

Driving and working on motorways



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Introduction

It is all too easy to treat the motorway as if it were a non-place; as if it were a featureless, empty culture-less route, the nowhere on the way to somewhere. To think about the motorway as the soul-less infrastructure which connects up global nodes of intense, rich activity. Is this not a little like noting that football pitches are terribly flat, highly geometric, pay little design heed to their surrounding landscape and impose their generic form on cultures from Norway to Mexico. Put the players on a football pitch and this strange way of looking at it disappears. Put the traffic back on a motorway and it comes to life as a particular place where social life happens. It is new but not all that new any longer, having been with us for half a century now (Merriman 2001). It can be found girding more and more territories, but in some places its growth is finally being checked like the railways that preceded it. And whether we wanted it or not, it has become a commonplace and an almost unavoidable part of transportation.

What then if we approach the motorway as just one more place where social life happens, as growing number of analysts are doing (Juhlin 2001; Katz 1999; Merriman Forthcoming-a; Miller 2001)? What if we place it on a level with the pavement, the public park, the laboratory, the school and the house? Is it not then another geographically, historically, legally and technologically constructed setting for appropriate and inappropriate activities? At the motorway's inception it was a strange place, with new codes of conduct, a place for projecting fears and fantasies (Merriman 2001; Merriman Forthcoming-b). As with all new technologies we have made it at home in our lives. It might be stretching the point to say that we have made a home on the motorway, but there are people who spend considerable parts of their lives driving along its parallel lanes (Katz 1999). In what follows I will be looking at a brief episode in day of the contemporary version of the travelling salesman (Spears 1995). the mobile office worker. This is an increasingly common type of company employee, a person who spends the majority out of their office in their car whilst travelling around a sales or service region (Laurier and Philo 1998).

Meaghan Morris's (1988a; 1988b) elegant essays on driving, motels and small-town life shift away from the static dualisms of many theories of travel - 'mobile/domestic, touristic/everyday, itinerant/domestic' to 'a spectrum divided by degrees of duration, intensities of 'staying' (temporary/intermittent/permanent).' In her description of a motel and a shopping centre she brings the spectacle of travel down to ground level in the everyday realities of *transport*. Where she chose a motel for the way it brings both metaphors of mobility some of the ceaseless flow of traffic to rest in the actualities a 'fixed' place I have picked out a case of mixing officework and driving to examine what possibilities it might provide for respecifying theories of mobility.

Matters of visibility.

In his work on Paris traffic control centres Bruno Latour called the view they have of traffic an ‘oligopticon’ (Latour and Hermant 1998). In the society of traffic, cars only provide certain observables. Notoriously for police surveillance and speeding fines it is number plates and makes of cars that can be photographed by CCTV and speed cameras. However these cameras are not everywhere, not are all of them loaded with film and well-travelled drivers get to know these geographies of road surveillance ((Ball 2000; Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 1999))¹. Excluding open-top cars, just what else occupants of cars are doing other than driving is quite hard to tell. They may be fiddling with their car radio, on their mobile phone, checking a map to see where they need to turn left, chatting animatedly to their passenger, dozing off etc. Moreover once a car is travelling at speed inferences will be made from the movements of the vehicle in relation to vehicle type, the changing traffic and setting rather than from seeing what exactly its driver is doing in its interior. Eric Livingston succinctly argues that drivers collectively and locally produce the witnessable details that are required for the continuing orderliness of traffic.

‘Drivers, as members of a production cohort – and as members of a production cohort, as analysts of its and their own order productive-work – produce and maintain the witnessable details of their local driving circumstances. The ways that they do so are identical with the ways that they make their driving ‘account-able’ – they are witnessably changing lanes, slowing down, trying to get to the off-ramp. Therein, they produce together the relatively stable features of freeway traffic flow. These consist, in fact, of their relatively stable, locally produced and regulated driving practices.’ Livingston 1987

One of the aims of this article is to pursue the architectures of visibility on the road for their consequences for those doing office work for a large company in their cars whilst ‘stuck in traffic’.

For a driver who attempts to do some office work whilst on the (slow) move, it is not only that their bodies are minimally visible to other drivers, they have a parallel difficulty of being minimally visible to their employers. In contrast to an open plan office, when an employee is out in the car on the road, their co-workers, their subordinates and their managers cannot easily see what they are doing. Whilst this minimal visibility of mobile workers provides for certain freedoms it is equally to their disadvantage since they have neither easy access to what their co-workers are up to nor can they display their current tasks (Crang 2000). Their lack of workplace visibility is doubly to their disadvantage since neither does their company maintain the same degrees of responsibility for their health and safety off-site.

¹ Ball (2000) covers this in much greater detail in his analysis of ‘gatso’ speed cameras and their relation to panoptic surveillance. They put the case against panopticism quite lightly : Sect 1.8, “The proposition that “One is totally seen, without ever seeing” requires modification when applied to public surveillance systems. Cameras currently only have the ability to focus and scan from one direction or angle at a time. In this sense, unless a sophisticated and subtly co-ordinated bank of cameras are set up and employed to simultaneously collect data from every conceivable direction and angle, a “total” view is not feasible. Indeed even as an idea, it is arguable that a “total” view may never prove practicable.”

