’ homes, as is the server, as are the academic departments where the researchers reside, as are the granting institutions that funded it with specific goals and parameters in place, and so on. The website does not occlude that wider network of meaning in the way that the traditional ethnographic narrative sometimes can, as if the journal of the lone explorer in a foreign land. There is little segregation of field and research, medium and messages in Energy and Digital Living. We are more fully in on the project, able to interpret a wider range of visual and aural stimuli than the traditional monograph typically allows. I am not falling for the acritical “image is truth” ideology here, just saying that we have a lot more to work with in this project and are able to bring more to it ourselves as visitors. Speaking of sound, that might be one of the sites and project’s few weakness. As is often the case, sound is somewhat secondary in the website’s rendering of these home worlds. We can see what takes place and “hear” it in the verbal interpretations from residents, but it seemed to me that sound was gathered from the camera’s mics rather than using something like a Zoom recorder. Sonic definition is lost and there appears to have been less of an attempt to represent soundscapes than visual information.

However, even a large team can’t cover everything, and the weakest possible criticism of any work is to harp on what it does not do. Energy and Digital Living does a lot, and does it very well. The beautiful design of the site and nicely rendered, appropriately simple videos really work. To see a busier and less effective website, I would direct you to ecosong.org, a musical project I have been involved with for a few years and am currently redesigning. You will see that my very crude, amateur webwork does an injustice to the incredibly rich musical offerings contributor’s have provided in Energy and Digital Living. However, the site I designed is pretty crappy, an archive of my collaborators’ (mostly) professional work as opposed to a well thought-out and user-friendly experience that works with and enhances the content in Energy and Digital Living. In other words, I know from experience how difficult it is to produce a website like Energy and Digital Living and absolutely love the look and design of this site. I will be stealing various elements (with credit, of course) as I redesign ecosong. Per the best interactive installations at a museum, it is clear how to explore a desired pathway and content in Energy and Digital Living.

Gamification has become popular in many worlds, and there is an element of that here as the visitor is allowed to navigate at will and then rewarded with discovery. It is not the sort of discovery that surreptitiously disciplines the visitor, however, but rather one that reflexively names the game regarding what the game developers, or rather ethnographers, intended through their authorship. There is no “good dog, have a digital bone” ruse here. It is clear that this is critical research and not a piece of persuasive communication masquerading as some sort of objective lens. We are learning what the ethnographic collaborative learned as we explore:

Rather than simply interviewing participants, the use of video in these methods allowed us to investigate the unspoken, habitual elements of daily practices that participants may not have known (or been able to) mention.

It takes some reading to figure out that the “us” in the above statement is “them” (ethnographers) and not “us” as in an inclusive reference to the viewers/listeners/readers. I greatly appreciated not being overly interpellated, to be able read the ethnographer’s honest reflections, goals, and discoveries without the assumption that those perspectives and the actual content were one-in-the-same, or that our/my interpretations and experience thereof would somehow simply map onto that. In other words, the invitation to intersubjective meaning-making is there in explicit form. Meanwhile, our access to the informant’s world and words is so deep in this medium that we cannot help but draw our own individual interpretations that are informed by the “authors,” the informants, the medium (is the message), and our own experiences. By design, the project and site inspire the viewer/listener/reader (I will start saying “visitor”) to draw intertextual (sic) and comparative connections between our own energized home lives and Alison’s, Alan’s, Scott’s and Roxana’s, to name a few. Perhaps it would be nice to have seen and heard more from the researchers as well, rather than have them represented in mostly textual form. However, most of us would be reticent to come out from behind our text to be exposed on video in that manner unless taking part in auto-ethnographic research. Nevertheless, such turn-about might only be fair and, more importantly, productive.

As for how a visitor might use this site, or interpret it, that probably depends on the visitor. In a weird way, I started to find these pieces providing a stock of “possible selves,” to borrow a term from Psychology (by way of anthropological ethnographer JoEllen Fisherkeller, 1997). Which of these people’s home life is most like mine? Do we use more or less energy and experience more or less electronic media than a specific informant and his or her family? A disgusting sense of smug (see South Park’s “Smug Alert!” episode) came into play in reference to some of the more potentially wasteful and, when it comes to digital media, Alone Together (2012) examples, but then I found myself realizing that I could not remember the last time I dried clothing without electronic assistance, whereas that seems to be the norm for many of these families in the UK. That led to consideration of national energy use norms and practices. I found myself understanding these lifeways better, rather than getting defensive or, worse, judging. That appears to be a goal of this project, a more interactive and networked cultural experience wherein one can reflect, compare, draw out ideas, rethink, create, and understand. In other words, Energy and Digital Living is good ethnography. It is an applied project with theoretically rich analysis and implications.

I am going to stop there rather than over-determining, or more likely, boring y’all with my own interpretations of this rich site and project. I mainly wanted to note that this is a very good model for doing multimodal, multimedia, and interactive ethnography. Such work has been talked and written about a great deal, but rarely accomplished to this degree. (However, if I have simply missed other examples out there, please do share; I might not be the only one who is unaware of other such experiments).

Energy and Digital Living so nicely invites us all to become experts on home energy cultures. Yet, there is a clear sense of expertise and value-added by the researchers as well, especially in terms of

their ethnographic expertise. My own knowledge on the subject of domestic energy is severely limited, other than the fact that I am a fellow traveler in the world of alternative ethnographic expression. Per my opening quip, “writing about music is like dancing about architecture,” I have increasingly resorted to supra-textual means to communicate my ethnographic research, in collaboration with musicians, environmental activists, and to a lesser extent, scientists. For me, *Energy and Digital Living* has been an invaluable learning experience and resource in that regard, one that I will be sharing with my research collaborators, students and colleagues in media ethnography, music, communication studies, and environmental studies. *Energy and Digital Living* presents an exciting way forward in terms of ethnographic research and representation, one that others can point to and say, “that sort of thing.” I am particularly thinking of grads, for example, trying to legitimate webnography in the eyes of a committee.

I do have one question based on my exploration, although it will not serve to prime the seminar well. Fortunately, priming is probably unnecessary, because this rich site will lead to myriad thoughts and questions regarding epistemology, methodology, theory, and representation. Meanwhile, I have a much more pedestrian query, but one that might relate to the problem of fostering the spread and development of visual, aural, kinesthetic, and performative communication in the academy:

Q: Were there any tensions between the time and effort this project has taken and how colleagues in your department or elsewhere interpreted it in terms of “metrics” vis-a-vis traditional written publications? In my experience, those who only publish written work have absolutely no idea how much time it takes to mount a collaborative media production (in fact, that very phrase is somewhat redundant; all good media productions are highly collaborative). There is a sort of “that’s nice” view of media work, but often films, websites, musical scores, and so on are not taken as seriously as good old fashioned journal articles, impact factors, and books, even though they can often take twice as long to produce. It is clear to me that *Energy and Digital Living* took a ton of work, is theoretically rich, and will have as great or greater impact than any book. So, to bring it into mundane terms: do your colleagues and administration get that? Please tell me that they do! Provide us with hope that the academy will catch-up with the possibilities for such work to advance the goals of scholarship. Or, depress us if the reverse is true. Either way, I look forward to hearing about your experience in regard to explaining and rationalizing this wonderful project with colleagues who have never done anything like it.

No matter what your experience in that regard, I am sure that the production of this project, done so very well, will widen the space for future scholars to explore this and other formats for their ethnographic work. Thanks for producing this site and conducting the extensive fieldwork in all 20 homes, and thanks in advance for stimulating what I am sure will be a fascinating seminar.

References

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Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

February 26th 2015

Dear Mark and all

Many thanks to Mark for his comments! I am particularly grateful for the work that Mark has put into offering an interpretation of **Energy and Digital Living** and how it works. It is often difficult to think about one's own work from that position so I really appreciate other people's understandings of it.

In what follows I respond to what I think are the key points:

The first is the question of sound. I must admit that in the design of the video ethnography project that the web site is based on I did not attend much to sound. There was a reason for this, which I think is justifiable but that now requires more reflection and is something I have considered since. I have been developing video ethnographies in homes since 1999 and from the outset have always been careful to use good quality but fundamentally domestic video technologies. Usually these are cameras that are reasonably affordable and that it would not be surprising to find that participants have themselves or that they know people who have them. The idea behind this has always been to bring semi-domestic research technologies into the domestic research context. This is on the one hand a reflection on power relations – which in the 1990s formed part of an important debate and remain important. I have always wanted participants to feel in control of the video tours. Also I never wanted to use a big professional camera or make the research encounter appear anything but a domestic event. Obviously it is not just domestic, given that academic work becomes public and these videos are now online, however the aim was for the feel of the encounter to be on those terms. Getting to the point about sound, this meant not wiring people up with mics, making the situation more complex or formal in that way, or using additional sound recording techniques. I followed that principle through in this project. However there are now more possibilities to record better sound and I have also started to think about the possibility of more collaborative sound recording in a way similar to video. Indeed in this project, as well as one of my earlier projects about the home sound was very important as a way of constituting the atmosphere of home. I recently reviewed some works in sound ethnography for the 2nd edition of my **Doing Sensory Ethnography** book, which by coincidence is also published right now, which likewise made me think about the importance of sound in such work. Another element of this goes beyond sound and vision and refers to the tactile elements of fieldwork, the feel of the floor under foot, etc and how we can invoke this through video and sound.

The second point is in fact a mixture of things that Mark refers to but which I will put under the heading of responding to the question about the time put into the project and if this was viable within an academic audit culture (well that is my rephrasing of it which I hope captures the essence). The short answer is 'yes' I think the site is viable in this sense because it is so inseparable from the other work that made it possible, and that will stem from it. But the long answer explains this better.

