

# MAN202T: Sociology of Design

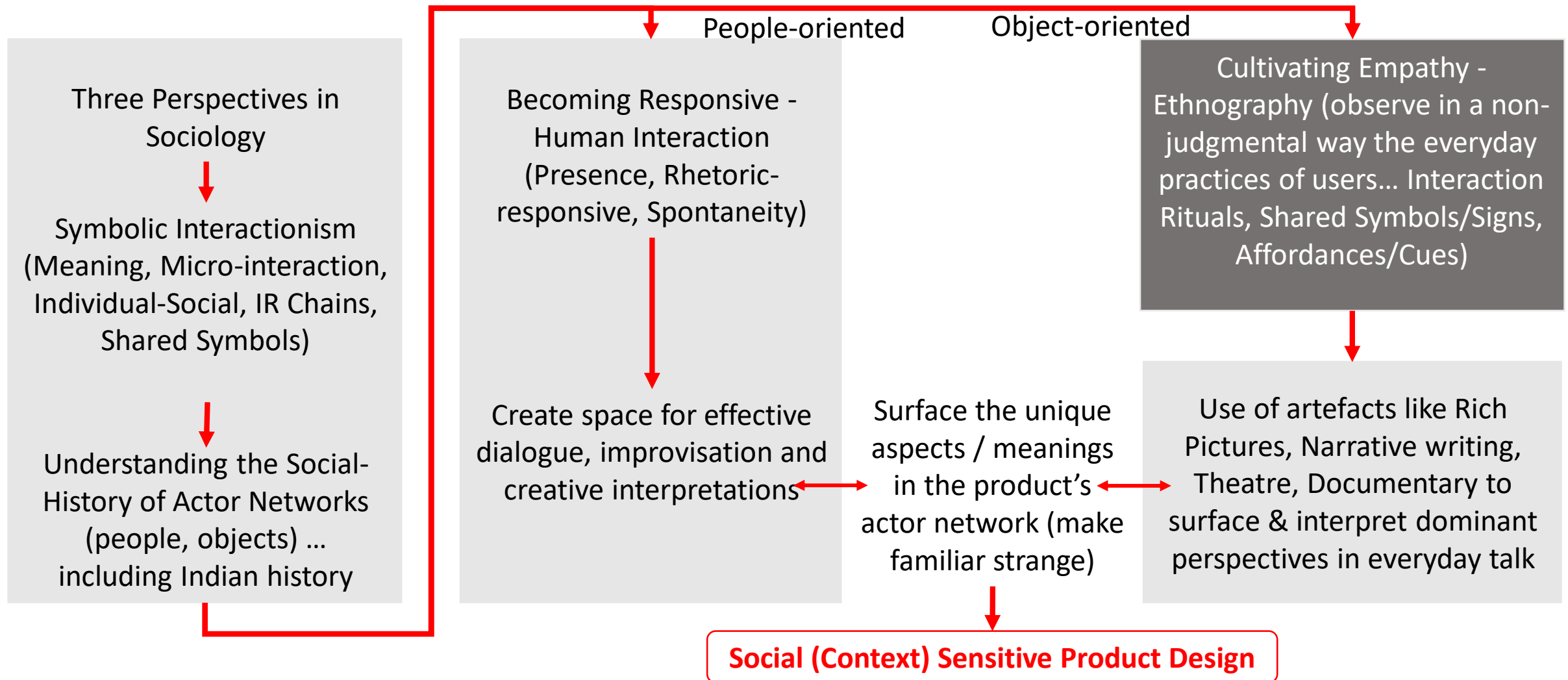
## Session 8



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# Sociology of Design... the story so far



# SESSION OUTLINE

- How does a deeper understanding of the context help in product design?
- Why and What of Ethnography
- Ethnographic Approach / Guidelines

# Why the social context matters (1/7)

Nano: Was conceptualized as a game changer, but failed



*Similarity with EDF... did two-wheeler consumers want small cars or more powerful bikes? Or Small SUVs?*

- Buying a car in India is associated with social status and prestige; if a person owns a car, he is assumed to be successful and settled.

It differs hugely from the Western market, where cars are more of a necessity rather than luxury. If a person buys a car in US, no one bothers unless it's a Ferrari or Lamborghini.