From an ethnographic study of car-based officer workers (Laurier and Philo 1998), myself and Chris Philo gathered observations of and reports from drivers about their working conditions. As an almost inescapable part of their job they will sit for too long, make mobile phone calls when they should not and break the speed limit to get to meetings. In fact it was a taken for granted if unstated norm amongst the car-based employees in our study that each car-based employee *will* use at least some unsafe practices to get the job done. Some workers were lucky enough to discover that they could do the paper and laptop work they needed to whilst either parked up in car parks or at their homes. However long journey times, which are common in large company regions, or delays in slow-moving traffic, meant that days on the road would be mostly driving and very little 'work' if driving was really all that was done whilst on the road.

Adding to the troubles of these mobile workers there was a lack of deliberate planning by companies who did not yet treat the logistics of their travelling personnel with the same precision as the logistics of their materials. Of the half dozen mobile office workers involved in our project only one worked-to-rule on the issue of safety, only using her mobile hands-free and never handling documents whilst she was driving. Her self-avowed status was as an *exception* to the rule, who moreover had to spend a great deal of time defending her work practice. It is a simple fact that the hands-free car kits with a micro-phone on the roof of the car created greater levels of background noise and as a result most drivers would pick-up the handset when they were becoming inaudible. One of the questions that motivates this paper's description of a singular instance of a driver's multi-tasking while in traffic, is, just how was work behind the wheel done in the knowledge that it was dangerous and at times probably illegal.

By way of comparison, ambulance crews, bin lorries, police cars, ships and passenger aircraft have 'staff' who work in pairs or more, so that there is someone to assist and also someone to whom their conduct is witnessable and immediately and retrospectively accountable (Hutchins 1995; Ikeya 2003). There is a staff of more than one in the vehicles because there is too much work for one person in moving these vehicles around whilst accomplishing the organisational tasks which they are required to do (i.e. delivering and preparing patients for hospital, collecting, sorting and rejecting rubbish bags). Little recognition seems to be given to the fact that when changes in technology and commercial company policy make other kinds of office staff mobile then not all the work can be divided so that *one* person in *one* car can do it appropriately, safely and in coordination with their non-proxemic co-workers, given that they are also responsible for transporting themselves. In buildings, rather than cars, the staff can be, and are, materially organised through such units as rooms, partitions, desks and corridors. Whilst some staff have their own room others work in a shared room. Arranging the space is part of the stabilisation, articulation, co-ordination and ranking of the relations between company members. A shared workspace in, say, a newspaper office, can be for up to 30 workers. Visibility and audibility arrangements of the 30 staff office are assembled and used daily to maintain awareness of what other workers up to, how tasks are proceeding, who is meeting with who and so on (Schmidt and Simone 1993). For the mobile office workers they have to manage doing their business's work and producing the 'society of traffic' (Katz 1999; Lynch 1993).

For the driver who makes mobile phone calls, shared awareness of the locally available traffic conditions cannot be assumed, sometimes their conversant may not even be aware they are driving a car at all. Telephone categories such as caller/called (Sacks 1992) are relevant, however mobile phone calls are mutually understood as potentially requiring formulations of place as a relevant matter to shape how the call may proceed in terms of geographically relevant tasks such as meetings, visits to clients etc. and also disruptions such as being cut-off in tunnels, valleys etc. Nevertheless in an important sense the work of driving, its contingencies and the heed paid by the conversant as a driver are in this particular way, rendered as potentially problematic *invisibles* to their co-workers and clients on the phone.

Matters of timing, moving, talking

Drawing on a singular instance captured on video (see below) I want to pursue in more detail how driving, talking and officework are woven together as a practical real-time matter. Or, perhaps more appropriately, how they are sometimes done seemingly beside one another or subsequent upon one another, consequent upon one another *or* cannot be combined at all. Finding how this is done, because it *is* done, can only be discovered in the details of actual unfolding singular events. In a different temporal register, the car-based officer workers are not getting anywhere fast, yet they are busy trying to keep up. Doing office work with documents and on a mobile phone to grab otherwise wasted time in traffic, and, the driving of a car in traffic are two jobs that are not designed to go together yet office workers manage to artfully combine them. They do so because they have to, yet they do not do so blindly, without account or without skill.

To justify doing officework while, to all legal intents and purposes, still driving requires occasions such as traffic lights, slow-moving traffic and traffic jams which are part and parcel of what produces the lost time which requires that they be utilised for other purposes in the first place. To be reasonable, to drive with care, a driver has to detect the occasions and conditions where distracting tasks, such as making a phone call, can be slipped in with minimum risk. Slow-moving traffic, lights and non-gargantuan jams do not provide *ideal* conditions for doing other things since the flow may resume before a phone call is finished in which case there is a temporal disjuncture between the activity of driving and the activity of talking which has to be managed by the driver-talker. Timing responses to the traffic has little to do with timing responses to the person you are talking to over the phone. There are work situations on the telephone where this is a similar problem, such as in telebanking where the activities of typing at the keyboard, waiting for the computer to respond and then reading off the screen are implicated in the organisation of the conversation (Hughes, O'Brien, Randall, Rouncefield, and Tolmie 1999; Tolmie, Hughes, and Rouncefield 1999). This gives us a further formulation of the car worker's problem as being involved in the joint production of two temporal sequences : traffic and talk.