The site represents the work of a number of people from the LEEDR team (all mentioned on the site) as well as Paper Giant, the company of 2 who developed the site). The project from which the materials and ideas were derived was undertaken over 4 years. However the site was developed over a period of a few months in the last part of the final year, but of course we did not all work on it all the time during this period, it was a process of going backwards and forwards with content, and layouts and working together to make the site that we wanted to create. Paper Giant brought some great benefits to the design and were exactly the kind of people I wanted to work with due to their academic training and understandings of the ethnography-design nexus, the academic concepts, the web design process and the video archive. By the time we made the site we had all our materials and ideas, the challenge was how to re-work these into content that would work online and be more broadly accessible than the kinds of academic dissemination represented in the articles linked to the site. For me the main task was putting together the content of the written and visual narratives, although a lot of the time this felt like writing things I had been thinking about for a long time. Within our team we also relied on dispersed expertise, in that Kerstin who had done most of the fieldwork, along with Roxana selected and provided the clips that would be most suitable to use. Both had also written articles with me, therefore our expertise melded well in knowing what we wanted to present. Both are on the list and might also have things to say about this.

For me personally another resource that went into this site was about 20 years of thinking about making a multimedia web site of this kind. I started to try to do this with CD/DVDs in the mid 1990s, and have written about anthropological hypermedia, as well as other more recent applied visual anthropology/ethnography sites – there are some interesting ones, which I discuss in a 2011 article here

https://www.academia.edu/8331412/Pink_S._2011_Images_Senses_And_Applications_Engaging_Visual_Anthropology_Visual_Anthropology_24_5_437-454

There are since most likely many more.

Making this site now however was exciting in that I was able to bring together my thinking about digital, visual, sensory and design ethnography. I wanted to make the principles behind and the opportunities afforded by these different (but inseparable) elements of ethnographic practice part of the site. This does not mean that the site engages with all the opportunities afforded by this medium, but that it is an experiment in working with some of them.

This leads me to the next point, which is that I would argue that a web site of this kind should be considered a work in creative practice – in that it specifically aims to advance practice-based work in the field of visual/sensory ethnography in new ways. However there is a bit of ambiguity in this because the project in the same time is a web dissemination project aimed at creating “impact” in the world. I genuinely do want the site to have impact in the world in that I think it has some work to do in terms of engaging people in thinking about energy and digital living in, for example, some of the ways that Mark pointed to. I do not think that its potential as a creative work should be at all in conflict with its potential as an impact focused dissemination site. It should be able to do both, and indeed I would argue that it is by advancing forms of creative practice in web dissemination that impact can best be achieved.

However there is a question of classification that might come into play there. The site was made as part of a funded project (LEEDR funded by the EPSRC in the UK - all credits on the web site) and it was something that we had proposed to do from the outset, as part of our dissemination plan. In this sense it was already endorsed as an outcome of the project.

However, to end, even if the site was not an impact project or a creative work, I would still not see it as taking up time in ways that could not be counted towards research outputs. Indeed for me the process of developing the site has enabled me to think through some of the relationships between ethnography and design, and to articulate them in ways that I could not before. And this means it can generate written publication outputs.

Although as I noted above we had all the materials for the site and the team of ethnographers and designers involved had worked together over 4 years, there was still an analytical and self-reflexive process involved in the making of the content for the site. It also make us think clearly about how our work fitted together. There has been an important outcome of this because the making of the web site has also helped us to write a forthcoming book chapter as a team, which explores the relationship between design and ethnography in the making of the digital design interventions discussed on the site. In turn the web site stands as a key resource for the book chapter because it provides us with online examples to refer to.

Indeed, more generally in relation to our publications from the LEEDR the project, the web site is an important resource for us. It solves the problem of not being able to include videos in our articles, as we can refer readers to those already online. It likewise makes presentations of the project easy to produce because there is an existing online presentation about the work, which can be drawn on.

Finally, to qualify the comments above, I would note that they are based on my experiences and thoughts as Director of the *Energy and Digital Living *web project – however I was not the only person to work on the site and I would like to acknowledge and thank my colleagues whose participation made it possible, as well as pointing out that they might have other insights to share.

Many thanks again to Mark and I look forward to the following discussion

Sarah

Veronica Barassi [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk]

February 26th 2015

Dear All,

Thank you Mark for your engaging comments and Sarah for your prompt reply.

The discussion is now open to all list members. Feel free to send in your questions and thoughts.

To post please write directly to medianthro@easaonline.org (with CC/ my email address v.barassi@gold.ac.uk so that I can make sure that messages won't get lost)

all best

Veronica

Veronica Barassi [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk]

March 3rd 2015

Dear All,

This is just a reminder that the discussion on Energy and Digital Living is now open to all.

While we wait for your thoughts and contributions I would like to add some reflections on the website, and to ask a question to Sarah.

I believe that Energy and Digital Living is a fantastic example of how ethnographic research can be pushed further theoretical conceptualisations and actually been translated into meaningful practice. Not only the researchers with their video archives are offering – as Mark noted – a window into the complexity of the sensory experience of digital living, but they also establish a ground of collaboration between ethnographers and designers in order to create technologies which promote energy saving practices.

Of course, within applied anthropology, we have seen a variety of examples where ethnographic practice was tightly bound to social intervention. Yet I believe that Energy and Digital living represents a novelty in the field, which we need to critically consider and understand.

Usually I am skeptical of narratives that emphasise novelty, as I believe that we have a lot to gain if we understand the complex dialectics between old and new experiences when we think about digital practice. However, this time I am eager to stress the novelty of this ethnographic practice for one main reasons.

Energy and Digital Living is – to my knowledge (and please do let me know if you can think of other examples) – the first successful ethnographic example where the study of digital practice is used to design digital technologies. This I believe has massive implications in the ways in which we understand participation and co-creation in ethnographic research. Here, therefore, I am particularly interested in knowing how Sarah and her team have dealt with the issue of co-creation, copyright and authorship.

All the best

Veronica

Michael Waltinger [waltinger@thinkbeyondborders.org]

March 3rd 2015

Dear all,

To extend on what has already been said, I am also amazed by this vivid example of how ethnographic work can be made readily accessible for a wider audience beyond the usual 'textbook-

cultures', while still shining with thorough academic rigour.

I may want to add a quick pointer towards a thing that came to my mind when I saw the website of Sarah and her team: the Routledge Innovative Ethnographies Series (<http://www.innovativeethnographies.net>), that I thought might be worth mentioning as another source of interesting examples in this context here. I am sure many of you already know about that resource, but to me, as I stumbled upon it a while ago, it was new - maybe it is the same to some of you as well.

Last but not least, I would have a methodological question to Sarah and her team:

I have some own fieldwork experience that I gained from my ongoing media ethnographic phd-work on mobile phones in Nairobi (Kenya). When I was in the field, I have mostly used what I considered 'unobtrusive ways of data recording', which was mostly note taking, sometimes voice recording, at times photo taking, and rarely video recording. Now it is definitely not the case that a digital camera, a camcorder, or a cameraphone would be a novelty in Nairobi that would attract much attention for that matter - but when I used (sometimes more, sometimes less successful) such devices, I at times felt a change in how comfortable people were. Now in the case of the 'Energy and Digital Living'-project, first of all I really wondered about how (apparently) seamless the video recording of the participants was. They seem to be not disturbed whatsoever by being shadowed by a researcher with a camera in her hand. I would have expected that people would feel pretty disturbed by a person following them with a camera (however tiny it may be) through their houses - just because such a 'mode of attention' is maybe quite far removed from what occurs to a person in 'normal everyday life'? That might be even more true for the combination with the task of 'rehearsing' some everyday energy-practices for a researcher and the respective camera. In relation to that, I basically wondered about the rationale behind not leaving a camera with participants, asking them to record some of these practices that the research team was interested in, as they really occur (e.g. a morning- and a bedtime routine on a weekday and on a Sunday, or so) - and alone. I am just curious, if that would have been an option?

Thank you so much again for sharing this insightful and impressive work!

Best from Stockholm
Michael

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 3rd 2015

Hi Veronica

Thanks for your kind comments, and your question.

The idea of studying digital practices to design digital technologies is not new in the sense that it has been part of HCI (Human-Computer-Interaction) research for a long time. However I believe that the way we have developed it in the context of the LEEDR project (which 'Energy and Digital Living' is an outcome of) is different. This is because we were not researching how people use digital technologies so that we could design "better" versions of the digital technologies they were using in their everyday lives, but so that we could learn from this about how we might better design

digital technologies that they would be able to use to reduce their energy demand.

We wanted a way to think about the research problem - which involved the outcome of making digital design interventions to help people consume less energy - through understanding what people already did, both in terms of digital media in everyday life and in terms of how they needed to use energy to live out their everyday lives in their homes in ways that felt right to them. The next step was to consider how digital media interventions could become part of this. I don't think anthropologists (and particularly applied anthropologists) will find that surprising, I see it as a way of approaching the 'problem' indirectly in a way that I would see as being typical of applied anthropology, but also as something that is coherent with non-media-centric approaches to media studies - such as those advanced by David Morley, Nick Couldry and Shaun Moores. So there has been a certain bringing together of anthropology and media studies, in this work, which Kerstin Leder Mackley and I wrote about specifically in our 2013 article in **Media, Culture & Society**.

