Artful Systems in the Home

Alex Taylor
Microsoft Research
Cambridge, UK
Home Making

organising of family life:
examples from field study
broader findings
design implications
Emma: Come on trouble.
Sophie: I’m a bloody reserve…
Emma: Excuse me?
Sophie: I’m a reserve for the swimming thing
Emma: Oh, that’s good
Sophie: I’m not going! I don’t want…
Emma: That’s not too bad, a reserve.
Sophie: Yeah, there’s somebody [inaudible]
Emma: Well, at least you get to take part.
Sophie: Only one kid from our class has got in.
Emma: Really… Typical school letter [reads through it]. When is it, 17th of June?
Sophie: Tomorrow.
Emma: Tomorrow?
Sophie: … and we’ve got to be at school at 8.30
Emma: What? Tomorrow?
Sophie: yeah
Emma: … [reads from paper] Early start, leave school at 8.30. Arrgh! Well, you’ll have to talk to dad. All right, let’s get out of here.
school pickup

letter on sideboard
  embodied
  point of reference

 gala planning
  by emma
  interleaved with other
  chores and activities
  co-ordinated with people
  and artefacts
  routinised system
family chart

“I do look at [the calendar] every morning. I do religiously come down, put the kettle on, have my shower, come back, look at it while I’m making the tea, and then go up back to bed with tea. And that’s what I do every morning, that is my routine.”

organising system:
- home-made
- ritualised
- co-ordinated
- one central overseer
- functional vs. symbolic
“when we’re all sat in the car and you’re in a very enclosed space for, you know, ten minutes and nobody’s going anywhere and actually you’ve got their attention – I’m like ‘remember, Anna, you’re going to Chloe’s for tea tonight’, or ‘remember I’ve got to go pick up Chloe’, and, ‘Flora you’re doing this’ or ‘Caroline Oswald is picking you up tonight and I’ll see you at Britannia.’”

organising system:
- physical/social affordances
- interleaving
- mutual shaping
petal-board
- carefully situated
- performative
- centrally overseen
- delegates responsibility
- embodies moral order

kitchen table
- physical properties
- combined collections
baby book turned critical phone numbers

baby book
- defunct
- ready to be re-jigged
- transformation
- continual assessment of system
“It has a kind of sentimental value… And I can’t bear to throw it away but you know, it’s silly to keep, so I’ve kind of made it into my recipe book where I stick in recipes and stuff. So I can see some of it but some of it’s just boring and repetitive and there are lots of useful pages in the back so…”

- sentimental vs. functional
- legitimate place
- constituted value system
Organising systems

- capture, integrate and arrange, and convey information
- heterogeneous collections of artefacts
- enmesh material and social practices
• Social character of organising systems
  - ad-hoc, devised to suit the needs at hand
  - evolving and ongoing
  - personally and idiosyncratically crafted
  - shared but centrally overseen
• Socially organising systems
  - implicated in ‘home making’
  - expression of family, of home
  - social roles, status, divisions of labour
  - a home’s ‘moral order’
• Design implications
  - not overly prescriptive
  - sensitive to a home’s social organisation
  - allow materials enlisted as ‘resources’
Design implications (continued)

- combinations of heterogeneous resources
  - to be combined artfully:
    - for the business at hand
    - the making of family
  - pliable/re-configurable
  - integration with existing systems