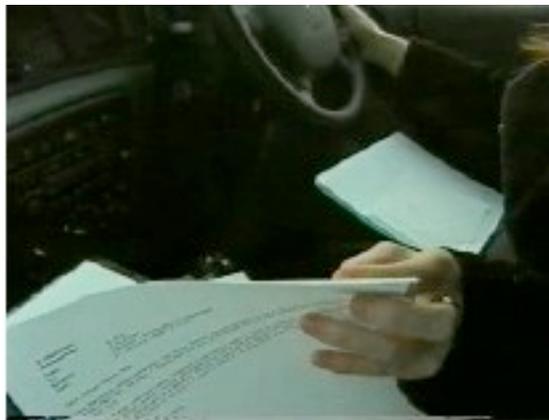
In situations where the conversant with the driver is in the car, as a passenger, there is a certain degree of mutual awareness of the current traffic situation, though rights, obligations and embodiment toward the traffic and the control of the car are divided unevenly between *driver*

and *passenger(s)* (Katz 1999). For instance, the passenger ought to shut up during tight manoeuvres unless assistance is requested. If so asked the passenger can assist in monitoring traffic conditions – occasioned often by restricted visibility of certain features and the need for extra seeing around the car such as when parking where the passenger has a better view of the pavement or bollards or other cars. In offering unsolicited warnings ‘watch out there’s a speed camera’ or ‘you’re awfully close to the articulated lorry’ these may be taken as assistance, yet easily stray into interfering with the driver’s work (see also (Watson 1999)). So as you might guess, the car workers’ problems will become still more complicated by having an ethnographer riding along since then there is not only telephone talk to organise but also talk between a driver and a passenger. Moreover a passenger who is wielding (as inconspicuously as possible) a camcorder. I will return to methodological issues raised by the video camera a little later.

When your office is your car and when you have to talk while you travel.

Intro

The fifteen minute video clip which is the basis of this section is of ‘Ally’ who was employed by a car leasing company and spent three out of five days a week on the road visiting clients around the M4. The fifteen minutes of real-time action occurred on a three lane motor-way. This is relevant background information since what kind of road we were travelling on is not obvious from the restricted visual field of the camera and it was to us as the occupants of the vehicle. A three lane motor-way is an easy environment for driving in, since there should ideally be no parked cars, pedestrians crossing, children playing football, cyclists, dogs, cross traffic or oncoming traffic. It is built to provide a visually supportive environment for speed under normal conditions; you can see things coming from a long distance away. It has no hairpin bends, no hidden entrances and it has wide lanes, cambered corners and gentle inclines. Although this is not strictly relevant to what follows it is statistically the least likely place to have a car accident. Not only do roads, by being ‘motorways’, ‘A-roads’, ‘country roads’, ‘dirt tracks in forests’, provide these basic categories but they also have typical rhythms that drivers get to know: they are busy and quiet at certain times of day, different kinds of traffic dominate different sections and also vary by time of day (i.e. parents collecting children from school, delivery vehicles parking-up, bin collection, inter-city commuters). On assembling the type of road by its time of day, its normal busyness or quietness and other local features in the course of driving so it is that drivers then make assessments over whether they might be able to get their paperwork out, make a few quick phonecalls, make long phone calls or whether they have to stick to driving alone.



Still 1 – Driving and dealing with documents

Description of the video

At the outset, somewhat surprisingly given my assumptions about the use of ‘safe’ places in the traffic, Ally is travelling fairly rapidly along the motorway and is working her way through a number of printed-off e-mails, flicking through them as they are balanced on her lap and mine. In syncopation with mainly watching the road ahead of her which remains clear, in relation to her current speed, she glances across and down at the in-tray of printed e-mails balanced on my lap. A question we will return to in a moment, is how then does Ally reasonably flick through documents whilst moving at high speed?

If I were not in the car the documents would be balanced on the passenger seat. With my assistance in sorting through a large pile for the documents, she selects two documents and places them on the steering wheel in front of her before making her phone call. She reads over them quickly to remind her what she has to do during her mobile call, the call being a response to the document (see O’Hara, Perry, Sellen, and Brown 2002). Once the document is on the steering wheel Ally talks quietly through the documents saying who she has to phone next, what will be difficult in the phone call. One thing we might say she is doing is [thinking aloud]². Whilst Ally does read aloud the odd word or phrase from the e-mails her activity comes close to [thinking aloud] in that the words she says are not word-for-word vocalisations of the letter. In fact like marginalia most of her comments make little sense to anyone else without access to the original document in relation to which they are intelligible comments. What further purposes [thinking aloud] served we will return to later. For the moment what I would like to focus on is its audibility, in that at the time and on the videoclip, I could not without great effort (and the benefit of replaying the recording) make out what Ally was saying.

The combination of road rumble, airflow and engine noise rendered Ally’s comments indecipherable. However it is worth pursuing that this rendering may be of Ally’s making since its outcome is that I am aware that Ally is busy with her documents and do not try and say anything to her. It is a limited awareness however in that she has pitched her voice at a level whereby it is *hearable* as talk, it is just that its *particulars* are lost. In such a way she is talking-to-herself since I simply cannot hear what she is saying just that she is saying something. Her talk then is more like a red “busy” light and the background noise of the car provides the door and walls which prevent me from intruding. For me in the car then I no longer have to manage the problem of overhearing the detail of what Ally is saying to herself.

After reading the e-mails through she leaves them in her grip on the steering wheel so that she has them available should she need to consult them whilst she makes the actual phone-call

² Bracketing, a notational device borrowed by Harold Garfinkel from the phenomenologists (Garfinkel 2002; Rawls 2002), is used at various points in this article to direct attention away from the reified social object toward the practical action and practical reasoning which makes these phenomena, the things they accountable are.



still 2 – left hand flicks the indicator whilst the right clutches the wheel and the paper e-mail.