In terms of the collaboration, we had a lot of discussions about authorship and copyright early on in the project - that was across the whole team not just with designers and ethnographers, and including energy engineers, systems engineers and other disciplines. This was complex because there are different authorship traditions in different disciplines, different author orders and different expectations. However we found the BSA (British Sociological Association) guidelines on co-authorship are very helpful for those kinds of decisions. Another example of a decision we made about copyright is that we agreed that all of the images that we produced during the project would be copyrighted to the project, rather than to us as individuals.

Sarah

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 3rd 2015

Dear Michael

Thanks for your comments.

I do see the work we have done with the **Energy & Digital Living** site as being distinct from the *Innovative Ethnographies* book series. The site is meant to be stand-alone and to address a wider audience (although we do not perhaps know who that audience is yet) rather than being a support site that goes with a book. For me it connects with a history of experiments in hypermedia anthropology and other similar genres, and seeks to use web design for what it is really good at, so it is about going beyond the book as a format, while also acknowledging that books work in different ways, and indeed need to be part of a wider dissemination strategy (at least for the element of the work that is more specifically aimed towards academic scholarship). Having said that the web site definitely connects with our publications for people who want it to. It has a strong relationship with my **Doing Sensory Ethnography** book - as I see it as an example of how a sensory ethnography methodology might be played out - and we (Kerstin, Roxana, Val, Tracy and I) are now writing a new book **Making Homes** (that is the current title) which will refer to the site. In fact one of the great things for me about having some of our materials online is that it makes it a lot easier to be able to direct people to them via publications.

The second issue you raised was about using video in homes, and the idea of participants videoing themselves: I get asked these two questions very often, and I think they are very good ones. I will answer them one by one.

First in my experience using a video camera with participants in their homes is not usually problematic, people are always quite at ease with it, and if not immediately soon it just becomes part of the conversation. I do use small domestic type cameras which seem in place in the home, and the participant is meant to be in control of what we see what they want to do and show. In the LEEDR project we also gave all participants copies of their videos so they could check that they were happy with them. Having said that, the response I always make to this question is that when we do research with video, we are only ever doing research about people who are happy to be videoed in their homes - this makes the sample a rather special one, because the interest in and willingness to participate is part of the self-selection of the participants. Having said that, unless you do covert research (I do not do this) you are only ever going to do research about people who are willing research participants - and we shouldn't kid ourselves that it is anything other than that. I don't think it is a problem, but it is a reason why participants tend to seem comfortable about the fact that they are participating. A second aspect of this, I think is that people generally know what to do with a video camera when is pointed at them; there are already certain cultural narratives and conventions that they attach the activity to, and follow, and in a past video ethnography in the home project I have thought about this and identified different themes in the ways that the participants interpreted and enacted the narrative of the tour of their homes.

Second, why don't I give participants the camera to film their own lives? A lot of researchers do do this and it produces fascinating results. Roxana who also worked on our project did use this method as part of her PhD research, which was intended to produce a different set of insights from the collaborative project.

The short and easy answer to why I don't give participants the camera is because I trained as an ethnographic documentary maker at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at Manchester University (UK), where the researcher/filmmaker-held camera was core to the method of ethnographic filmmaking at least at that time. I developed this approach subsequently in the video ethnography work I have done since, seeing my encounter with each participant as something like an exercise in making a short film with them about their lives in their homes. We have not edited any films from the LEEDR materials shown on the web site, but I have been collaborating with a filmmaker to make a documentary based on another similar project done in homes.

There are also other reasons why the participants are not holding the camera, which include that I want them to be able to have their hands and bodies free to be able to show me what they 'usually' do in their homes, to be able to engage sensorially with the environment we are in. I understand the video recording to be a recording not just of what we see through the camera, but of the trace through the environment that I would have made with that person (I have written about this in some detail in published work), it is a way of creating fieldnotes that go beyond representational knowledge.

I am, having said that, very keen on experimentation around using life logging cameras, and other

self-tracking technologies in research - both by participants and researchers, and have recently been writing about these with my colleagues Vaike Fors and Martin Berg in Sweden.

Sarah

Kerstin Leder-Mackley [K.Leder@lboro.ac.uk]

March 5th 2015

Hi Michael, Veronica and all,

Thanks for your comments and queries. Having worked with the LEEDR video materials within the team for a while, it is really interesting to see what others get out of engaging with them. It's been important to me to get across what Patricia Sunderland and Rita Denny have described as 'sociocultural textures' of everyday life in the home, with a specific focus on the sensory imagination (drawing inspiration from David MacDougall's notion of making sense of video through a form of 'acquaintance'). We first wrote about this, in the context of LEEDR, in our article in Sociological Research Online where we embedded clips and invited readers/viewers to make sense of them with us (<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/1/3.html>).

I do find from showing clips to colleagues in industry and across disciplines that they require a bit of framing, though. A recurrent question is how we can be sure that what people describe on video is actually the case when we turn off the camera. There is a notion that what is often referred to as self-report is even less reliable when 'performed' on video. (We usually explain that this isn't the point of our engagement with participants, that it is futile to pursue some absolute truth and, instead, any research context creates versions of the world). Another recurrent experience is that people compare their own lives to those on screen - which is great. Depending on context, though, this can mean jumping at moments when it seems that participants are particularly energy-hungry or perhaps not so wise in terms of how they draw on resources in their homes. This then sometimes gets used as instances of bad behaviour that need to be 'fixed'. I know from our design colleagues that they have found it really helpful to draw on our interdisciplinary discussion to try and move beyond this and consider more overarching themes that have emerged from our ethnography, for instance the notions of making the home, managing flows, and everyday innovation. This is also one of the elements that perhaps sets the work apart from previous ethnographic research within HCI.

I expect these kinds of issues around framing videos will be familiar to people on the list. I'd be interested to hear how you have dealt with them in the context of your own research.

Just to respond to Michael about what he felt were participants at ease in front of the camera (I'm glad they appear as such). We did a lot of introductory work with participants before pointing the camera at them. This included getting to know families over a takeaway meal, instigated by our design colleagues and linked to their interviews (an occupational hazard was gaining a good few pounds of weight during that time!). I think it also helped that we were able to have eye contact with participants, so there was emphasis on having a conversation. At the same time, participants were always aware of the camera, and had to be to show us things. Some probably found the experience more enjoyable than others.

Kerstin

John Postill [jrpostill@gmail.com]

March 6th 2015

I have really enjoyed visiting the Energy & Digital Living website, reading the texts and watching some of the videos. A great example of public scholarship.

I'm right in the middle of fieldwork in Jakarta and haven't had time to follow the e-seminar discussion closely, so I hope I'm not repeating previous points made.

My first question to Sarah and Kirsten has to do with the notion of how homes 'feel right', which seems to have played an important part during research. I'm intrigued by this notion, which I think may have comparative potential in different cultural contexts, and was wondering how it came about. Was it the researchers who came up with it or the research participants? Is it related to other domestic notions, incl. media-related notions?

Speaking of cultural differences, I'm missing a discussion of participants' (and their living environments') Englishness/Britishness. Had this been, say, Indonesia or China, would cultural specificity have played a bigger role in the analysis? Or perhaps bringing in this 'macro' question would distract from the main aims of the project?

John

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 6th 2015

Hi John

Thanks for your comments, first I am really please that people have liked this site as an example of public anthropology and it would be great to get more feedback about that either in this seminar or privately by email if people have thoughts about it.

The concept of 'feeling right' was based on several elements of my existing work. The idea was to find a concept that could be used to speak to research participants with, to research through and that was also meaningful in relation to theoretical and methodological strands of the work. In part it was derived from my interest in sensory experience and perception - so I wanted to create an open category through which participants could communicate about these embodied feelings (and with video use their bodies and the environment and objects, sounds, textures etc in it rather than just speaking). The notion of feeling right also came from the ways I had, as an ethnographer, incrementally learned through earlier research projects about how participants had shared their feelings about different environments I had explored with them. While as far as I know they did not use the term 'feel right' it was not necessarily a term I wanted to come back to use in the participants' words, but something that would help to bring to the fore similar ways of telling, showing or performing about everyday environments that I had encountered before, - as this was the kind of thing I was looking for. Examples from previous work include how in my earlier work about the home participants had shown or told me about how they had created a particular atmosphere while,

for example cleaning the bathroom, using media (radio, music playing), the feeling - in the form of textures, smells, and the look and sound (if you want to divide it into sensory categories) of cleaning, as they used products, wiped over particular surfaces, etc. I knew from earlier work that people sought to make their home 'feel' a particular way, and that they might do this differently at different times of the day. The idea now was to understand how digital media were part of this and how energy might need to be used to achieve it (or work towards it as I was not expecting there to be a precise ideal or it to be actually achieved in any complete sense). Another example might be the ways of anticipating how a place or locality might feel if it was not right - for instance standing in a site of land and sensing what it would feel like if an unwanted block of apartments was built on it. The key point to answering this question for me then, is not so much about that particular concept, which is specific to that project, and to my own work. Rather the point is that the research projects we do, and share with our co-researchers, are always part of longer trajectories of learning, knowing (about) and researching in the world. Our different projects sometimes blur into each other so that we are not starting a new each time.

The question about Englishness and cultural context is very relevant and perhaps we should have said more about this on the web site - although I think there is one explanation why I did not (below). In fact had we done this it would not have just been about cultural context and Englishness, but would also have needed to cover a range of elements of the specific framings of everyday life, energy and digital media in UK. This includes the energy and digital infrastructures, policies, the weather, types of technologies and materiality, forms of sociality and much more that are part of every life in UK. These were accounted for (if sometimes implicitly) in our research and in our other writing. They are indeed different in several ways from those I have found when doing similar research in other national and cultural contexts. Although I would say that these framings and issues are already documented and critically discussed for the UK context, by other researchers, in ways that they are not or national and cultural contexts where there is just not so much energy research being carried out.