Indian market is different, and a different marketing strategy was required for selling Nano, which is arguably world's cheapest car. But the word 'cheap' in its marketing campaigns spoiled everything

Not understanding the “meaning” prevalent in society ... subtle differences

# Why the social context matters (2/7)

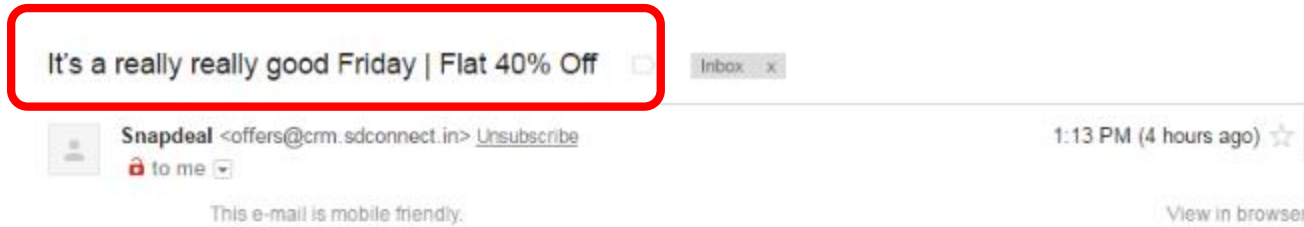
Kellogg's: How a global leader in breakfast cereals once assumed that the Indian market wasn't ready for its products



- When Kellogg's initially launched into the Indian market, the initial sales seemed promising but it emerged that consumers were buying the product as a novelty but not repeat purchasing
- Indians were accustomed to boiling their milk and consuming it hot and sweetened. The crispy flakes would go soggy when consumed with hot milk. When Indians tried the unsweetened breakfast flakes with cold milk, they couldn't get the sugar they added to dissolve properly.
- Missing interconnected elements in everyday practices

# Why the social context matters (3/7)

At a time when ecommerce is booming in India...



snapdeal

Alienating certain segments of society



Source: Reuters

To cash in on the extended weekends due to Holi and Good Friday, Snapdeal & Myntra had sent promotional e-mails to its customers with a subject line “It’s a really really good Friday Flat 40% Off”





# Why the social context matters (4/7)

Ford Edsel, known as 'The Titanic of Automobiles' sank like the Titanic



Source: <http://www.dailyfinance.com/photos/top-25-biggest-product-flops-of-all-time/>

- Ford invested \$400 million into the car.
- It was launched with much hype in 1957, and initially, the showrooms were packed with curious consumers
- Unfortunately the car did not live up to the high expectations, and only 64,000 were sold in the first year... and the model was withdrawn in 1960
- One of the reasons **was the fact that at that time Americans were looking for smaller, more economic vehicles. High-end consumers were also turned off by the design of the front grill ... was like 'a toilet seat'**
- Social stigma attached to certain objects/activities

# Understanding the social context (5/7)

## Microsoft: Acquiring the wrong customer



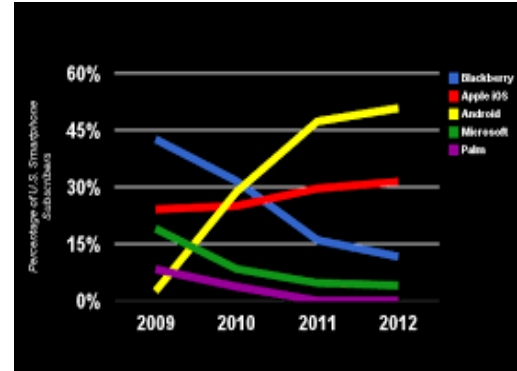
Source: <http://www.dailyfinance.com/photos/top-25-biggest-product-flops-of-all-time/>

- WebTV (now MSN TV) offered consumers Internet connection via their television sets in the mid-1990s.
- The service grew quickly at first, attracting mainstream users that typically shied away from technology
- But to WebTV's dismay, they became the dreaded consumer: **a customer who failed to produce new revenue streams but insisted on creating expensive customer service problems**
- So Microsoft which bought WebTV in 1997, scrapped the brand. It never passed the one-million-subscriber mark

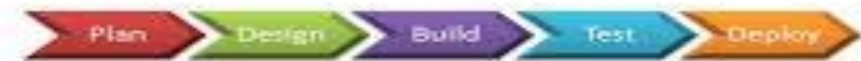


# In B2B Products ... User context matters! 6/7

- Blackberry (#1 fastest growing company in 2009) ... the company believed they knew better what the customers wanted in smart phones... **but the customer was different from user** ... users forced companies to adopt BYOD policy...
- Failed software implementations (CRM, ERP, Banking)
- Technology for coordination / collaborative work – medical practice, media/news, trading rooms, air/railway traffic control



