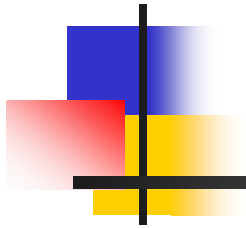


# “Never Mind the Ethno”: Where do we go from here?



Tom Rodden  
Andy Crabtree  
Mark Rouncefield

# How did we get here? Where did we start from?

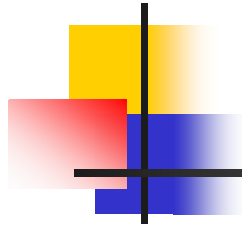
- Close encounters with difficult words -  
ethnomethodologically informed ethnography
- *'any group of persons ... develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it, and .. a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject.'* (Goffman, 1961: ix)
- a naturalistic method - origins in social anthropology -  
investigating phenomena of everyday life  
emphasis on describing the social activities of work -  
providing 'thick descriptions' - Wittgenstein - 'don't think but look'  
what is a day's work like? how do the activities of work  
get done as someone's work?  
innocent/naive; relatively unobtrusive; heavily descriptive



# How did we get here 2?

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- Ethnomethodology - *'to treat practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical .. reasoning as topics of empirical study, and by paying to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events, seeks to learn about them as phenomena in their own right'* (Garfinkel 1967)
- Ethnomethodology - takes seriously the great question of Sociology - 'how does social life get organised?'
- Ethnomethodology = data driven Sociology
- Ethnomethodology refuses to theorise - it has no work for theories to do.
  - an 'unmotivated' approach to the witnessable and varied activities .
- Ethnomethodology does not offer explanations but explication
  - Ethnomethodological findings - descriptions of the embodied social practices in and through which members produce and accomplish the daily activities of the setting



# Where is Here ?

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- Ten Years of research study seeking to link with systems
- Predominant theme is researching the best way to link study with design
- Different arrangements reported
  - Work Study → System Design → Deployed System
  - Deployed System → Work Study → Redesign



# Experiences so far..

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*"..and so what ?"*

- What does this study **say for design**

*".. How did the study inform this.."*

- What is the **link** in a developed system

*".. Is the application better because of the study?"*

- What is the **justification** to emerge from the study



# Studies Now...

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- Ethnography is now seen as nothing new
  - Commercial job descriptions
  - Everyday part of consultancy
  - Accepted technique in HCI/CSCW and Software Engineering
- Ethnographers are scarce

*"Tom do you know who we could hire....."*
- Studies are not scarce

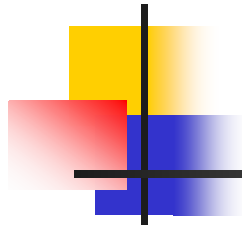
*"This looks like yet another study of Air Traffic Control ...."*



# Study Orientations

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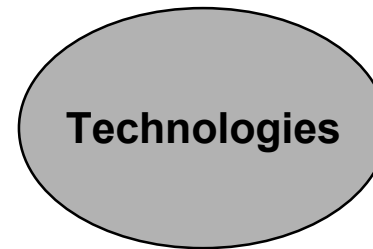
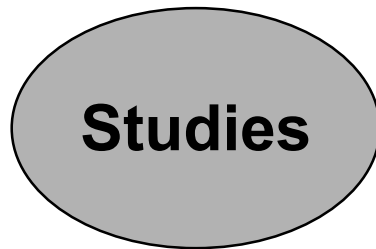
- Designing to fit with organisations
  - Study scopes the problem
  - Study “informs” the designs
  - Study provides sanity check
- Raise the importance of people
  - “sensitising” technologist
- Studies to evaluate and assess



# Worlds Divided

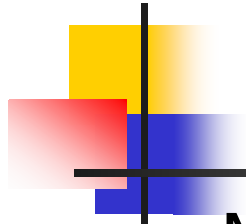
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- A common construction has been the need to “bridge the gap”



- Bringing world together
  - Academic – workshops, theories, methods..
- Setting worlds apart
  - Need to “put the brakes” on designers..
  - Studies don’t say anything about new technologies





# Research Challenges

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- Moving the method on
  - Extending our corpus of studies
  - Recording and presenting lots of experiences
  - Seeking to say something **in general** about design
  
- Technologies moving on
  - Wireless
  - New interaction paradigms
  - Universal information and access
  
- Research is moving on..
  - Start up companies and .com
  - Internet years and new economies dominate research



# Field studies grow up.....

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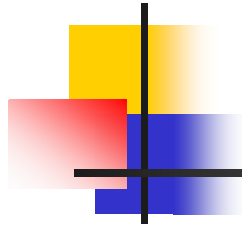
- We have explored field studies for over 10 years and we know enough now for research in interactive systems
  - Declining number of ethno papers in CSCW
- The role of studies of work will continue to decline in interactive systems research
  - Will this mirror the “decline” of PD in CHI