However I also did not include all our research findings, or go into a lot of depth about our theoretical approaches on the web site. This is because the site is meant to be reasonably concise, but also because its focus is on demonstrating the use of the key findings methodologically.

Our sample was of 20 households. Our findings were quite consistent across the sample in that we were able to find patterns as we had hoped to and were able to generalise from the households. However, this is a very specific and small group of people. My point is that these participants are only a very small part of the "English" and anyway to be English or live in contemporary England is characterised by much diversity. I think there are some elements of our key findings that could be generalised across wider populations - but partly this is because they are theoretical as well as empirical (ie developed through a dialogue between theory and ethnography) - such as ideas about movement through the home, and making the home feel right (ie making an atmosphere of home). The claims of the project are not about the English so much as about what we can learn about a particular group through a particular ethnography/design research process which is framed by an appreciation of the digital and sensory elements of the environment of home. However indeed the work is about the ways in which the infrastructures, policy weather and technologies at play England impact on lives and on the contingencies that we highlight as influencing the ways that

everyday digital media and energy use play out (there are also wider and global framings that would be part of this too).

Kerstin might also have some comments on this, as might Roxana whose PhD research was much more engaged with questions around the cultural context of Englishness

Sarah

Nina Grønlykke Mollerup [ninagmollerup@gmail.com] March 9th 2015

Dear Sarah, Kerstin and all,

Thanks for sharing this fascinating project! I particularly appreciate the transparency of methods. I find writing is often a very limited way of giving readers a sense of the fieldworker in the field. This project brilliantly shows another way for us to demonstrate our claims to knowledge and make the process of research more transparent.

I assume that using video and making a website has enabled you to explain your presence in a more tangible manner than we are often able to. But I wonder if the website has also provided you with an opportunity to engage with your participants in new ways? Have you had any discussions with them about it (after it was made) and has this been useful to the research?

I have another (perhaps) rather trivial question. I wonder why you have chosen to highlight 'digital' in the title of the website? The digital seems (to me) to be only a small part of the living you are interested in.

Cheers,
Nina

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au] March 9th 2015

Hi Nina
thanks for your comments and questions!

Your question about how the web site could feed into the research process is a good one. Kerstin might have more to say about this as she has been more closely involved with the participants during this stage. For now though I would say the following.

First all of the participants were consulted about our use of their video clips on the web sites and asked to approve them before they went online. This was an important part of the ethics of the process, so they had some involvement in that sense. However, the site was made at the end of the project. Therefore it was not really made as something that we could use in order to engage participants in new ways. Having said that, if there was now an ongoing process then it would be really interesting to do this.

Second, we highlighted 'digital' because throughout the project one of the core objectives was to make digital design interventions for energy demand reduction. So while we researched a range of different activities in the home, such as laundry, cooking, bed times, mornings, uses of bathrooms etc, the project was framed by questions about digital living and how this was also interwoven with such activities. So, for example, if you are researching showering, and wondering how we might think about how to reduce energy demand in relation to showering, through digital design interventions, then for me one of the questions to ask would be: what does digital media have to do with showering. The answers to this question might be very mundane, but they can produce really interesting insights, and also novel insights precisely because they are the questions that are often not usually asked in research about digital media in the home.

Sarah

Àngels Trias i Valls [Triasiva@regents.ac.uk]

March 9th 2015

Hi,

I really liked the site and the project as a sensorial ethnography project, I think it illustrates beautifully well the rich interrelation between design/sensorial ethnography. I have no issues regarding the filming, sound or otherwise as it seems to me, informants are central to the creation of ethnographic context, and the technology and strategies used appear to 'make sense' to them. Albeit, following John's comments, I also wonder how these would feel to informants from other cultural contexts that may be use to other visualisations and sensorialisations of their domestic space with regards to 'flow', 'movement' and 'making an improvisation'.

I am involved in an sensorial ethnography project, and it is great to see the execution of this one; I really like the way it is structured through the website. The website feels very 'dense' (positive density) in terms of the ethnographic 'thickness' or rather say 'atmosphericity'. I know the project isn't meant to have 'fixed findings', but it does have some 'fixed premises' as to what do we mean by 'using less energy', which kind of 'fix' the findings in the design section (when the outcome of this exercise is narrated). Also, missing (my apologies if I missed it) in the project are discussions about the domestic liminal times/activities - people talking and taking mobiles to their toilets, for example. In the project I am involved, people often neglect to mention the use of mobiles in toilets -there is a greater narrative of the mobile in bed, the mobile as alarm-; when I bring this out the toilet, it generates really interesting discussions as to what people do not wish to disclose about their use of either mobiles/energy consumption in certain areas of the house. I know these discussions are not completely missing in the sense that the idea of 'messiness' in the website incorporates their absence, but I wonder if more could be explored about energy consumption in regards to what people do in the areas outside conventional 'energy use' (washing/laundry) thinking.

I wonder, what are the notions that may be 'taken for granted' from the point of view of what the energy teams want to achieve, I quote: 'This exercise taught us that if we want to help people to use less energy when doing the laundry, or showering, for example we might need to look at the whole routine through which they do those activities, rather than those activities in isolation'. I agree that the holistic element is essential in all ethnographic/social projects, and this can be achieved with

sensorial ethnographic methods, but also through other kind of ethnographic approaches. Because the same conclusion can be drawn through other methodologies, I would have liked to read more about why a sensorial ethnographic method improves the research strategy (I believe it does, profoundly - the whole website is an example of how ethnographic visualisations enhance this project). I would have liked some more discussion to how the ethnographic sensorialisation contributed, added on, to what other methods already do in allowing us to understand holism -maybe this can be part of a paper later on. It is clear to me, but maybe it can be externalised further to other audiences, it is too subtle sometimes.

I am digressing slightly, my main point, however, is on what may be taken for granted prior to the start of the project, on the premise that people 'use' 'energy' (or use it in areas of laundry, showering); and who are the 20 group of people involved. On the 'use' of 'energy' I wonder if we are giving privilege to certain areas (laundry/showering/washing) as a bias on how we think of energy to start with. For example, back to the use of mobile use in toilets I am looking at, the mobile is ubiquitous at home, but since people avoid talking of their use of mobiles in toilets, an area with often no-recharging points, there are specific emerging patterns of use of energy choices to do with the movement of the mobile throughout the house/and outside and throughout the day that involve aspects of mobile/energy use they don't talk about. Another example, depending on your social background is ironing (daily and for most of Sunday) is privileged over showering (only on Friday - as opposed to daily) and this creates a different type of mobility around the moments where people decide what is 'messy' and what is 'orderly' and the boundaries and spaces in-between.

In the issue of design for intervention (laundry process), sounds really good but would individuals be able to implement such changes? I do not know, from the videos and the website, if the people own their homes or rent, or if their renting is similar (and so their consumption as in Bourdieu, makes similitudes of practices). Are these people able to make such proposed choices? For example, my own renting I am not able to even change energy providers or to enter into interventions that would make my energy consumption improve much. There are also patterns of consumption (retail discount shopping) that have had an impact on how we do and don't do laundry. I mean, the discussions I am familiar with about laundry also contain elements of discussion about postponing laundry, and laundry build-ups that have to do not just with 'washing' but also shopping and giving away clothes, with quantities of clothing, times when certain items are necessary. I am really alien to this concept of 'changes one/two times' a day for children - in the family case study-, because in my thinking it is not the time of changing clothes that determines when I will do the washing. The Child constrained family is slightly problematic, it is very set within a particular class/ethnic and economic background. (out of curiosity, do they own their house?) - if I was reading this as the outcome of the findings of the energy company it would put me off from taking it seriously as a consumer-, it can't apply to me because it reflects middle-class, educated, white, straight parenting, with one staying at home, with habitus about moving around the house that look very orderly to me (like counting the times you can change a child). It is about the old debate on 'rationality' that we used to have regarding religious belief, but this time applied to consumer practices in the home. The 'rationality' of their 'messiness' would need to be contrasted further. I wonder if there would be worth looking at ethnographic cases where messiness is organised differently. What are the backgrounds of these 20 families? Would other type of videos -for a messy space it feels very controlled at times- could emerge in different contexts? Have you considered using children to

produce their own energy accounts, to follow their patterns during the day? All the videos are of white people, young-middle age, middle class, mostly women (I wasn't sure but all English spoken as a first language?).

On the one hand, as a methodological practice and outcome on the website I like the possibility of creating visual spaces that enable us to position sensoriality as it occurs around the home. I think this is done very well, the section on 'histories from the home' is great. On the other hand, the case of the constrained child family, and the informant background appear very biased towards one fairly shared type of 'messiness', I think the choice of groups, and approach to what we mean by 'use' are to be questioned/explained much further. There is a danger in that the 'messiness', which as a concept works very well in connecting with understanding design/energy use, disguises the possibility that there are types of messiness that would be harder to understand from the point of view this research emerges from; I am not looking for representativeness, what I am saying, probably echoed in other posts, that the way these people walk around the house makes sense to us (to the designers as well) ethnocentrically; I would like to see videos from people whose lives may be more precarious in terms of energy use, with other priorities that are not washing/drying; for this group of people, energy is somehow a sort of an existing 'thinking, priority', they are aware of the discourses on energy saving; how would this project make sense to someone in their own neighbourhood who does not share discourses on energy saving? I believe the Stories From The Home does show people talking about what they may take for granted, and they make visible to us the mundane, or what is relevant and are great ethnographic moments. I wish that, the kind of questioning we ask about 'the mundane' was applied to 'energy'. The informants do talk about energy, and what they do, and they takes us through their daily lives, but there is not enough contrast to challenge what 'energy-thinking' is about. The advantage to using sensorial methodologies is, as illustred, that it can externalise some of this 'thinking' for us, my worry as to when ethnocentricity settles is, is in understanding 'energy-thinking' as it is represented in design and later fixed in the possible choices to do with managing 'energy'. Where else do this people 'manage energy' that is not to do with the obvious cleaning/washing? and can we integrate these non-obvious spaces for managing energy into the mundane washing/cleaning/electricity we witness here?

