

# NOTICING OBJECTS WITHIN THE HOME: NAVIGATING A NEW DWELLING WITH A VIDEO RECORDER

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## ABSTRACT

In many different ways a home can surprise and delight. In doing so it furnishes us with insights into how some objects within the home attract our attention. In this preliminary examination of narrated video from an over-night stay at a property we study how the participants display their noticing of things within the dwelling (i) in physical movements walking around the house, (ii) the artful coordination of their conversation with the movement of the recording device and (iii) how this commentary is done in the co-presence of a co-participant. This new insight opens up questions about how people make known what they notice and how the noticing and (aesthetic) assessment of objects plays a relevant part in their experience of the dwelling. More generally we suggest that tangible, lived and embodied interaction with a property, in a try-before-you-buy arrangement such as this, is important not only because it is intrinsically a novel participatory innovation in the property sector, but also in its under-explored potential to reveal experiential insights into interactions in a near-purchase situation.

## INTRODUCTION

Buying a home is a major financial and personal investment. Routinely this decision is made with limited opportunity to appreciate the characteristics of a dwelling before moving in. In contrast we test-drive cars and for lesser value objects we engage more tangibly and might hold, wear, smell, manipulate, to aesthetically scrutinise and re-inspect things several times before we decide (not) to buy. But what if things were different? In this paper we examine an authentic situation where people inhabit a property, experience living in the space and interact with the designed environment in a try-before-you-buy arrangement. Studying this situation we are able to shed light on some of the things that people notice and choose to interact with when they see a property for the first time.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to how a building, in this case a Solidspace dwelling, was experienced and talked about by potential buyers during their first visit in the dwelling. The potential buyers, a dad, his son and their dog walk around the house while the son is video recording the visit. The video recording is accompanied by his spoken aloud commentary, noticings and assessments of objects and features in and of the environment, and these noticings are the main focus of the paper. In particular, we investigate how such 'online' comments are embedded within (i) the boy's physical movements as he walks around in the house, (ii) the manipulation of the recording device so as to zoom in on the objects he is commenting on, and (iii) how the recording and in particular the boy's comments to a potential future viewer is done in the presence of a co-present co-participant, the boy's dad, who might contribute to, comment on, or participate in the boy's telling and recording activity. This exploratory study plays a small part in research that continues to question our relationship with buildings (Luck, 2014, 2014b). In this preliminary examination it is what the inhabitants notice that focuses our attention on sequences to inspect more closely, to see just what is happening and how people interact with things at that moment in time.

## DATA

Our data comes from the hand-held video recordings made by a boy visiting this Solidspace dwelling with his father and dog Chiba in tow. The boy records the route he takes moving through different spaces in the property and whilst recording he speaks to an imaginary viewer, as well as to the man and dog. In this way he provides an emic, reflective account that narrates what he is looking at, as he moves and points the video camera at different features within the dwelling. In doing so he draws a viewer's attention to his navigation through different spaces, as well as making available his assessments of aspects of the dwelling that we can see on the video.

This method of data collection shares similarity with Pink's (2012 p.43) interviews on the move through a dwelling, in the materials we examine the camera is under the direction of a participant. The video recording does act as a documentary. It also provides a creative purpose for the boy who performs to the camera, acting as the author for the resulting video artefact (Buur, Binder, & Brandt, 2000). This way of working is in keeping with conversation analysis and ethnomethodology's concern with recovering the participant's perspective, however, we note that "no matter how elaborate and sophisticated the recording setup is, the record will always be impoverished in some way or other, and it is important for the analyst to be aware of that" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995).

Pointing a video camera in any direction provides a representation of action, that is, it is never *atheoretical*. In this recording there is selection in what the boy notices and films as he provides his lived-account and assessment of what he sees. Crucially, although any recording of events is partial, and there is only one camera view, it is the directedness of the boy's attention that we tap into (Buur et al., 2000). The recorded actions are situated, in the moment, in a setting and in interaction with the father who only talks on occasion. Things also happen as they walk around and interact with the property that are recorded in these materials and are available for our inspection.



Figure 1: The living and kitchen spaces in the dwelling.

The dwelling that the father, dog and boy visit has a distinctive spatial configuration, where the kitchen, dining and living room areas are connected (Figure 1). Their movement between these spaces is written visibly into the recording and can be re-inspected (Buur, Caglio, & Jensen, 2014). It is the man and boy's actions in response to features in the dwelling that we focus our attention on.

We look at how participants orient and respond to each other, and to the things they interact with in the dwelling. In this routine practical reasoning (Pollner, 1987) about the things within a house are brought to our attention and become of analytic interest.

It is the participant's interactions with and reactions to the objects in and features of the dwelling that we study – among other things, how doors are experienced in the dwelling. While the behaviours of doors have received notable attention (Latour, 1988; Norman, 1988) it is what is revealed through the performance of 'doing being a door' as an embodied experience (Mitchell & Raudaskoski, 2013) and the study of normative interactions with a table (Boer, Mitchell, Caglio, & Lucero, 2015) that resonate more closely with this research, as they similarly concern embodied, spatial qualities of movement within built environments.