## .. then leave home

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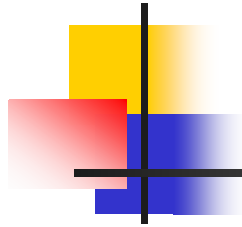
- The essence of the field studies have been appropriated in the research community and no new research is needed.
- Continuing field study oriented research will form into a smaller and narrower community.
- Field studies really take place in the commercial world and have nothing new to say to researchers



# Meanwhile, back at home...

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- Focus on more radical technologies
- Growing turn to other disciplines to inspire
  - New methods (e.g cultural probes)
- Increasing involvement of product designers
- Adventurous visions of the future
  - Ubiquitous Computing
  - Tangible Interfaces
  - Virtual Environments
  - Many focus on experience rather than application



# Where is home now

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- Academic labs and funding bodies focusing on long term high risk and adventurous
- Shorter term research is happening in the .com's
- What is the link between studies of work and research that
  - Uses technologies that are yet to exist
  - Postulates user communities that are not around
  - Involves radical interventions from the arts or design

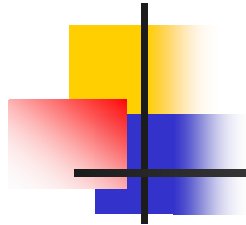


# Home Improvements:

## Potential futures

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- Computers moving away from the workplace
  - so what of work studies?
- “wild and wacky” ideas to drive our research
  - The example of 10\_dencies
- Other disciplines as a contribution to our future research.
  - The example of cultural probes.



# The Intelligent Home?

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- What is the place of technology in the home?
- Closely intertwined with the household's daily routines
- Physically reflects the extent to which living and action are distributed throughout the house
- Control of access to technology is also an integral element of the articulation of roles within the household



# How do people use their home?

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- Various a place of refuge, a place of work, a place of privacy and a place of public exhibition
- Steps are taken to make the house 'a home'
- Householders orient their behaviour towards one another in order to establish and maintain the equilibrium of coordinated home life
  - Use of technology within the home both facilitates and reflects these activities





# What makes the home different from other places?

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- Control
- Security
- Aesthetic judgements
- Tailorability
- Privacy and the 'public face of the home'
- Usually in direct contrast with 'the workplace' in the minds of paid workers



# Walk on the Wild Side:

## 10\_tendencies

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- Knowbotics research seeking to involve urban planners, citizens, artists in commenting on the growth of San Palo
- Everybody can see across the internet material to do with the city and the chaos of the city
- This material presented using animated displays and new devices.

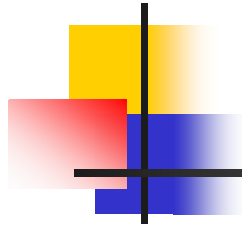


# The 10\_dencies display



Topic raised by  
community  
actions

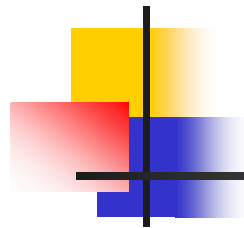
Swirling  
clouds  
showing  
aggregated  
effect of  
community  
actions



## Putting to use

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- Used in a library to convey the activities surrounding access to shared information
- Used to convey the activity and to suggest new areas of interest
- Promoting serendipitous discovery of information
- Low cost aesthetic and ambient display.



# 10\_dencies Library

Topic from  
the library  
OPAC



Swirling  
clouds  
showing  
aggregated  
effect of  
library  
searches



# So what of the work studies

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- The studies of the library could not say “10\_dencies”
- They did say.. History is important in resolving things and discovery previous activities is central to finding information
- Thus activity was displayed through the 10\_dencies piece reflection the notion of a social history of activities.



# Inspiration not Justification

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- Studies emphasis on history of activity provided one source of **inspiration** rather than a point of justification
- The need to link the system with the study was less important
- We don't even pretend we are identifying a need rather we are exploring a potential possibility.



# Inspiration is mundane work

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- Getting a dream to work means it must meet the real world
- A central vision is inspired by
  - Technologies
  - Art and Design
  - Fieldwork
- Realising the vision requires a return to the real world
  - Studies used to ground , inform and assess





# New engagements with users?

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- Designers have linked with users “to inform design”
- Information and insights gained from domains other than places of work
  - The home
  - The community
- Similarly art works have been used to probe other aspects of everyday life



# Getting on with the relatives

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- How does new and emerging approach relate with field studies?
  - Do they replace field studies
  - Do they augment field studies
  - Do new hybrid forms emerge
  - What more..