After a while our vehicle begins closing in on a slower moving vehicle in our lane, Ally mutters ‘get out the way’ slightly louder than her talking through the documents. She checks her rear view mirror and sees a gap in the fast lane.

Transcript of video:

5.27³ *Ally indicates and pulls out, looks at rear view mirror and over her shoulder, waves thanks to driver who has let her pull out. As she speaks she makes a forward indicating gesture toward the road with her free left hand*

5.34 A : I must concentrate on my driving for just a little while [just (unclear)]

E: +
[He he he (laughs)]

What might be the obvious interest here is in Ally’s comment ‘I must concentrate on my driving for a little while’, such a comment taken out of context would seem to be indicative of a recognition that she is *not* concentrating on her driving and she *really* should be doing so, and yet I laugh hearing it as a joke. One way that Ally has made this remark something that I can laugh at is by its placement in relation to the preceding long stretch of our collaborative sorting through of e-mails. It might also be funny because she does not stop concentrating on her e-mails afterwards either but I cannot laugh at that because it has not happened yet, so I couldn’t find that irony (yet). What she had just done immediately preceding her remark is noticed an obstacle ahead and stopped taking e-mails from me. She had checked for a slot in the traffic to her right, pulled into the other lane and gestured thanks to a driver who slowed to let her into the fast lane and all of this without letting go of the documents on the steering wheel. One part of her comment’s sequential organisation is its coming *after* the driving event: *overtaking*. During this admittedly brief event (about 5 seconds) she devoted her entire attention to driving, stopping talking to herself, and to me. With a look in her rear-view mirror she checked on the intentions of the driver in the fast lane who let her out by slowing down slightly, making, and

³ These numbers are timecodes to video-clip I was working from. They are useful for indexing the descriptions back to the original footage but should not be taken as relevant to Ally or myself during the driving episode.

thereby offering, a gap in the traffic. Once in the fast lane Ally waved thanks by raising her hand to window height making an observable gesture of gratitude (Katz 1999). Hands up / hand down is a big enough gesture to be seen where a nod or a smile is practically imperceptible at these speeds and distances, and in this nose-to-tail arrangement of vehicles.

During this brief period she *was* driving carefully, however it would be a mistake to say it was only a ‘period’. It is a point where in the society of the motorway she is doing an accountable action – [overtaking] – in contrast to which the rest of her driving could be said to be merely [cruising] along the middle lane.⁴ Overtaking is a highly moralised and often emotive action on the motorway, and on the road more generally, which requires additional care (Katz 1999). In a contra-flow system the car is being put into the face of oncoming traffic, on a motorway a gap has to be found in the fast(er) lane, if done without care it produce a ‘cut off’ for another driver (and for an excellent account of the righteous rage that follows see Katz (1999)). The speed of the car may in relation to the vehicles ahead require monitoring and adjusting and in addition the path of the vehicle needs to be altered to get in and out of the gap in the fast lane. In describing overtaking in detail it becomes clear that it can be decomposed into multiple accountable and locally identifiable actions which require their reflexive use in relation to time-bound spaces to maintain the endogenous production of motorway traffic.

Cruising does not fully occupy the competent driver and they would not be a competent driver if they could not do [cruising] with relative ease. Would it not be nonsensical to cruise the motorway *attentively* unless it meant that you were driving this way in order to gaze at the scenery and sites? Moreover motorways with a normal traffic flow, as a recognisable territory, make the occasion for cruising at high speeds. Once a driver has established that they are in a setting where cruising along is happening then they can accountably let their concentration shift to other things (‘I was just cruising along when X ran out in front of me’). For some drivers this may be daydreaming, for the mobile office worker, it is most likely other work. In summary though, the space of cruising is a *safe* space for work, and is not simply correlated with the speed of a vehicle.

What is perhaps less obvious is that cruising has a speed which the driver produces and maintains in relation to the traffic flow and the kind of road they are on⁵. When Ally finds herself approaching another vehicle in the middle lane which occasions her overtaking then we find that her cruising speed is set by herself at a particular level. She could slow down to the pace of the vehicle in front, yet there appears to be a *preference* to avoid doing so on the motorway and to maintain the speed that is *your* speed⁶. As Ryave and Scheinken (1974) note with walking, by slowing down your movement, the appearance could be produced of merely following another vehicle (and not properly driving your vehicle) or, worse, of tailgating. Given that Ally selects a speed appropriate to traffic flow and road type, where Ally is an

⁴ It is under such conditions that in luxury cars ‘cruise control’ can be switched on since driving does not place exacting demands on the driver – it is relatively automatic requiring that the car be kept in lane and at a safe distance from vehicles ahead.

⁵ A concise description of the production of freeway traffic through drivers’ local driving practices can be found in Chapter 7 of Livingston (1987).

⁶ In busy single lane city road, and of course in traffic jams, at junctions, exit ramps and so on queues of vehicles are common and quite acceptable. They are not seen as purposefully constructed by drivers behind and can thus be utilised by drivers without being seen as tailgating.

avowedly fast driver, she ought not to meet other drivers like her. If she is driving as a driver of her kind the regular drivers that she catches up on are ‘slow’ drivers.