Thank you Sarah for this project and allowing us for a discussion on this.

Kind Regards,
Àngels

Veronica Barassi [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk]

March 9th 2015

Dear All,

We have decided to extend our 50th E-Seminar Energy and Digital Living for a week. The seminar will now close on TUESDAY 16TH of MARCH.

You are all welcomed to send in your questions and thoughts. To post please write directly to medianthro@easaonline.org (with CC/ my email address v.barassi@gold.ac.uk so that I can make

sure that messages won't get lost).

Veronica

Jo Helle-Valle [Jo.Helle-Valle@hioa.no]

March 9th 2015

Hi - a from the side-comment & in a hurry (I am just back from Botswana and simply do not have the time to go through all the comments, so I apologize if I repeat others' points):

I am a great fan of what Sarah is doing and I think this is really groundbreaking work. For one, it is a stroke of genius to 'emulate' fieldwork (not meant in a negative sense) in this way where fieldwork is not possible to conduct. (I and colleagues have tried it in some of our research with quite a success.) But to me there is a much more profound point here - which I would like to call an Isadora Duncan-argument: Namely that it grasps a part of reality that simply is not possible to grasp through words. Duncan supposedly answered, when asked about what her dancing meant: "If I could tell you what it meant I wouldn't have to dance it."

To me - linked to Sarahs methodology & dissemination - the Duncan-point has one epistemological point and one ontological:

1. Epistemology: Straight from Duncan's mouth: some important - I would say essential - aspects of life as it unfolds is non-linguistic (and mind you: not pre-linguistic). This means that our access to this praxis (and I use here deliberately the 'praxis' and not 'practice') can only be through non-linguistic means. We are almost always forced to end up with words in one way or another but the more we 'postpone' the introduction of words as a substitute for praxis the better the data are. So visual data are not simply a pedagogical extension of linguistically mediated data but in fact something qualitatively different. (M. Bloch was on to this as early as 1991 in his - to me - groundbreaking article: Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science, (Man, 26: 183-98) but it is a point made by important philosophers (Marx, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein) before his time and, I believe, revived by some post-phenomenologists in recent times (Thrift, Ingold, Moores, etc.)

2. Ontology: as long as we do not operate with ideas about a world consisting only of representations we need to sort out the relationship between things we do and how we talk/represent it, and not the least what the relationship between talk and non-talk is. There was a discussion a year or two ago on this site, based on S. Moores' paper, about non-representational theory (NRT). Several were positive to the idea but preferred to talk about 'not always'-NRT rather than pure NRT. I suggest that this is missing the ontological point, which is that to the extent that people we study 'do' representations (which they obviously do all the time) it is not representational in the scientific sense - rather it is simply a special form of praxis (performative in one sense or another). I.e. what is representational in an emic sense is performative in an etic sense. We - as researchers - also do representations all the time, in the sense that we try to re-tell reality. However, the crucial ontological point is that we need to see that these representations are our scientific practice and not part of the life-world we are trying to understand. If we don't acknowledge the difference we mistake the map for the landscape (or is it the other way around?). To me, this is what the term flat ontology means (or should mean (cf. of course Latour but more importantly: Manuel DeLanda): that

there are no representations, models, rules, structures that lie behind, below or above reality and form/explain it but that all is praxis and analysis is simply to re-present(sic!) habitual (and not so habitual) praxis, not to introduce some magic force of a different ontological status. Anyways, and here I am back to Sarah's methodology; by holding on to the sensory and tangible (what bodies do, accompanied by talk and in a concrete space) we are aided in seeing that talk accompany praxis, not replace it (the Duncan-point). Thus, by presenting data in the ways she does she not only postpones transformation of non-linguistic data with linguistic but in fact 'insists' on the irreplaceability of the non-linguistic.

Thus, I think both the methodology and the way it is disseminated helps to bring out the richness in praxis, the flatness of the world and to bring down the RT perspectives that few subscribe to but many use nevertheless.

So: thanks Sarah!

Jo Helle-Valle

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 10th 2015

Hi Angels and All

Angels, thanks for that long and considered set of comments. I have tried to make my reply less long, but I am not sure if I have managed. You raised an interesting set of issues and I ordered the responses under a set of headings as follows:

Can we mobilise concepts like 'flow', 'movement' and 'improvisation' as universally applicable categories that might be used across projects in other cultural contexts in similar ways or not? I don't particularly want to generate a debate about the relationship between the particular and the universal in anthropology: I think there are different ways to do anthropology and that we all make critical choices about that as our scholarship develops. However, I think that there are reasons why these concepts might be mobilized across different context, in that these are theoretical concepts that have long trajectories of debate in disciplines including anthropology and human geography. When they come into dialogue with different ethnographic places they will generate different types of discussions, and indeed we might end up abandoning them and turning to others instead, but they are concepts that can offer starting points.

The dialogue between ethnography and theory is always specific and we should not necessarily try to replicate it. The concepts of movement, flow and improvisation emerged both from the ethnographic findings and our theoretical interests. They also developed in dialogue with recent work in design anthropology, Ingold's work on making, and from processual geography. That is, from areas of theoretical debate in relation to the messy interpretive process that anthropologists usually find it difficult to write about (note the lack of blow by blow guides to how to do analysis in anthropological ethnography!). I am doing/have done similar types of research in other cultural and national contexts and indeed other concepts have emerged. I would put that down to theoretical turns in scholarship at the time, as well as research questions and specific things that emerged from

the ethnography being different. As an example I am now, since developing the site exploring how critical readings of the recent interest in atmospheres which has developed across human geography and anthropology can be developed in dialogue with the theory, methodology and ethnography from this project (we have an article due out in the journal *Visual Communication* about this later this year).

These concepts worked well in our project, which makes me think they are worth trying out in different contexts. The way we work as scholars is incremental, across projects, rather than establishing through one project a model that can be applied across others. Therefore for me, methodological and theoretical development go hand in hand and also change in relation to each other and the ethnographic field in each project.

The Interdisciplinary context:

Could we look at what people do outside conventional energy use? We didn't research energy use directly so much as the things people do that use energy – so this meant that actually we also looked at things like opening windows, dealing with draughts, and more (some of these are discussed in publications), although we were interested in how these intersected with conventional categories that are looked at in energy demand research. To a certain extent we did this in that these would be really useful areas for future research, but there were reasons why in this project we focused on particular activities that use energy.

However, this was a large interdisciplinary project in which we needed to coordinate what we were researching with things that designers and engineers could also investigate, as well as with what their existing research fields told us it was important to investigate. Our shared interests in media, laundry, bathrooms, cooking, heating etc, were not controversial, in that they were topics that we all wished to work on. They were also chosen in relation to existing research knowledge about their implications for environmental sustainability from our different fields of research. Take laundry for instance. Energy measurement and monitoring research shows that it is a major culprit in domestic energy demand, and there has also been quite a lot of sociological research about how laundry is done, as well as my own earlier ethnographies of laundry. The question of whether the best way to reduce the amount of energy consumed through laundry activities is to directly address the laundry itself or through other more radical or less direct (co-designed) interventions with participants is a whole other story, but keep in mind too that this project was also an experiment in working together across a large project

The relationship between anthropology and design:

The ways that we worked as ethnographers were anthropologically informed, but on the other hand we need to distinguish between anthropology as what Marilyn Strathern usefully called 'a community of critics' and anthropology as it becomes part of a shared interdisciplinary agenda. Writing about my work to anthropologists brings these issues into relief because it makes me explain where I stand in terms of inter/disciplinary practice, but also why. So in response to Angel's points about the child-constrained personas, I would first say that I did not participate in the development of these beyond the ethnographic work feeding into them, so I also am not really in a

position to comment on them (this was partly because was in Australia by then). However we also need to keep in mind that the personas were part of the design research team's work – they drew from our ethnographic work, but their work clearly also refers to their own disciplinary practice and its own trajectories. I think for anthropologists the construction of design personas from ethnographic materials can be quite jarring when we compare them to our own practice and the principles that inform it – they are objectifications of sets of people presented as if they could be real lives – therefore they are problematic from an anthropological perspective on a number of levels (although anthropologists also abstract what they find about people). But while we need to keep a critical perspective, I am also interested to see what work can be done in the world through other discipline's methods and to witness how other disciplines work through their practice. It is (perhaps too) easy to jump to critical responses about the work of other disciplines, based on an anthropological perspective – and I have often done this as a first reaction when doing interdisciplinary work myself, but for me this has to only be a first critical reaction which perhaps affirms my position as an anthropologist, before I seek ways of working across disciplines that might impact on my practice and critical perspectives to some extent, but also allow me to see the world differently and to learn from the questions that other disciplines ask. In fact working across the LEEDR project with Designers and with Engineers was particularly interesting in this respect (but I have already written enough).

