

Life In A Day



For this, my life in a day, I will tell you about a normal day. We can call it Tuesday if we like. It is a day where there are no exciting events or fantastic travels in exotic locations. It is a day like any other.

Today starts as so many before have and many more will again. I wake next to my girlfriend Emily and quietly roll over to hug her. We are often without routine so this could be any time of day, from early morning to mid-afternoon. It normally takes us a while to get up, often Emily will get us some tea and we take a moment talking and drinking. The radio murmurs quietly in the background as we consider rising. This is always one of my favourite times of the day. Just a moment to think things over before we finally make our way to the communal living area.

Once downstairs in the lounge we engage with our house-mate in conversation. The form of this conversation has changed as we have gotten to know each other. What was once polite niceties is now affectionate mockery. Something that has only been achieved through learning one another's acceptable levels of offence. The conversations and the manner in which they progress is different from the intimate time Emily and I spent minutes before. Catherine, our house-mate, tends to have difficulties that I considered to be easy problems to resolve. In my view, she has a negative outlook on life. When we were in bed Emily and I discussed our financial issues and the problems we were having with our coursework. We are worried and it certainly has a negative effect on our mood. Despite this we quietly spend half an hour listening to Catherine, when she finally remembers to ask how we are. Me and Emily smile at each other and in unison (which is a little embarrassing) say "fine thanks", and mean it. I always feel like our problems dissolve when I'm around Catherine's woes. One can't help but be reminded of Gergen's work, 'The Healthy, Happy Human Being Wears Many Masks' (1972), in particular his experiment on impact of visual appearance with Mr. Dirty and Mr. Clean (p137). Catherine is our Mr. Dirty, she gives us a psychological lift, a boost to our self-esteem as a positive reaction to her negativities. Curiously though I find these reactions contrary to some of Gergen's other findings. Gergen found that many of his experimental participants were influenced empathetically, finding their mood matched those around. I found that I felt a positive reaction to Catherine's difficulties, a feeling of 'I'm not struggling, so it's all okay'. Perhaps, as Goffman (1959, in *Contemporary Sociological Theory* 2007) suggests, I am presenting a mask of what I wish to the audience to believe is me. That may have been true when we moved in together a year ago but now I think I may have moved onto another stage. It may now be the case that where I have been performing the 'life doesn't worry me' mask for such a long period that I now believe it is the real me. Perhaps I'll slip back some time but for now, this is also a situation that I am used to. We do this every day and the setting is always the same, we sit in the same chairs in the same positions, drink from the same tea cups and as Goffman would suggest, though there may be subtle changes we know the setting and as such know how to act when we are in this performance space (p55).

It's early summer, so I check the garden for new shoots, maybe pick some weeds or do some

watering. We have more tea before I politely make my excuses and head upstairs to my computer. Sometimes Emily will come up with me but today she has decided to remain downstairs for a chat with Catherine. Emily is a lot better at empathising with Catherine than I am, she sometimes tells me after their conversations that she feels demoralised herself. This is more in keeping with Geregens findings, in particular his experiment with the whiner and the braggart (ibid, p135). But today I can hear them laugh as I head up the stairs, they are content to just talk and joke. I need to engage in an activity or make something.

The computer is almost always on, quietly humming, performing some unknown calculation. I sit, give the mouse a shake, press the screen-on button, unminimize the web browser and email program and see what the world has said today. One of the first sites I check is Twitter, a social network site that asks what a user is doing with a response of less than 140 characters, a process called tweeting. I wander the net, bookmarking and tagging interesting things, posting tweets of whatever is on my mind. I've tried to make this as easy and seamless as possible with my web browsing by using several services combined with unobtrusive browser plug-ins. For many web users this sort of information is scattered, but I like to collate it. I roughly organise to make it easy for me to find what is added to the many services I use for different things by pulling everything into one place, somewhere I call SkinOfStars. What started as a blog is now a collected resource of my thoughts in an easy to access place, what Foucault (1984) may describe as my own hypomnemata. If I'm not collecting links, quotes or resources from others then I will write my own posts detailing my thoughts on events or sharing little discoveries that I have made. Though in public space, my site isn't so much a public forum as it tends to be mainly myself who reads it. Others sometimes come by, but its main purpose is as a reference and an outpouring for myself. The knowledge that I am not creating this for others but for myself means I feel this personally reflective collection was to some extent what Foucault had in mind as he discussed his hypomnemata. It is my "material memory of things read, heard or thought" (p364), not a self-obsessive discovery of my true self in the sense of the "Californian cult of the self" (p362). I consider it a method by which I can disseminate from the mass of information what is important and upon which I can have an effect within this on-line world. As such I will not spend time on

introspective reflection in my postings, rather I try to clarify information I have previously encountered.