Drivers cannot afford to be inattentive, they have instead to actively grasp an aspect of their unfolding situation to deal with it for what it is then. Their struggle is to prevent themselves paying attention to what they should not at the wrong moment. Such a moment could then be a fatal slip in their attention. What we are coming to is, that in a setting where legitimate demands converge, a person caught would say ‘I must concentrate on my X for a little while’ to perhaps provide a reason for ignoring something else. In this case Ally needed to give her concentration over to driving because the action of [overtaking] so demanded it. Yet it is also that Ally ought to tear herself away from what is distracting her – the e-mails and get on with the tiresome work of driving, in that way it is like someone ironing clothes getting to an ornate shirt and saying ‘I must concentrate on my ironing for a while.’?

Returning to Ally’s comment on her driving – ‘I must concentrate on my driving for a while’ - though coming after the event it is tied to it by the forward moving gesture of her hand which suggests ‘overtaking’. What Ally also does is to raise her voice, something she has done several times earlier to offer a remark that is hearable by me as a comment on the traffic rather than talking herself through the office work. Her office work, as described above, has been talked about in soft, almost inaudible tones up until then and in the developing history of our conversation, louder remarks become ones that the passenger *ought* (is intended) to hear in their details and hear as relevant to something for them both (so they have also been instructions to me for passing paper).

-- We continue driving along the motorway. Ally has noticed something funny ahead of us, saying ‘look! I’ve laughed in response but before I can say anything more, she says ‘Caroline Sweeney please’ on the phone and a 25 second silence follows.

6:36

A : Good morning Caroline (3 secs) Hullo, hullo (3secs) Hello (2 secs) >Hello Hello< Ewww ((starts waggling mobile phone. Turns it upside down))

E : Hmhm ((laughs slightly))

A : Work you swine. ((looks at mobile screen as she hits the re-dial button))



Up until now on the themes I have been working with is how Ally has used contrasts in the *audibility* of her voice to produce talk for *her* and talk for *both of us*. The talk that was meant for me you might expect to be all the hearably louder talk. However her talk's tasks here involved myself as a potential respondent in more complex ways since there was talk in relation to my handling of the documents for Ally, talk in relation to the driving, talk that was loud but was not meant for me and other talk besides.

My time with Ally was full of moments of bizarre conversation switches between *our* talk in the car and her talking to someone else on her mobile phone which I initially found highly disconcerting. In part this was because Ally had a mobile phone headset which meant that I could not hear what she could hear in terms of phones ringing and being picked up. It was additionally confusing since Ally often talked in and out of her conversation on the phone to me. In this case she says 'look!' whilst she is listening to the ring tone and then at the moment when I should be getting the space to make my return to her 'look!' having seen what she has found to look at, such as 'what the hell is that doing on the motorway!' Ally says 'Caroline Sweeney please.' I could not help but think she enjoyed these mismatches, they were a form of interrupting which she put to creative uses. They provided for inappropriate transitions between us as speakers which were sometimes funny and sometimes came off as rude. Yet by my growing appreciation of the often random (to me but not to Ally) interruptions I could not take it as purposefully rude, it was inadvertently so. One of the results was that I had to monitor her 'loud' talk closely as to whether it was in fact directed at me, especially when she was shifting from talking on her mobile to talking to me. Now this is in some senses an odd strategy since one would expect that Ally might try to give me the opportunity to be inattentive to her conversations on the phone. For instance by stopping talking to me, having made her excuses that she had to phone someone and I would do 'civil inattention' (Goffman 1963). It is certainly true that at various points I helped her sort e-mails but she did not try to involve me in whatever the e-mails contained. I will return to this puzzle a little later.

Moreover in line with Watson's (1999) remarks on the omni-relevance within the vehicles of the categories *driver* and *passenger* for Ally and myself. As a passenger my rights to do noticings of the road ahead are pretty limited. If I say 'look at that' for objects in the road relevant to driving it can easily turn into my being a back-seat driver, equally I have to be careful about offering non-road items to look at to the driver such as 'beautiful sunrises' or 'a pretty house', so that I do not end up distracting the driver from what they ought to be looking

E : Uhhhh, he may be killed.

A : Caroline Sweeny please

What I find interesting here is when Ally starts waggling the phone itself. It might just reconnect her, though on the numerous occasions I saw this gesture used it never got anyone's signal back, so what does this gesture do? Ally and I have a space between the seats which can be, and is, used for passing objects back and forth between us (we had just been doing so with documents). The space between the seats is also a space for displaying particular objects – I hold a document there to let her look at it and take it if she wants. Wagging the phone in *that* space makes it clear *to me* that her phone is malfunctioning. Her action is then bringing the handset itself in as the source of her troubles (Hindmarsh and Heath 2000). There is a humourousness to her gesture in that it is common knowledge that the signal comes and goes whilst you are travelling. To really get the signal back you either have to keep driving or could in an act of motorway madness reverse the car to the point where the signal cut out. Getting the signal back in a building on the other hand can be done by wandering around until you find better reception or even just shifting which way the handset is pointed. Ally's gesture cites these actions from her immobile position in her rapidly moving car. Her gesture is also something to show to the camera and I would suggest that it starts to reveal her solution to being observed by a video camera. She is 'doing being funny' by these jokes related to her driving and jokes now related to her mobile phone.