I think there is still a lot to be done in terms of generating a shared anthropology-design practice. In my current work I am concerned with how to engage ethnography and design in processes of what I would call a more 'blended practice' which connects anthropology/ethnography and design in other ways. There is some discussion of this on the web site of the Design+Ethnography+Futures programme which I have developed with Yoko Akama at RMIT – see <http://d-e-futures.com/>. This will be discussed more in a forthcoming iBook about Un/Certainty. There is also of course the new literature about design anthropology – developed by Wendy Gunn, Jared Donovan, Ton Otto and Rachel Charlotte Smith which is creating important new connections between the fields and practices of design and anthropology.

Participants;

The participants in our project were nearly all white British middle class home owners. This was a sample of only 20 households and for various reasons related to the logistics and interdisciplinary needs of the project we needed them to be based in a particular geographical locality (so a large team of researchers could easily all visit them), to all be home owners (so that the engineering team could install monitoring equipment in their homes), to be family households (in terms of energy use) and to be comparable with each other. This turned out to mean that we worked with a particular demographic, but on the other hand I don't think any particular demographic would be 'better' to work with than any other, just different and for different reasons. The other characteristic of our participants was that they were all interested enough in our project to participate in it for its duration (this was a 4-year project).

So, yes it would have been interesting to look at a more diverse range of households, but perhaps not necessarily more interesting – just differently interesting.

I also agree with Angels that it would be good to look at how people who manage energy in other ways would offer alternative perspectives. Here I do not so much mean studies of 'alternative' lifestyles by already environmentally aware people. But rather the ways that other sets of everyday contingencies lead to a range of different ways of managing energy by people living in a range of different circumstances.

Critical perspectives

Finally, I would add that working in the interdisciplinary field of energy demand reduction, as an anthropologist actually invites a range of different critical perspectives about how such research is done, by whom, the theoretical and methodological frameworks that other disciplines use, and how these are mobilized to create intervention/change. I really appreciate the critical perspectives Angels has suggested, and I agree that some of these are definitely worth following in this research field. But I would also say that there are a number of other critical issues and debates that we have been engaging in which have been related to existing work already happening in this field. For example social sciences research about energy demand in everyday life has been dominated by sociological theories of practices and psychological theories of behaviour change – for me both of these disciplinary perspectives are problematic in terms of the ways in which they design research problems and how they then become translated into design processes – and I have written about this in several of the articles we have published from the project. I think anthropology has an important role to play in this field precisely due the ways in which ethnography and theory come into dialogue through the research process and due to the possibility of a design anthropology. Coming back to media anthropology – I think there is a role specifically for an anthropology that acknowledges the digital and sensory environments in which energy use is played out.

Sarah

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 10th 2015

Hi Jo

thanks so much for those comments - which I think really explain well some of the things we were trying to do - and it is really nice and refreshing to have it put into your words.

Yes, going back to Shaun's paper and the discussion we had there about the non-representational, my work has been along those lines very much. The idea of going *through* the world rather than mapping it out from above - or at least the relationship between those two processes has been an important way of thinking for me. Methodologically this means going through the world with people with the video camera, but also inviting viewers to continue journeys through the world when viewing - with the idea that the video recording is always played forward and not played back - I have written about this in two recent piece, one myself and one with Kerstin here

https://www.academia.edu/8331361/Pink_S._2011_Drawing_with_our_feet_and_trampling_the_maps_walking_with_video_as_a_graphic_anthropology_in_T._Ingold_ed_Redrawing_Anthropology_Ashgate_pp143-156

<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/1/3.html>

Sarah

Brett Frederick Dwyer [Brett.Dwyer@cdu.edu.au]

March 10th 2015

Sorry abt repost

Hi all

Thanks for the link to <http://energyanddigitalliving.com/doing-sensory-ethnography/>. I am not sure how I feel about it yet but one issue that does bother me is the term 'sensory ethnography'. I thought ethnography, at least how it has evolved as a method for social anthropologists was rather immersive, sustained, long term and subjective as well as objective. I guess my question for Sarah is how are we not already being sensory when engaged with ethnography? I guess a related question is what does sensory ethnography give us - as ethnographers, access to that we do not otherwise get access to? In asking those questions though I do appreciate that so much of our lives are visually mediated - online sex for instance, and video as a research tool, a tool for recording and reflection can be invaluable. Also Jo, I was wondering what you mean by our being forced into language in lieu of more deeply appreciating a praxis?

Many thanks

Brett

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 10th 2015

Hi Brett

Thanks for your question.

The term sensory ethnography is for me more of a label than a purely descriptive term, although calling ethnography 'sensory' also of course refers to a particular set of ideas that are concerned with sensory perception and theorising the ways in which sensory perception is part of ethnographic practice. Indeed ethnography has always been a sensory experience, but sensory experience and perception have not always been theorised as part of the reflexive practice of ethnography. It is not so much the term *Sensory Ethnography* itself that needs to be taken at face value, but the ideas that underpin it.

I would also not claim to have any exclusive ownership of the term or what it means - there is also the sensory ethnography lab at Harvard (which also connects anthropology and film and creative practice) <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/>

The notion of a sensory ethnography for me then refers to the idea of developing a form of ethnographic practice that attends to theoretical and ethnography turns towards sensory perception, sensory experience, the non-representational and related questions, which has been part of anthropological discussion increasingly since around 2000. This is explained in a lot more detail in my book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?>

[prodId=Book242776](#)).

Another point to make is that *Sensory Ethnography*, is not the first book to refer to a theoretical 'turn' that has been applied to ethnographic practice - look through the methodological books through the last decades and you will see how ethnography has been labelled reflexive, gendered, virtual, visual (that one is also my fault I guess) and more. In September my colleagues and I will publish a book with *Digital Ethnography* as its main title (from the Digital Ethnography Research Centre). Again I would point out that it is not so much the short label that matters, but to the wider discussions it refers to.

I don't want to turn this discussion into a debate about what 'real' anthropological ethnography is (and see also Tim Ingold's discussions of the relationship between anthropology and ethnography). However, I would say that the view that ethnography is, as you put it 'immersive, sustained, long term and subjective as well as objective' is simply not really sustainable for many research topics, time-constraints and particularly the demands of engaged, applied or public anthropology. This means developing alternative ways in which to develop ways of knowing with and about research participants that might be much more short term, more experimental (another cross over with design and creative practice research) and seem very little like long term participant observation. Jennie Morgan and I have recently written an article called 'Short term ethnography' which tries to explain some of these issues through our experiences of ethnographic research about safety - see https://www.academia.edu/8128766/Pink_S._and_J._Morgan_2013_Short_term_ethnography_intense_routes_to_knowing_Symbolic_Interaction_36_3_351-361

Sarah

Sally Applin [saa26@kent.ac.uk]

March 10th 2015

I'm not clear on something. if you had all of this data on actual people, why did you need to use "personas" for the design phase?

-Sally

Àngels Trias i Valls [Triasiva@regents.ac.uk]

March 10th 2015

Thank you Sarah for your comprehensive reply. I work with designers in my current job (I have already shared your site with them) I really value that kind of interaction as reflected by you, and I will look into the links/books that you mention, thank you for these.

I must be doing something very different with laundry that you do! This is a point of reluctance of mine, it is not about your project, I am not always convinced by the point from where the literature on laundry emerges from, I always seem to have the same issue with it- but I do take your point. I wonder if there is a kind of bias on how these (informant) groups share understandings and practices to do with laundry that is what I would like to see questioned further. Thank you for explaining the informant's background, would it be useful to disclose this in the website? If it is there, my apologies.

I couldn't agree more with you that there is a role for anthropology that acknowledges digital and sensory environments in which energy (and other considerations) is played out. I think your project does this very well, and so past projects too. I was in total agreement with that premise from the project, as I navigated through it, and I would so much welcome a design anthropology! My concerns were more to do with the way in which the design reproduces specific views of energy thinking when the ethnography questions and takes these much further, I think the tension between these is necessary, and it is part, in my experience, of working with designers. One of my interests is on the topic of electronic waste (and electronic sensorial environments where this waste occurs). I have seen a team of sociologists/designers and artists bringing together issues of design and use here in London and I think your website goes a step further, and seen the kind of productive relationships that designers and anthropologists can come about. I will be looking forward seeing these collaborations and texts as you produce them!

Thanks again for this site, it has been inspirational

Kind Regards,
Àngels

Mark Pedelty [pedelth@umn.edu]

March 10th 2015

Very interesting seminar, all. Sarah et al's site inspired a very productive discussion.

For one thing, it has revealed the many different reasons we do our fieldwork, writing, etc. I have to admit that over the years I've become much less enchanted with abstract "poetics" (which never seem that poetic) regarding "flow" and other modeling metaphors, and more interested in interdisciplinary, problem-oriented work. There is a feel of wine-and-cheese abstraction in much of contemporary anthropology, eschewing more messy interdisciplinary engagements with science, the arts, and especially, for what for many anthropologists raises a nasty red flag: problem solving. For me, praxis is the ability for theoretical discussion to inform a more embodied and, dare I say, even material ecological practice for sake of biodiversity, environmental justice, and environmental health. Thus far, the sciences have had greater critical relevance to those important questions, as have environmental movements, and the arts. The humanities and anthropology a bit less so, and I think that might have something to do with our tendency to eschew messy interdisciplinary engagements that require us to lessen our fear of polluting purer cultural theory with others positivistic impulses (e.g., the circular concerns over representation that crop up to forestall other important conversations). There is a sense that wandering too close to other rhetorics and conversations is a thought crime from the disciplinary perspective of anthropological theorization. If the poststructural turn was supposed to lead us to one conclusion, it was that all knowledge is partial and limited. Instead, we sometimes simply move toward the opposite side of the same binaries, including revulsion at the "vulgar" material sciences surprisingly good predictions of how a material world and ecological system behaves, perhaps out of fear that there are, indeed, "more things in heaven and earth than imagined in our philosophy." There is a certain humility and temporary suspension of judgment required in order to hold those more holistic, interdisciplinary conversations that the defensive and retrenched humanities seem to be lacking in this age of disciplinary threat.

