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DAVID SILVERMAN (ed.). Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice. London: Sage, 1997. 262 + x pp. £\*\*.\*\* (pbk).

This review has taken me some time to deliver: not because I couldn't quickly appraise the book, rather because it kept being borrowed while I was reading it. And this material fact, rather than any subjective feelings I might have about it, could stand as an appraisal in itself. My graduate students walked off with it. Even our new professor of psychology wanted to have a look. And another group of people, across several disciplines and at very different stages of their careers, had to have at least one of the chapters as an answer to that always vexed question: "I've collected my materials, now what do I do with them?" I suspect that what they learned was that, by starting with data and then searching around after the fact for an analytic method, they'd begun on the wrong foot. For, as Silverman reminds us in his Introduction, and as the rest of the papers demonstrate, there is an inextricable link between data and method. We find, at the end of this book's extraordinary journey through the many facets of qualitative analysis on many aspects of everyday life, that how we are to analyse everyday communications is itself a communication in communication with what it analyses.

Rod Watson makes this perfectly clear when he writes that "Sociologists can and do provide analytic descriptions of social order but they are only able to do so because their own ordinary, natural language furnishes the general resources for them to do so" (82). In this sense, the book is a collection of wonderfully assembled reminders that the ordinary is the baseline from which social research must proceed and that, at the same time, the utterly ordinary (an empirical domain demanding an empirical approach) is its missed topic – the very thing it has tended to put to one side as unworthy of investigation.

If this is the position, then, of course, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have to be close by (Watson, Baker, Heritage and Heath). But this collection isn't simply ethnomethodological in a slavish fashion. It also doffs its cap in the direction of traditional ethnography (Baszanger & Dodier and Atkinson & Coffey), Foucault's conception of discourse (Miller, Prior and Potter), and interview techniques (Miller & Glassner and Holstein & Gubrium). But in doing so, in arranging these approaches as clearly written examples (templates even) of the current state of qualitative research, we are constantly reminded that ordinariness is both the proper object of this kind of research and its very condition of possibility.

And this is very much the tenor of Silverman's own Postscript, "Towards an Aesthetics of Research", where he argues against both romanticism and humanism as the proper bases of social scientific work. That is, the technically reflexive cross-imbrication of data and method is taken to be a factual condition of social scientific research, rather than an excuse for endlessly reflective contemplations of what the "analyst" may be "doing" to the "subject" (à la Clifford and Marcus) in the course of his or her research. And it is also clearly steered away from principled criticism as the primary analytic mentality for investigations of the ordinary. In this respect, it is a guide to doing empirical analyses of the everyday, mounted on a distinctly Hunterian platform. And this is something the whole field of qualitative analysis has needed for some time: an approach outwith the restrictions of both "correctness" and "authenticity" and, instead, predicated on a resolute ordinariness or empiricity.

The only possibly sad note is that Silverman, at the end, has to epitomise all that the book stands against by using television (and, in particular, chat shows) as his foil:

Less cautiously [he's polite enough to begin], may I admit that my heart sinks whenever I read yet another "open-ended" interview study claiming to tell it "like it is". If this is one's "bag", why obtain research grants and write scholarly papers? Better by far simply to turn on the TV and wallow in the undoubtedly "human" and "authentic" pap. (249)

This hardly sits well with his almost simultaneous plea for a separation between what the researcher values and what she or he finds. As the interview chapters in this book (Miller & Glassner, Holstein & Gubrium and Baker) imply, talking on TV — even if it is a corollary of bad sociological investigations of "experience" — needs to be investigated in its own right, piecemeal, in terms of its particularities, rather than being turned into an irony for the justification of an "aesthetics" of sociological research. Otherwise, the Frankfurt School (which Silverman, otherwise, roundly trounces), kept on the boundary for so long, is back there at the end of the day, with the chance of taking the final, and crucial, wicket. At this point, reluctantly, I have to question the captain's decision, and perhaps even suspect him of wanting to pad up for the other side. Instead, let's take his plea for scientific clarity right into the heart of cultural studies itself: the popular.