The phone wagging is doing more than showing me where the problem is and making a joke (see a similar instance in Goodwin 1997), it is also working as a transitional place for moving between the conversant that is involved that I cannot hear (i.e. the caller on the phone) though I can infer something of her relevance to matters that I might comment on. She waits for recognition from me (my laughter) before she says anything further. Once I have recognised what she is focused on and what she is inviting me to focus on, then I can also locate who the 'you' of 'work you swine' is. What we learn is that the 'you' pronoun can be used to speak to objects. This is pretty important in one sense since there are several possible yous on offer : 'Caroline' on the phone, me as her document holder, me as her passenger and other drivers, all of whom the 'you' might refer to. We can be a little more certain of this by looking to what happens next. Ally cries out briefly and formulates the object of her concern as now not me, not Caroline, not the mobile phone but a 'man running across the motorway'. As we noted at the outset the motorway as a setting carries with it a set of expectations about what we will meet on it. A man running is a feature of immediate moral and mortal concern to the society of traffic which Ally is a member.

The running man in the talk is then a further 'you', though only as a possessive pronoun, 'your job'. At the end of the transcript Ally switches rapidly again on being reconnected to the place where she may eventually get hold of Caroline. In her switching, how can she switch between all these scenes, with all the different retrospective and prospective awareness needed to proceed with her lines of action in each? Although Ally may not be able to speak different sentences to different persons at exactly the same moment (she only has one mouth after all), she can remain oriented to several unfolding scenes. Paying attention is about giving

precedence at any moment in time to that which demands such attention, where for Ally there are several things demanding her attention almost simultaneously. To deal with this daunting problem she can use talk to address more than one person as one method – one is being talked to and the other sometimes is also being addressed (as when a person emphasises part of the telephone conversation so indicating that an overhearer ought to hear this bit as addressed to them too).

What I am building up to here, then, is Ally's competing demands between driving, mobile phones in motion, doing being humourous, phone conversations and document handling. How her passenger relates to this is not only as a passenger. Ally has to get me to realise rapidly when I am being interacted with as a passenger, when I am to help with documents as a kind of co-worker and when, from time to time I am allowed to 'merely be an observer' (where that might turn out to be quite a special and weak right in a busy demanding environment like this one.)

The car comes to a halt in traffic.

8.50 A : Quite bored with these now so I'm gonna have a little rest for a while

E : Okay fine plan

Ally says 'well I think I'll take a rest now' after working steadily through her 'in-tray' – which has meant me handing over documents to her and stacking them back afterwards. She says this as we approach stationary traffic. My hypothesis was that she would use the jam as an opportunity to do bits of extra work that she would not normally be able to do whilst engaged in driving the car through moving traffic. Instead she sees it as an opportunity for rest. From my ethnographic notes from the time I had been impressed by the productivity of workers during traffic jams (Laurier and Philo 1998). By way of contrast with my fieldnotes the video material in presenting me with the details forced the question of : how might a traffic jam be an opportunity for a rest?⁸

For a person who is in a hurry to get to a particular destination then a jam is an obstacle. Where a car is concerned we might want to say it is an obstacle for the driver, yet it may be that the driver is not the person who has to get somewhere. For a taxi driver and passenger, the jam for the taxi driver is no huge problem apart from in managing their passenger's potential irritation. Equally for a couple on their way to a party, one of them wants to be prompt, the other isn't bothered, so it depends on who is driving, who is a passenger and what the traffic is like. In this case Ally, as I discover later, is running a little late but she does not have the address yet which will allow her to get there. For the time being she does not have anywhere to hurry to. In such a situation the fact of waiting for the address will also provide for a reasonable excuse for tardy-ness at the other end of the journey. Despite all of this, getting

⁸ In Livingston's (1987, ch. 7) description, the traffic jam becomes an occasion for an inquiry by the driver finding themselves in it. In their search for what is causing the jam, drivers may pass a wrecked car and see that as a probable cause. Garfinkel's answer to the driver is 'you are causing it' since the drivers slow down to examine the cause of the jam thereby continuing the jam as ongoing production of the delays they cause by slowing down to examine the object they see as its cause.

stressed out could still be a perfectly reasonable response to slow-moving traffic. To put it bluntly, experienced car-based workers are not flustered by bad traffic conditions (it would be a little like a surgeon getting stressed by blood flowing from a wound).

A traffic jam also becomes an opportunity for rest in the light of our earlier encounter with the concentrated effort Ally has had to devote while moving through the traffic at *her* speed, talking to a passenger, making phone calls, reading e-mails and appearing on camera. So it is not just that she does not have the address right now and is delayed. It is not just that she has stopped doing paperwork and phonecalls to clients and co-workers. It is also that she no longer has to drive with the effort and alertness that all this has required. For Ally to 'down tools' she has to be able to put down her documents, her mobile phone and take her hands and feet off the controls of the car.

Some belated methodological remarks

In pursuing our ethnographic work Chris Philo and myself shared Rod Watson's (1999) commitment in conjunction with his co-researcher Jon Driessen to :

'... preserve the natural language categories and natural interactional organization deployed in real-world contexts by Forest Service personnel. This, for us, meant that we should not attempt, simulation-wise, to reconstruct allegedly 'typical' driving situations in a studio or in laboratory conditions, but instead go into and film the actual, *in vivo*, worksites in the forests and mountains ... This, then, became a filmic study of lived-and-experienced real-world worksite practices.' Watson and Driessen (1999) p52.

Watson and Driessen had the advantage in their studies that the trucks in which they rode had crews on board already. The office workers we shadowed generally worked alone. Never the less my presence in the passenger seat was not entirely without precedent since Ally, like many other car-based workers, did travel with passengers intermittently. There were training days when new employees sat in on the job to learn how it was done. Also there were days when more senior members of staff rode along to have a meeting on the wing and to keep in touch with how things were going away from HQ.