Yet I admit that I struggle with a Greco-Roman concept, to consider my own life as an object of knowledge for arts sake. Instead I feel a need to create artefacts that are representative of my accomplishments at that time. This is perhaps reflective of the Protestant Christian society which I am raised in, where our merits are judged on our work, an idea suggested by Weber in 1905 (*).

Whether this means that I adhere to the Greco-Roman interpretation of the self or the Christian, I am unsure. My collected thoughts are in general those only pertaining to my own interests and those that are relevant to myself. Though in the past some of what I posted to my website concerned others more than myself, I now tend not to spend my time dealing with events that do not concern me. Despite this, what is included is certainly not the height of intellectual or scientific knowledge, rather it is what I find interesting. I'd like to think that this fits with Foucault's description of the Greco-Roman concern of knowledge.

Time drifts on as I browse the web and I can help but feel that I am watched. Where once the web was an open arena we are now tracked, Orwellian fears of surveillance by governments has in many ways already become a reality in countries such as China and Iran (BBC, 2008). There are also fears that the same may be happening here in the UK (BBC, 2009)

Does this panoptic nature (Foucault, 1991) encourage certain behaviours? In a discussion of the symbiosis between the Panopticon and technology, De Landa (2001) picks out one of the most concise sentences in explanation of the Panopticon in Foucault's view:

“it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work” (p205)

Though the internet may be an ever-more encompassing technology it will not cover all these

practices, but I thought it interesting to try to apply them to myself.

I generally do not consider myself a legal deviant, though I am certainly wary before I engage in a search that I know may be restrictive under the law. Even in researching this work I came across the restricted lists of websites that are used to limit users in places like Australia (Wikileaks, 2009), something that made me concerned for who was logging me reading this information. Am I now on a government list of people searching for restricted material? This uncertainty is one of the key features of the Panopticon. The Internet's observation tower is easily observable in the form of numerous media reports about net surveillance, a “permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”(Foucault, p201).

DeLanda (2001) offers us a new phrase in considering the invasiveness of modern technological techniques. He suggests that “we may be moving from the old Panopticon to a wider Panspectron”. New technologies can do more than observe what is on the surface, they can view through walls and into the home without us even being aware.

To continue looking through Foucault's various uses of the Panopticon, I think that personal illness isn't of such relevance, but what of machines infected with malware and viruses? A recent BBC showed the ease by which criminal gangs can infiltrate a computer (Perrow, 2009). Though in honesty I worry a little about that due my own awareness and some of my technical choices. Education on the other hand, is certainly something that I would bear in mind. It would be easy for a wary assessor to check a particularly well constructed sentence against the the bulk of accessible works on the internet by using a common search engine.

These Panoptic advantages of technology are used by more than just government agencies and other assorted nefarious organisations. They are used for marketing companies, those concerned with their intellectual properties or even by the very providers of the Internet to my home. This makes the centrality of the Panopticon non-existent, whereby the watchtowers can be located anywhere in the world (Brignall, 2001, p4).

I finally consider web-life as a supervised worker, a begger or an idler. I think it would only take a quick look at what is contained in the cultivated works on my own website so see that I idle my time on some inane wanderings on the web and this is for all to see. Perhaps in this instance that invert the theory. It is what I add myself that is what really makes my life on the internet Panoptic. My blog and Twitter postings, uploads to photo sites like Flickr. I am distinctly backlighting myself for everybody to see., not just for the casual observer but for my friends as well as by possible future employers.

By this point of the day I feel I have had enough of sitting around be watched by the world while I sit quietly at a computer. I go back downstairs to talk to to some real people and to do some more jobs. Emily doesn't have much work on at the moment so she is reading the supplements from the paper. She isn't too keen on the main news but finds the features, columns and puzzles interesting. Once I've done a few handyman jobs around the house I read a little news and Emily starts dinner. Though I may occasionally cook, Emily normally takes on the role. Its not that I can't, but I do the other jobs; fixing broken stuff, gardening, catching and disposing of spiders. We dropped into these roles pretty easily after a few months of living together and they seem to suit us. But as Butler may ask, are we in these roles due to our gender or is it more likely that we have fallen into these gender specific roles due to a perpetuation from socialisation? Let us begin the examination, as Tyler (1996) does in his analysis of Butlers 1999 work, *Gender Trouble*, by a brief physical comparison.