I write all this in praise of the Energy & Digital Living project. It allows for any number of messy engagements, from theoretical reflections on cultural patterns to potential discussions with scientists concerning energy use in households. This is not niche ethnography, but rather creative fieldwork and, in some ways, a work of polysemic art that holds myriad possibilities for critical conversation and application. It is an expanding conversation, with key interlocutors (e.g., anthropologists and residents) rather than a more uni-directional, purely textual presentation with predictable theoretical genuflections. That is the beauty of the applied side of praxis, the ability to say something theoretically new because it does not fall into solipsistic absolutes regarding representation (subtext: "Anthropology ubber alles"). It is refreshing to read/watch/hear something new and productive, but as my remarks here indicate, it might be as much a matter of taste and the scholarly life cycle. I admit to becoming a bit of a curmudgeon and disciplinary agnostic after witnessing recurrent and circular waves of theorization that seem to lead to the same dead ends. Therefore, thanks Sarah and team for providing to what my eye, ear, and being seems like something new and productive, in the best sense of the term. I am applying aspects of your method and analytical framework in my developing project in music-and-environment and imagine I am not alone in having been inspired by your work.

Mark

Sally Applin [saa26@kent.ac.uk]

March 10th 2015

I've been corresponding with Sarah privately but thought I would open this up to the group.

Mostly, I don't understand how this approach is "new."

I'm not trying to be difficult here, or to challenge her and her collaborator's great efforts on this interesting project. I simply do not understand why this is being touted as "innovative methodology."

I asked Sarah:

Sensory Ethnography is an innovative methodology developed for understanding digital technologies and energy use in the home. It goes beyond conventional research that depends on what people say in interviews to instead encounter people as they live out the sensory, tacit, mundane and sometimes barely noticed elements of everyday life.

I do not understand how paying attention to what people do in combination with what they say or instead of what they say is "innovative." Nearly the whole point of ethnography is to look at self-reporting as well as action. What is the distinction you are trying to get at here? I'm missing anything "new" or "significant," as it seems to me part of the whole ethnographic package is to pay attention to these things. Do you think that the addition of digital devices is somehow "new" and changes behavior of this ethnographic outcome?

"Invisible architectures and structures of the Home" -- I like the idea of spending time on this

concept and found it the most valuable part of the project.

And she replied:

thanks for your question. For anthropologists it is probably not particularly new to look at what people do, and accompany them in this, as well as what they say, but for scholars from many other disciplines it is not. Much existing research into energy use in homes done by sociologists depends on the interview (even if in said home) - an approach that attends to sensory perception and experience is not commonly used in this field. The site is aimed at people beyond anthropology as well as at anthropologists.

However I would say that the approach also challenges conventional anthropology in a number of ways - it is not a long term participant observation fieldwork method, it creates collaborative interventions with participants which interrupt their lives and possibly how they think about them - such as re-enactments, and uses video extensively to engage with people, their lives and their homes.

My objectives is also go get beyond the relationship between self-reporting and action - the idea is to actually use action as a way of engaging people with in situ reflection on what they are doing, and using the intensity of that encounter to produce ways of knowing about what they usually do that would not be apparent if just using interviews and observation. Thus I would not see the the video-reenactments, or video tours, which we have written about quite extensively as standard ethnography

I hope this answers your question, and please do fee free to post the question and answer to the online discussion if you like - its completely up to you.

But I'm still not getting it.

The part where Sarah writes that this challenges conventional anthropology: In industry using these methods, we have done shorter work, created collaborative interventions, asked for re-enactments (when necessary and where self-reflection often happens as an outcome) and used video in lives and homes.

It may not be standard ethnography, but it has been going on in industry for a long time. I used this approach with Dr. Susan Squires at GVO in 1997 when we worked on the Go-gurt research and continued in this vein on pretty much any ethnography project I've done in industry.

I'm not disputing that the work Sarah and her team has done is interesting work, just that I don't think this approach is new or innovative, unless I am still really missing something.

If I am, please help me to understand, I'd be grateful to learn what I can to improve my own methods.

For the type of work I am referring to EPIC conference is a good place to find more information. It

discusses ethnography in industry with multi-disciplinary teams and good proceedings.

The first chapter of *Creating Breakthrough Ideas* discusses this being done in the 80's. They discuss a use case of RV research in the 80's that was done in very much the spirit that this work describes.

-Sally

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 10th 2015

Hi Sally
thanks for posting this.

I would say a few more things in response to your comments and further questions.

First, actually I was a bit hasty to say that sociological work in the energy field tends to depend on interviews - it was more of the case in the past, although while we have been doing our project sociologists have also been using interesting video methods and also other really interesting techniques in this field - for instance the work of Mike Michael in collaboration with Bill Gaver, about energy communities is fantastic.

However back to your question in relation to what I think you are not accounting for. Yes, video has been used, in a range of ways in industry ethnography for a long time, and my first uses of video to research in the home were developed in collaboration with industry research, also in the late 1990s so we would coincide there. Indeed video methods were much more acceptable in industry ethnography than they were in mainstream academia much earlier on. However, my use of video was developed much earlier than that - in my training as a ethnographic documentary maker in 1989-90, at the Granada Centre at Manchester University, which is where much of what informs the use of video in my work started to develop. Which I believe is one of the first differences between the 'methods' as you are referring to them and the methodology that I am discussing.

One aspect of this is the issue is the relationship between methods and methodology? We don't make a claim that the methods themselves are 'new' or innovative in the sense that using video in a technical sense is innovative. The methods are not new for me either in that I have used them for a long time. However, as Kerstin and I discuss in one of our articles here <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/1/3.html> methods also have biographies, and they are not developed in exactly the same way in each project - rather the ways in which we learn about them and use them across projects is incremental. I don't mind the term 'method' and use it myself, but we always need to remind ourselves that there is no 'pure' method that actually stays the same when enacted as part of a research project.

Therefore the 'method' is perhaps the wrong thing to focus on, in that a method can only ever come into being when it is enacted, and when that happens it inevitably becomes more than just a method, and is never actually the method that was used before. Methods cannot be completely replicated, and cannot be taken off the peg and re-used in the same way as they were before. That is why it is often better to talk about methodology.

The innovation lies not in picking up a video camera, or following people around - but in how different approaches - from theory and practice – come together. In this case including techniques from ethnographic documentary making (the work I do with the video camera - and importantly the understandings of what we think we know from it - has been developed in relation to reflexive ethnographic filmmaking practice) along with bringing together theoretical understandings from phenomenological anthropology, and human geography, and media studies. The innovation also lies in seeking to understand the home as a digital-sensory environment, both theoretically and through our ethnographic practice.

The methodology also involves going more deeply into disciplines sometimes. Therefore while we have published in ToCHI and other HCI and design contexts, we have also published in journals including **Media, Culture & Society** and **Senses & Society**, and the **International Journal of Cultural Studies**. This involves creating critical theoretical understandings of both the ways of knowing that we can produce through the use of video in our research, along with also using this to generate critical discipline-specific discussions. These discipline-specific discussions were then brought back into the context of our work with the design team. This work cannot be separated from the approach taken in the project, but because this is a dissemination site that seeks to focus on the work in ways that are accessible to people who might not want to read through theoretical articles, they are offered in the links which go to these articles. As an example, the notion of digital media as presence is developed ethnographically and theoretically in our article 'Situated and Saturated' in **Media Culture & Society**, which develops non-media-centric media studies in a new way. The idea here was to develop a theoretical understanding of the home as a sensory-digital environment, which would feed back into the research process, through a dialogue between ethnography and theory.

I hope this explains further
Sarah

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 11th 2015

Hi Everyone

It has been great to hear people's comments on the web site, the approach and the project so far during this seminar.

I was also really pleased that Kerstin Leder Mackley who worked with me throughout the project has participated, because although I am discussing the site, it was of course not just my own work. Both Kerstin and Roxana Morosanu (who I think is also on this list) played really important roles in the ethnography team and we have published on our work together (as well as with our design colleagues).

I also wanted to comment a bit further on the interdisciplinary nature of this work beyond the kinds of questions that people have been asking so far. We have been focusing a lot on the relationship between anthropology and design - because that is what the content of the site directs us to contemplate on amongst other things. But there is another element of this relationship, which is the

web design itself. That is to say that as a dissemination project the web site itself was also an interdisciplinary project. I worked with Chris Marmo and Rueben Stanton of Paper Giant, here in Melbourne, both of whom have PhDs from RMIT, to develop the web site. This was a great experience and I particularly wanted to work with them as they brought to the site development the theoretical and technical understandings needed to be able to create a project of this kind. There is a page on the site where they write about this, as well as the tagging techniques they have used.