In the earlier description of I tried to bring out talk's work in attending to *multiple* courses of action, one of which may be 'doing being observed'. There is much else going on though that sequentially and spatially involved Ally's attention and mine. For instance in the section where I examined what is made available in Ally talking to herself aloud. 'Alouds' I would venture to say are a common feature of a lone person being 'shadowed' and/or observed in their workplace by either a trainee, boss or researcher⁹. Talking aloud can be an instructive treatment of the observer, where the person being observed doing their job is aware that their observer cannot fully grasp what they are doing. Talking aloud would not be used on a non-observer, such as someone who is involved/concentrating on their own business in the passenger seat (if I were reading the newspaper or listening to a personal stereo). They are a way of managing someone watching what you are doing as making them aware of that activity and in some senses instructing them in that activity¹⁰. So it is that a cook on a TV show says to the audience they are instructing what it is that they are doing just now: 'next I add the garlic and let it sizzle in the oil.'

In one sense we could say that they are 'observer effects' whether the observer is there in the flesh like I was or whether for an observer who would subsequently be watching the video. Harvey Sacks in analysing a kids therapy group being watched through one-way glass (Sacks 1992 pp104-113) described the kind of talk assembled by the 'problem' kids for the unseen observers behind the glass. The kids are talking in a situation where they have been observed before by therapists though in this case it is Harvey Sacks that will be observing them. He reflects on the kids' perspective:

⁹ In their work on 'alouds' in air traffic control centres, Harper et al (ref?) show them serving a similar but slightly different purpose in what they make available to everyone present as the current state of unfolding events.

¹⁰ We describe other aspects of this in (Laurier and Philo 2003).

‘..they’re talking, there’s an observer present, the observer is engaged in making out what they’re saying to each other, using it, so far as they might think anyway, to make some assessments about them .. They might well figure that what an observer is doing is listening to what they say in a similar way to that of their therapist, e.g. to figure out what’s wrong with them. It might be an aim that they could have to put the observer in a position of not being able to be assured that what they say in this session is to be read by him for its therapeutic interest’ p108.

The position of a driver being video-taped should not be too easily equated with that of kids undergoing therapy. The ethnographer as an observer has not set up his work as being connected to safety issues and is not after their driving as something that needs remedying. Nevertheless the mobile office worker is aware of being videoed, is aware that what they are doing behind the wheel can be treated by others as dangerous, sanctionable and even illegal behaviour¹¹. In some senses then Sack’s question about the kids, ‘how might they go about complicating the work of an observer?’ is still pertinent to a mobile worker. However in Sack’s case the kids can use each other’s talk to produce what is happening as [acting for an audience] and not doing [being themselves] to fend off simplistic readings of their talk as genuine. His term, which I have used already, for the use of collection of alternative categories in a particular circumstance is ‘partitioning consistency’ (p110).

Along with providing complications for observers, for the lone worker, talking aloud to co-present, distant or subsequent observers is akin to *not* hiding the ‘inner heed’ that one is paying to one’s task.¹² The dilemma for a lone person is that they might appear to lack appreciation of or reflection on their bodily actions. If two people are working together then their conversation with one another accompanies their work in various ways – sometimes with direct instructions, appreciations, criticisms and formulations and as often with jokes and matters unrelated to their work. In this way their talk appreciates their work, formulates it, reflects on it and is in fact also *the* work. A person working by themselves may well criticise or compliment the work so far without speaking their sentence aloud – talking to yourself requires careful production to avoid appearing mad. Once they are being watched for what they do, then a lone person uses ‘alouds’ where they could reformulate actions which to observers are candidates for criticism or negative inferences. A lone worker’s alouds might then attempt to make such actions more equivocal by methods such as partitioning consistency.

The only group that Ally wanted to avoid seeing her video were her employers. From my experience of shadowing several workers Ally was doing nothing unusual and was certainly not slacking. The crux of the issue may be around how much of the kind of work their employees do out of the office a company should see. If the company was confronted with the actual work it might become an accountable matter in a quite specific way. Ally is expected to

¹¹ Conference and seminar audiences have remarked on those aspects as have the media technicians who assisted in the digitising of the video, one of whom happened to have been a driving instructor in the past and expressed strong disapproval of the mobile workers doing what they did.

¹² On a slightly different tack one of the things that driver do inside cars is say a lot of stuff aloud about other drivers that they would probably normally not. Katz (1999) provides painful and funny depictions of those occasions when drivers do manage to ‘give the finger’, direct lip movements or audible talk at one another on the roads.

do what is necessary to get the job done but not make what is necessary observable to her employers. The problem of my video would not just be that Ally was letting the cat out of the bag, where the employers know what kind of bags they have and what the cats are doing in them, but that she had a witness there in the form of the ethnographer. Whilst I had explicit permission from the mobile workers to shadow them, this was usually and deliberately without them having made their employers fully aware of what going on. My inquiry into their working conditions was possible of course precisely because the employers had only limited technologies of surveillance for their car-based workforce. If I had walked into Ally's head office with a camcorder then my surveillance might have been detected by theirs and queried and in other ways made accountable to head office rather than Ally.