As I look at myself, and consider the female form respectively, I can see all the common traits associated with gender. I have a beard, I am of a reasonably large build, I have a deep voice, in fact if it wasn't for my long hair it would be very difficult indeed to mistake me as a female. Conversely, as I look at Emily I would have great difficulty in mistaking her as anything but female. I do not know my chromosome make-up, but as Tyler points out in his dissemination of Butlers work, chromosomal make-up doesn't necessarily reflect appearance, or more importantly performance. Though I may or may not conform to these physical and biological attributes, I certainly perform the appropriate gender role within my society.

The performance is continued along societies expected norms by entering into a heterosexual relationship and, as previously mentioned, engaging in tasks typically associated with my gender. As Butler says “an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (1998, p519). She quotes Merleau-Ponty in saying that the body is “an historical idea” rather than “a natural species ” (ibid, p520). Indeed, gender is a performative truism. Butler distinguishes between the word 'performance' and 'performative' whereby the performative is only true because it is performed (1994, p112). In this instance, the act of me sitting back and reading the newspaper while Emily cooks dinner is the performative, it qualifies our gendered roles. Of course, we are not the only ones who perform these roles, they are repeated throughout our society time and time again. In the printed media, on television, by my parents before me, these roles are perpetuated by the different by institutions such by the state as well as the family. Fairclough (2001) argues that we are constrained to perform and perpetuate roles because we are constrained by “orders of discourse” (p23, *Discourse As A Social Practice*), social orders within which we are bound by convention. Just as Gergen's 'Masks' (1972) make us feel about ourselves dependent on who we are in the company of, so we also act differently dependent on the situation we are in and the acceptable behaviour therein (Fairclough, 2001). Is it socially acceptable to allow Emily to cook dinner each night? In a traditional sense it probably is, but the ever changing relationships of power within these sites of social interaction, discourse, mean that this and other perceptions of gender relationships are subject to change (Fairclough, p28).

We eat, watch a little television and prepare to retire. This gives me some rest time with which I can reflect on my day. After waking this morning I engaged in various performances, both one-on-one and in a group. I considered from a Gergen perspective that I wore masks which reflected those around me. With Emily I was empathetic in concern, yet in the presence of those who I feel wallow in their woes I was able to lift myself. In light of the work of Goffman I also considered how my settings affected my performance as well as wondering as to my sincerity and how it may have changed over time.

After these encounters with others I decided to spend some time in physical solitude, yet interacting over the internet. My main concern at this point was in reflecting upon cultivating my self from

Foucault's Greco-Roman perspective. I considered that my attempts at collecting information and disseminating that in my own space may be regarded as similar to the notion of an hypomnemata. Yet despite this notion I was still swayed by the idea that my desire to create artefacts as personal symbols of my own successes are likely to be rooted in more Christian ideals.

This time collecting and interacting with online information began to raise my concerns over the freedom of the net and how that affects me. I considered the Internet in the terms of Foucault's Panopticon, an all-visible mechanism for control and discipline. I noted the already encroaching surveillance by government bodies and how this raises my concerns of being watched, even when I am doing legitimate research. I also looked at the Panoptical Internet in the different situations that Foucault suggested a Panopticon may be used and how the permanent possibility of being watched can affect my behaviour. Perhaps most importantly though, I realised that I was the one who created the greatest visibility of my online habits.

The fourth topic I tackled today was the gendered roles I have assumed and how this can be considered a performance rather than a result of biological traits. I considered how these roles only form through their perpetuation by the media, institutions and by socialisation. I also looked at how I am constrained within these roles by what is accepted discourse practice within certain social orders. Yet despite the roles we adopt today, passed to us through historical means, I found that they are subject to change.

My day in a life has been reflective and personally thought-provoking. A day like any other and I'm sure it will be much the same again tomorrow.

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Appendix: Six forum Posts at <http://www.cyberchimp.co.uk/U75184/forum>**1 [Online Seminars](#) / [Subject to Culture](#) / [Re: How are we cultivating ourselves?](#)**

Strict routines can be productive in the sense of tasks fulfilled but I think are contrary to the evolutionary and creative process of self-mastery. The hypomnemata was a method of collecting these randomly collated ideas as they pass through one's mind, rather than as a time planner with chores to tick off. Ethical or aesthetic concerns flow through one's mind as events differently trigger them, yet with a routine events are regimented, predictable, sterile. 9-5 routines are good for the boss to see his figures, not for the individual and their self-development.

2 [Online Seminars](#) / [Subject to Culture](#) / [Re: The World Turned Upside-Down](#)

I think that an interesting aspect of this imagined world is the ridicule placed on those who try to help the disabled. I understand that Finklestien is presenting his concerns about the way that disabled are being helped, but the ridicule implies that he would prefer any help to be non-existent. Society has not developed from a disabled viewpoint, but many have made strides to try to rectify this. Would Finklestien prefer those who have tried not to have bothered? Many have and are trying to help and I would suggest that ridiculing the efforts of others, though illustrative, is not productive.