## Traditional End User Involvement

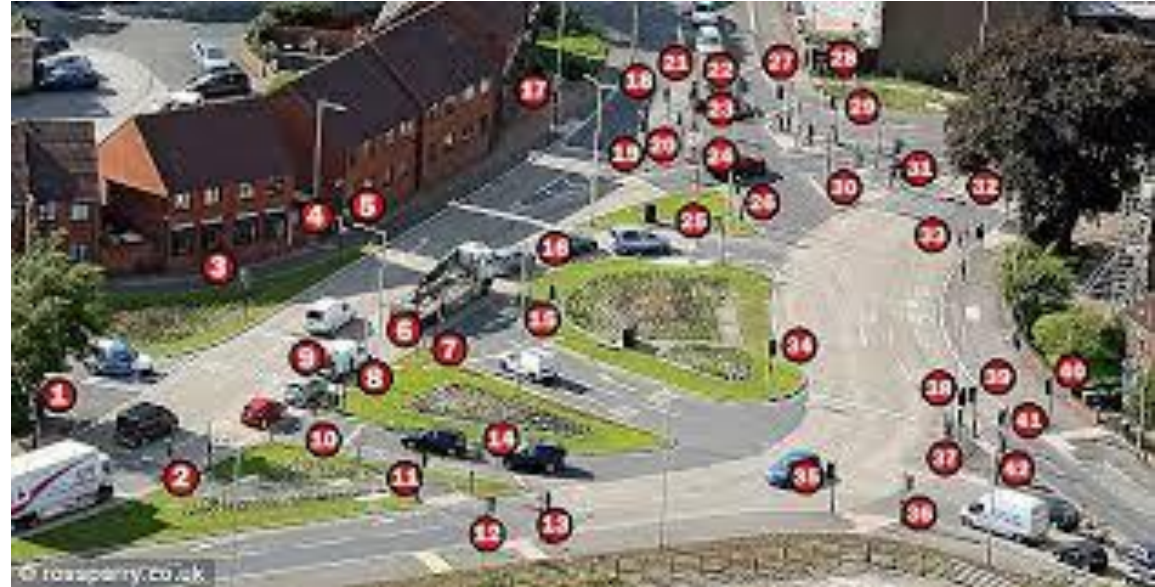


Limited End User Involvement

# In Public Services ... Users contexts matter! 7/7



Different uses of waste bins, including traffic control post



A complicated traffic signaling system for the user

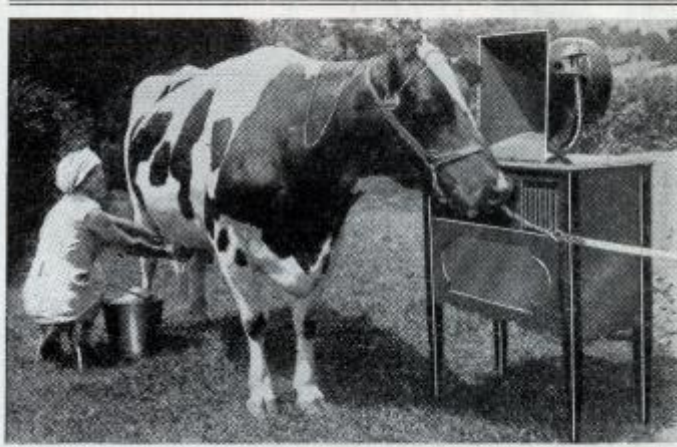
Failure of this system accidentally gave way to a new experiment ... no signals



## Radio Increases Milk Yield of Cows With Musical Ear

**T**HAT cows will give more milk to the strains of music was proven when Ben Scott, in charge of the cattle at the Fredmar Farms near Oakville, Mo., installed a radio loudspeaker for the benefit of the restless bovines. They immediately showed signs of musical appreciation and stood still while they were milked. Some even cocked a musical ear while the soothing strains of a classical waltz came from the radio.

As an almost conclusive proof to the new idea, the cow pictured boasts of an official record for 3-year-olds with 840.98 pounds butter and 17,864 of milk.



Bossy yields record milk crop listening to boy-friend on radio. She does best under influence of the waltz, it was found.

SAVING BANK ACCOUNT



AUTO SWEEP BANK ACCOUNT



A deeper understanding of the social/user contexts can trigger new product ideas ... user led innovation



# Surfacing ambiguity in a social context



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvNnswuLxUc>

An intelligent system's way of making the invisible (routine everyday practices) visible

# Exercise 8a: Analyze products & adverts

- Each group may pickup 2 products in everyday use (that are closely related to their domain)
- Identify 4 social aspects that are addressed and 2 social aspects that are missed out in their design or communication
- List down 10 aspects of your product's social context that you need to understand better & why
- Include the findings in your final report

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# Ethnography for Product Design: Why & What?