<http://energyanddigitalliving.com/using-video-to-present-ethnography/>

So I would really welcome it if people also want to ask questions of others who participated in this project, other than me

Sarah

Jo Helle-Valle [Jo.Helle-Valle@hioa.no]

March 11th 2015

Brett: About being 'forced into language' - my point was simply that almost all dissemination that counts for one's career is in writing. That's how it is, and difficult to do anything about, but we should acknowledge the difference between linguistic and non-linguistic praxis. One way is to work it into our theoretical stance (like radical praxis-, and flat ontology-perspectives) but the other is to gather more of our data, and disseminate more of our findings in non-linguistic ways.

jo

Brett Frederick Dwyer [Brett.Dwyer@cdu.edu.au]

March 12th 2015

Thanks Sarah

Re your comment: 'I would say that the view that ethnography is, as you put it 'immersive, sustained, long term and subjective as well as objective' is simply not really sustainable for many research topics, time-constraints and particularly the demands of engaged, applied or public anthropology'

Yes I agree with your comment there – and the problem of adapting the method of ethnography with respect to different limitations. I remember being quite impressed by Miller and Slater's book because of the approach they took and the different methods they drew upon, but also because their research drew upon Miller's (though not always explicitly elaborated) years of ethnographic experience in Trinidad undertaken prior to the Internet project they were writing about. The idea is to elaborate and integrate that experience with the context of a contemporary research problem and vice versa. It must become harder to do that when you have not had ethnographic experience within a given context, or your ethnographic experience is cursory. Is the value of the ethnographer and ethnography to be found in the application of a 'limited or stripped-down or adapted form' of ethnography across a range of context, or is it on the corpus of experience developed with respect to a group of people? Perhaps it is or has to be both, but I wonder about 'the sensory,' which emerges over the long term, and how is it relates to the sensory in the context of the energy and digital living project? I agree with you that we do need to do more work on theorising sensory experience and perception as part of ethnographic practice.

Many thanks

Brett

Sally Applin [saa26@kent.ac.uk]

March 12th 2015

Hi Sarah,

Thank you for taking the time to write all of this down and there is much to consider.

This may be in relation to our various disciplines and it may be a combination of our various experiences.

I have lived and worked in Silicon Valley since 1983. When I have conducted fieldwork here, what you refer to as the "digital" in the environment has been going on in many homes in various ways well before I arrived. The "new ways" of connecting have just increased the capabilities, but the desire to use them and the way that they are perceived and integrated -- doesn't seem like a big deal since it's been in the local culture for decades. Technology is technology. Capabilities are capabilities. Whether they are digital or not doesn't seem to change the stories or the outcomes to people's lives any more than any other technology would.

What is the "biography of a methodology" — the legacy of how something is done over time?

It is obvious that methods and approaches need to be adapted for individual cases and that there is no single one that can apply over and over again as situations are different.

I respect your publishing record and your project of wanting to do something to uncover energy usage, etc..

That said, from my point of view, I still do not see anything particularly "new" or "different" of "innovative" in the approach you outline.

My "not getting it" certainly doesn't take away from the useful work you are doing.

Maybe it's best here to just simply agree to disagree.

-Sally

Sarah Pink [sarah.pink@rmit.edu.au]

March 12th 2015

Hi Sally

I think that the difference is the way in which our work is engaging with the relationship between theory and practice - if you have a closer look at some of the articles I mentioned then you will be able to get a sense of how we are doing this (and in the SRO article you will also find the answer the

question that you just posed about the idea of the biography of a method (note, not methodology - although that might also have a biography too)

I had a look at some of the articles you have on your web site and I think you are working in a quite different way - that is that your approach is different - so I do not think you can claim to have already been doing what we are doing.

I don't think this list is the place to go into that level of detail but I would be happy to discuss further with you off list another time

Sarah

Sally Applin [saa26@kent.ac.uk]

March 12th 2015

Hi Sarah,

My work history is not relevant to the discussion of whether or not your claim of "innovation" is true, but it seems like you have landed on an idea that I do not have an applied research background. My website doesn't list my early and other industry career history. That is in my resume. That is "practice." Many clients do not want their projects discussed, (least of all put on websites). Yes, my current research is theoretical, soon to be applied again.

I'm not claiming that I invented your "innovation." I have been trying to say that others well before the both of us have used these approaches and I myself used them in the mid-1990's and beyond.

I've said this to illustrate that what you are doing, in my opinion, is interesting, but doesn't fit the claim of innovation. It's been done. By other people. For a really long time. Whether or not it is "digital," as I added in the last go around, in my opinion, is moot.

I've tried to be respectful about your publishing record and your intent to do interesting work.

I've suggested we agree to disagree and that is about where I'd like to leave this.

Again, not challenging that the outcome is interesting. It is. Challenging the claim of "innovation." I don't see it. I'm ok with that.

-Sally

Chris Marmo [chris.marmo@gmail.com]

March 13th 2015

Hi everyone,

Thanks Sarah for introducing my colleague Reuben and I. As the designers and developers of the website and the video archive, it's been great to see that the site itself has resonated with people (on top of the fantastic research and design work).

To provide another take on the project and this discussion, I wanted to talk to the experience of designing and the developing it, and highlight some of the thinking that went into it.

The page that Sarah linked to earlier (<http://energyanddigitalliving.com/using-video-to-present-ethnography/>) speaks to this already, and so I won't add any more to the points we make on that page. What I do want to talk about is the balance between non-representation and representation that has come up in discussions here, and highlight how the design and functionality of the site attempts to address that.

I should note that Reuben and I were not involved in the research or design work itself – we came in at the end of the project to help with the website only. Also, I haven't run any of the below past Sarah or the broader project team, so please take them as my thoughts only.

Our involvement began, as I started, towards the end of the research project to help disseminate the work through a website. Sarah and the project team had two main goals with this: First, they wanted to show the reflexive nature of their work. Second, they wanted to embed video clips as textual elements in the site, so that the clips themselves were part of the argument, not just an addendum or illustration of the text. The reflexive nature of the research work is referred to and referenced throughout the site in text, and I feel like its quite clear and honest about what its purporting to represent (or not) on individual pages. It is also (obviously!) straightforward to embed video in webpages these days (although it seems to be still a major challenge for a lot of existing dissemination channels), so the technical side of including video was never going to be an issue. There were definitely ethical, privacy and copyright concerns that were worked through, however, and these were perhaps the more challenging aspects of including video. I don't want to gloss over these, but I also don't want to delve into them here as they probably deserve their own post.

Reuben and I's main challenge, as designers and developers of the site, was in combining those two goals in an engaging and useful way while embracing the reflexive nature of the research through the functionality and design of the site itself. To do that, we proposed creating the video archive you see on the site, as well as a tagging system that allowed project team members to create and embed video clips from their ethnographic material in a way that would be visible to the public.

In this way, the video archive is intended to be experienced alongside the “rich media essays” (our term for the text/video combination on the pages) as a way of reinforcing the reflexivity of the work. Without it, we felt that non-academic visitors to the site would be less likely to engage critically with the arguments (taking them at face value), and would also have no way of making up their own mind on the issues discussed. By giving the public access to (mostly) the same ethnographic material the project team had, we hoped to break down that didactic divide between reader and writer, researcher and subject, ‘passive’ viewer and ‘active’ participant, at least to some degree.

Of course, the videos in the archive themselves were recorded, selected and uploaded by the project team, and some participants preferred not to have their videos public, so we can't (or would ever) claim that the archive is impartial or itself free from any kind of interpretation or influence. The

interface does try to make it clear, though, just how each video was used across the different contexts of the website, and encourages visitors to compare and contrast those different interpretations and uses through that interface. I think, importantly, it allows viewers to watch entire videos, from start to finish, even if parts of that video haven't been referenced or referred to in the essays themselves. The archive, in this way, is an important functional and technical backing to the claims to reflexivity the rest of the site makes. Just like the video clips are used as textual elements in the argument of the pages, we hope that the archive itself can be 'read' as a key part of the argument for reflexivity.

The tagging system is not publicly available through the site, but the page we linked to above contains some screenshots of it. If there's interest from the list, I'd be happy to make a small video illustrating its functionality. The goal of the tagging system was to provide the team with an easy way of making video clips, writing about them, and embedded them into the website. A further goal was to highlight to visitors how, where and why clips were used in the sites main content, as a way of exposing some of the connection and links that are otherwise hard to trace or make legible.

There are other solutions around for annotating and analysing video in a 'qualitative' way, but we certainly found this system useful when working with project team members on constructing and embedding the content for each page. It's fair to say that most of the 'analysis' work happened before we made the tagging interface, but when it came to the final finessing of arguments and site content, it proved very practically useful and was indeed used reflexively. We imagine this could have been used throughout the project, at earlier stages.

Any website (or any mode of dissemination, really) has to perform some form of representation. What we hope that the two "parts" of the site – the rich media essays that form the argument and discussion of the site, and the video archive – do is show a fruitful approach to disseminating research that wants to be careful about the representations it makes. We also hope that the site inspires thought around forms and modes of dissemination of ethnographic research, and that it encourages other researchers to 'release' or 'show' ethnographic material alongside their more instrumental reporting. It won't be appropriate for all projects in all contexts, and there are some very important ethical and privacy concerns, but we hope this site shows that its possible with a bit of technical and design effort, and that it makes the dissemination of the work richer.

I've gone on longer than I had hoped here, but I welcome your thoughts and comments on any of the above!

Best,
Chris

Veronica Barassi [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk]

March 16th 2015

Dear All,

This is just a reminder that our 50th E-Seminar will close tomorrow evening.
You still have got some time to send in your thoughts and questions to Sarah and her team.

all best

Veronica

Veronica Barassi [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk]

March 18th 2015

Dear All,

The E-Seminar Energy and Digital Living is now closed. A heartfelt thanks to Professor Sarah Pink, to Prof Mark Pedelty and to all of you who contributed to the seminar. We will let you know as soon as the transcripts are ready.

Veronica