3 [Online Seminars](#) / [Subject to Culture](#) / [Re: Panoptic Practices](#)

CCTV?! Yes, all our actions within the physical public sphere are potentially under surveillance. But these just catch you while you are out in the street or a shopping centre or similar. But these are not your most uninhibited selves. Your actions are already tempered through an awareness of being observed by other citizens. Does anyone here have an oyster card, or a car with a numberplate.

Our experience of automatic and disindividualized panoptic power is being experienced as I sit here and type this. Thanks to 'anti-terror' laws councils can now routinely check our emails and phone calls on the most mundane matters¹. Despite any words to the contrary by the government, this surveillance is still expanding² and where they don't have resources they will get your internet provider to help them out³. There are lists which governments use to block your traffic⁴, or otherwise lists that your ISP will use as 'self-regulation'⁵. Perhaps you feel that so long as you are being careful with your net usage then they won't be able to track what you do.. well I'm afraid to say that there is already been a history of the American National Security Agency working with Microsoft to provide easy access to your computer⁶.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to put my tinfoil hat on⁷.

1. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1024162/Phone-spies-Town-halls-using-anti-terror-powers-bug-residents-calls-emails.html>

2. http://www.theregister.co.uk/2009/05/03/gchq_mti/

3. <http://www.itpro.co.uk/610662/government-looks-to-isps-as-it-cuts-comms-database-plan>

- 4.<http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2009/03/wikileaks-expos/9>
 5.<http://www.pcpro.co.uk/news/251609/bt-blocks-off-pirate-bay.html>
 6.<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/437967.stm>
 7.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_foil_hat

4 [Online Seminars](#) / [Subject to Culture](#) / [Re: Knapsacks](#)

As a white working class male... I get a pretty easy life. Like pippa, in this country I am judged on my own merits. Perhaps it would be easier if I was advanced by 'positive discrimination', but I do not believe there is such a thing. We seem to believe that our racial barriers are coming down, especially since the new president of the US is black, but I believe the rarity of the event does little more than highlight the divide. I'll admit that I notice racial differences of the time and try to consciously correct my behaviour to 'act normally', how bizarre is that?! I always remember a friend of mine at school telling me that racism is noticing the difference. I'm not sure I agree with him, but I could see his point.

McIntosh points out that she is 'never asked to speak for all the people of [her] racial group'. Yet I found when I was in other non-white dominated countries that I was posed questions regarding 'us whites', yet at no point did I find my whiteness a hindrance. Perhaps in some countries, Zimbabwe comes to mind, being white can cause issues. But I think that whiteness is representative of prosperity as much as it is of imperialist rule. Prosperity, even if it little more than the the appearance of, can buy you many good graces in any part of the world.

5 [Online Seminars](#) / [Subject to Culture](#) / [Re: Opposite Sex](#)

I don't have a great deal of knowledge in genetics so, like many who have posted before, I was mildly surprised by the 10% crossover in chromosomes between males and females. Naturally, I did a little reading on sexual determinism, in particular the Sex-determining Y chromosome (one never accepts statements from a single source) and found that differences are often more than a simple XY pairing, often a string of letters found at the end of the alphabet (you can see my genes knowledge coming out here). I then found that birds and fish use a ZW system and in other types of animals there is no chromosome differentiation at all, rather a determination based on environmental factors. Seeing as we are merely another variant animal too then this whole definition based on new found medical practices becomes a moot point.

With Butler one can hardly disagree then that we play to our culturally determined definitions of sexuality rather than our medical determined. For example, I am a man (I know that for I have a beard.. and stuff) and I will not be seen wearing a skirt. Men do not wear skirts, it is totally inappropriate to our gender to do so... in this country. Perhaps the more important and sinister point here is that we accept whichever roles we are assigned, and the restrictions associated with them and then further perpetuate them by continuing to play these roles. This is something that spreads through gender, ethnicity, age and class.

6 [Online Seminars](#) / [Subject to Culture](#) / [Re: More Masks](#)

We seem to have conflict here within many posts. The consensus seems to be 'yes we have masks, but I am still a unified person'. There is something about the postmodernist viewpoint suggested in this text that many find disturbing, that we are a reaction to our environment rather than a centrally controlled individual. Yet despite this there is discussion on how our friends 'turn into totally different people' when they are drunk. Is this not an example of a non-unified self? Gergen considers the clinging to the idea of a unified self as an unhealthy act and I'm inclined to agree. Maybe we should appreciate the many sides of our friends, rather than ridiculing with such phrases as 'it's so unlike them'.