Sociological Perspective (RULE)  
(Symbolic Interactionism)

Desired Behavior (EFFECT)  
(Usability, Social/Context Sensitive)

Product Concept?  
(CAUSE)

Interactive

Affordances  
(Cues/Constraints)

Symbolic  
(Signs)

How these are interpreted  
in Interaction Rituals and  
lead to Shared Symbols

Ethnography to surface these meanings

**Ethnography: the  
documentation and analysis  
of a particular culture  
through field research**

# Why ethnography?

- In practice, companies often rely on what people say. Verbal behavior is the foundation of the overwhelming bulk of consumer research
- Most approaches (qualitative and quantitative research) are based solely on what people say — either in groups or individually, in person or over the phone, on paper or on the Internet. What **such methods fail to focus on is what people do and how they do it. i.e., behavior (action + meaning)**
- When manufacturers and marketers rely solely on what users say, they fall victim to the fact that **people often have difficulty describing what type of product they need or want**. End-users typically cannot express their precise problem with a given device only by talking about it

# What is ethnography?

- As a methodology, it stems not from psychology (the source of virtually all of the traditional market research methods, such as surveys and focus groups), but from cultural anthropology, and so **involves the study of people's behavior in the actual “environments of use”** to generate insights about their needs
- **Observing users in their natural habitat helps new-product developers understand the product's strengths and limitations from the user's point of view.** But there are many additional benefits. By watching end-users interact with the device, researchers can see behaviors that reveal product performance attributes even when the users don't say a word

# What is ethnography?

- When compared with focus groups, surveys, and even one-to-one interviews, the discovery process of **ethnographic research yields information that is typically more rich, vivid, and concrete**. This is because working in a naturalistic context enables researchers to ask people questions while they use the product (or, at the very least, immediately before and after).

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# How is ethnography done (1 / 6)?

- Literally meaning “**writing about culture**”, the term and concept of ethnography describes the attempt to **understand the beliefs, customs, and rituals of people** in different types of societies.
- The **main principle** of successful ethnography is **understanding the other person's worldview**. Doing so is not the same thing as merely listening to his or her opinions.
- Understanding their worldview **means discovering their values and norms, identifying their goals and expectations, and determining some of the basic ways they divide space and fill up their days ...** shared symbols & behaviors



# How is ethnography done (2/6)?

- Electrical engineers have had a difficult time for years trying to develop a user interface for pacemaker programming that cardiologists will find easy to use. Why?
- Because to do it, the device manufacturers essentially need to learn how physicians think.
- They need to know, for instance, what day-to-day professional language cardiologists and electrophysiologists use, which diagnostic categories are most critical to them, and how they arrive at specific treatment plans

# How is ethnography done (3 / 6)?

- Ethnographic research is holistic.
- It requires researchers to look beyond the immediate answers to their initial questions and to see the new product as part of the larger context of personnel, tasks, and incentives that its users confront on a daily basis.

# How is ethnography done (4 / 6)?

- In a study of behavior around office photocopiers, for example, anthropologist J. Blomberg discovered that office workers tended to define the term *mechanical breakdown* simply as any time the machine was unusable, not as when the mechanical components were physically damaged
- As one might imagine, machines that happened to be in offices with a helper, someone available to clear paper jams and handle other minor problems efficiently, were perceived as more reliable than machines of the same type in offices lacking such an employee.

# How is ethnography done (5/6)?

- *Emic* and *Etic* are terms used in ethnography to describe methods of observation
  - **Emic observation is an insider approach**, observing the setting and its members by directly participating in the setting. Emic is not only observing but also experiencing.
  - **Etic is a more distant approach**, observing the setting and its members as unobtrusively as possible from the outside

# How is ethnography done (6/6)?

- The best tool for ethnographic research is the designer's knowledge, vision, and memory
  - Cameras, voice recorders, and notebooks are also reminders of what is observed.
  - A video camera is a valuable tool that allows an independent researcher to focus on the larger context, sketch, make notes, and take pictures while in the environment.
  - Sketches are less obtrusive than pictures, and pictures are less obtrusive than video footage

# Example of Emic: Getting involved to observe better



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMj\\_P\\_6H69g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMj_P_6H69g)





# Exercise 8b: Right where you are sitting (5 min)

- Exercise for each individual
- Write ten things about where you are sitting right now that you hadn't noticed when you sat down. Use your senses, Do it quickly. Do not censor.
- Debrief: “The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity” ... Wittgenstein

## Relevant videos



<https://youtu.be/9tHgNXzS2EY>



<https://youtu.be/ZGnCOKPlikg>

<http://blog.usabilla.com/top-ethnographic-research-videos/>