Keep your mind on the motorway

“Here it is necessary to point out that readiness to answer questions about one’s actions and reactions does not exhaust the heed we pay to them. Driving a car with care reduces the risk of accidents as well as enabling the driver to satisfy interrogations about their operations. Applying our minds to things does not qualify us only to give veracious reports about them, and absence of mind is betrayed by other things than merely being non-plussed in the witness box. The concept of heed is not, save per accidens, a cognitive concept. Investigations are not the only occupations in which we apply our minds’ (Ryle 1949) p132.

The preceding description of some work happening on the motorway did not deal predominantly with queued traffic or otherwise unusual traffic as an occasion for the driver’s inquiry as to its cause (Livingston 1987) but rather concentrated on the other uses to which cruising on the motorway and coming to a halt in a queue might be put. Using steadily flowing motorway traffic or a traffic jam to do more than one thing at a time was suggested to create problems in producing reasonable and accountable actions since the agent may be seen as inattentive toward one of the activities that it is morally incumbent upon them *as a driver* to be concentrating on. What they are concentrating on is the defining aspect of attending rather than that there is some core cognitive process which is ‘attention’. Ally is clearly ‘at the ready’ throughout for whatever might reasonably happen next. It was Gilbert Ryle (1949) who suggested that the episodic states of attention or what he more often calls ‘heed’ might be better treated as adverbs rather than verbs, so it is not that a person is doing two things: [driving] and [attending] but rather that they are [driving attentively].

At a deeper level the limit of the notion that a driver could be doing driving and nothing more is that large stretches of what driving consists of in its living effacements is merely habitual, and so a driver’s mind is justifiably and expectably on other things. Could everyone be always and completely fascinated by driving? The answer has to be no, not always and probably not even that often. To see that a driver’s mind is on other things does not require looking inside their heads since Ally was not only witnessably (to us, if not other drivers) switching her concentration between driving, phoning and talking to me, she is also drawing our attention to her switching (Coulter 1983). As Ryle notes in the quote above we need not and really ought not to expect Ally to provide reports on what she is concentrating on while she is driving. There are methods by which she does show what she is currently attending to and they were detailed earlier. To ask for reports would be to distract her from what she is doing and make her do something else (e.g. formulate a report for an observer of what she is doing).

The over-riding practical concern of ‘what to do next’ as stressed by Garfinkel has to be closely tied to ‘what *else* can be done next’ when the reasonable, pressing, preferred or intended ‘what to do next’ cannot be done. For the mobile worker on their way to their next destination, an unavoidable for all practical purposes delay, gives them ‘well what can I do with this delay?’ The mobile worker stuck on their way to their destination answers Foucault’s question over how historically it is assembled - ‘what can be said’ with a locally occasioned

‘what can be done’. What I have also tried to reassemble to some extent is Ally’s dilemma: that whilst she has to do things with care and readiness, she can not *just* be a driver when she is on the road. She is also an experienced business woman who knows what it takes to get her job done. Added to that she has characterwork in doing [being friendly] and [funny] to her co-workers along with an ethnographer. If our culture gives us persons, then these persons come with these multiple memberships. They are members in a plural sense and this is a point similar to that made by Gayle Davies (1998) where she critiques Bruno Latour’s (1993) version of human life forms as tending toward mono-valency if they inhabit an actor-network. In our conduct with other people we expect that we should be able to see their multiple, differentiated and sometimes conflicting commitments. Moreover as Sacks (1992 : 104-113) pointed out, methods such as ‘partitioning consistency’ allow that members can show observers who want to see only one thing that thing’s multiplicity. Whilst Sacks does not ignore what the kids in therapy are doing to deflect their observers’ attention to what they will see, we can guess how such observers may reconstitute the kids as the objects they want them to be. Ally’s multiple memberships are switched in and out of during the episodes described earlier and frequently run in parallel. I urge readers of this article to try and pay heed what Ally is showing us as her witnesses.

Vehicles provide equipmental contextures of activity (Lynch 1994) with intended uses and then possibilities for what else can be done with them as they are made at home in different life worlds. On the motorway where cruising is easy (but also on other discoverably straightforward roads) people get up to all kinds of things while in motion inside cars, taxis, buses and lorries. Whilst drivers in traffic work collaboratively they do not have to work in any way consensually over what safe driving is (i.e. always taking calls hands free and/or pulling over to make calls). In this article I have not been disputing that driving whilst using a mobile phone or whilst attempting to read documents or both is unsafe, nor does Ally, nor the other drivers.¹³ Given that mobilising officework on the motorway involves reasonable and moral persons, I have dealt to some extent with how then do drivers show an awareness of this fact. What observable activities can be utilised as occasions when a driver can involve themselves in other activities. Each and every driver on the motorway attends carefully to the morality of other driver’s actions since these are, as David Sudnow (1972) said of crossing the road, life and death matters.

¹³ The risks of accident and injury posed by mobile phone use whilst driving have become a focus for several studies, i.e. (Goodman, Tijerina, Bents, and Wierwille 1999). In critiquing this particular article (Moray 1999): 44 makes a salient point ‘... it is obvious that if a large proportion of drivers have stick shift rather than automatic cars, then using handheld and hand operated phones, will greatly increase the danger of interference with driving. This will be true, in general, more for urban driving or driving on narrow rural roads with hills and sharp curves, than it will be for freeway driving’. Moray’s criticism of the lack of attention to specificity in such studies is one that we have attempted to address here by beginning with an actual instance rather than looking for regularities in accident statistics and reports.

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