## ANALYSIS – DOING NOTICINGS

Walking around in a prospective (new) home together for the first time is deeply anchored in a first-hand experiencing, perceiving, observing and noticing features in and of the environment. This involves recognizing arrangements 'for what they are' (e.g. 'this is the dining room') and making assessments about them (e.g. 'a nice fireplace over there'). In the data, the boy's noticings are typically combined with assessments about what he notices as in extract 1.

- (1) MDB/1:10  
01 Boy: the camera the:re  
02 (0.6)  
03 Boy: #pai:ntings,  
#fig.2  
04 Boy: nice paintings on the wa:ll



Fig. 2

Here the boy makes known his noticing of the paintings on the wall (line 3) and then makes an assessment ('nice') about them in line 4. Such noticings, observations, assessments and announcements are done on the fly as online comments in specific sequential

positions (Sacks, 1992, vol. II, pp. 87-97) while participants move around in the different rooms, sections and arrangements of the house. Noticings are thus tied to the mobility of the participants who experience the house in the sense that they are sequentially relevant at certain moments in time according to participants' physical location, postural orientation and visual access to the objects and features of the environment to be noticed, commented on and assessed. Previous studies on car driving describe how noticings in the environment outside of the car are embedded within the interactional work of the participants inside the car (Keisanen, 2012). In this way, noticings of the outside environment are not only linked to the (fast) here-and-now visual access to the feature to be noticed – and hence a specific relevant sequentially placing of the noticing – but also to the social interactional work and, obviously, the driving itself inside the car. This finding relates to Schegloff's description of noticings as making "relevant some feature(s) of the setting, including prior talk, which may not have been previously taken as relevant" (Schegloff, 2007: 219). Interactionally, a noticing "works by mobilizing attention on the features which it formulates or registers, but it treats *them* as its source, while projecting the relevance of some further action in response to the act of noticing" (Schegloff, 2007: 219, emphasis in original), i.e. noticings make relevant a response from the co-participant(s):

(2) MDB/12:00  
 01 Boy: up some more stairs?  
 02 (1.3)  
 03 Boy: another (1.1) vie:w  
 04 (1.0)  
 05 Boy: nice vie:w  
 06 (2.1)  
 07 Boy: into ano:ther bedroom,  
 08 (0.2)  
 09 Boy: .hhh which looks like a head ma:ster's bedroom  
 10 (0.4)  
 11 Dad: 'an why why [a head master's bedroom?  
 12 Boy: [the:re  
 13 (0.4)  
 14 Boy: it j(h)ust does  
 15 (0.7)  
 16 Boy: cuz' it's like it's all bi::g and ehm (0.2) .tsk (0.3)  
 17 Boy: ehm (1.1) ba:throom (0.7) which has a view  
 18 Boy: again

Here the boy moves up the stairs – while explicitly saying that he does so – and moves into a room, which he announces as 'another bedroom' in line 7. He expands the turn by saying that it 'looks like a head master's bedroom' (line 9). Dad challenges this description in line 11 thereby requesting an account from the boy. So here we see how a description of a

room as a certain kind of room is picked up and challenged by a co-present co-participant, i.e. the assessment of the room and its 'type' makes a next-action by the co-participant relevant.

In extract 2 we see how the boy is experiencing the house and doing noticings as he walks through the house. In other words, the noticing is anchored in his experience of navigating his way through the house. In extract 3, the noticing is related to the dad's action and involvement with the house – here a door.

(3) MDB/1:52

01 Boy: 'kay so (.) we open the #door  
 #fig.3



Fig.3

02 (0.7)

03 Boy: nice glass door

04 (3.5) (Dad turns key in the lock with right hand and lifts handle up with left hand)

05 Dad: oh=  
 (head of door tilts inwards)

06 Boy: =oh

07 (1.2)

08 Dad: the other way  
 (right hand holds the door upright as left hand turns door handle downwards)

09 (1.1)

10 Boy: oh #WOW  
 #fig.4



Fig.4

11 (0.8)

12 Boy: the door can actually just come down=

13 Dad: =yes totally

14 (0.2)

15 Dad: swivel

At the start of the sequence the dad approaches the door. The boy notices the dad's movement and bodily orientation as the dad grabs the door handle and says, "so we're opening the door". His noticing is thus related to an action performed by his dad. The boy's assessment of the 'nice glass door' is simultaneous with the dad turning the key in the lock with his right hand as he lifts the handle up with his left. As the head of door begins to tilt inwards both the dad and boy display their reaction of surprise 'oh'. The dad reacts quickly to the movement of the door and uses his right hand to hold the door upright as he turns the door handle downwards





aloud' is organized with participants' mobility in and as a social and interactional environment.

This exercise does point up the value of more sustained interaction with a dwelling, as part of the home buying experience, to more tangibly experience whether you would like to live here.

These materials also suggest a methodological route to study how people experience buildings that is founded on the observation of people's lived-embodied interactions with buildings.

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