

No Way to Make a Living.Net: Exploring the Possibilities of the Web for Visual and Sensory Sociologies of Work

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Abstract

This article reflects on the possibilities and pitfalls of a website, *No Way to Make a Living* at: <http://nowaytomakealiving.net>, as a sociological space for exploring what work (paid or unpaid) is like in today's world. The site includes research projects, short thoughts on everyday working lives, and different kinds of textual (fictional, autobiographical and analytical), aural, and visual representations of work. It emerged as a collaborative project from our frustrations with some dominant representations of work in contemporary photography, and the limitations in the forms of knowledge we can convey in academic publishing. We argue that the contemporary complexity of work exceeds the dominant forms of sociological representation available to us, and illustrate how a website provides multi-media opportunities to gain new insights into work. However, we also problematise the status of visual and sensory methodologies as a panacea for the shortcomings in more conventional sociological practices. We discuss the analytical and imaginative potential of absence as well as presence. And in the final section, we frame the site as a contribution towards a more 'open sociology', and one which engages with a readership we can only partially know.

Keywords: work, blogging, web 2.0, visual sociology, digital methods

Introduction

1.1 Understanding work in the 21st century is a tricky business. Work is complex, variable, unstable and uncertain for many, and yet crucial to our everyday lives and arguably our sense of selves. Sociologists trying to grasp how work is organised and lived at the present time (or historically) have quite a job on their hands. So how can we do it?

1.2 This special issue is about ways of understanding different aspects of work, with a particular emphasis on visual approaches. As part of this aim, the present article reflects on the possibilities and pitfalls of a website, *No Way to Make a Living*, at: <http://nowaytomakealiving.net> (henceforth *nowaytomakealiving*) as a sociological space for exploring the nature of work in the current world. The aim of the article is to think differently about academic writing, research methodology and the exchange and development of ideas within the research process. We argue that the contemporary complexity of work exceeds the dominant forms of sociological representation available to us, and illustrate how social media such as our website provide multi-media opportunities to gain new insights into work.

1.3 In what follows, we present the site and discuss how it came about. We consider the capacity of the web as a space for addressing the complexity of work sociologically. We critically discuss sensory methodologies and the ways they are employed in the site, arguing that sensory approaches can provide distinct ways of knowing the world of work, and generate new analytical insights. We use them flexibly and experimentally to reflect on work, and to provoke our audience to consider work differently. We are committed to 'open sociology' but the question of audience perplexes us. Whilst we are fully in favour of the public presentation of our academic work, a conundrum of many websites like ours is how little we know of our audience and their responses to our ideas.

The website: *No Way to Make a Living*

2.1 *Nowaytomakealiving* is a web-based sociological space 'generating discussion and exchange on what work, paid or unpaid, is like in today's world', as per our tag line. The site is composed of different types of post: 'projects', 'thoughts', 'stories' (including autobiographical accounts) and 'reviews' which brings together information intended to be of particular use to visual sociologists and photographers. In addition, for each post, there is a comments space where, in principle, anyone can submit their reflections. Another way of describing the site is to emphasise that cutting across these different types of posts are different kinds of textual (fictional, autobiographical and analytical), aural, and visual representations of work. Indeed, a central ambition of the site is to make use of the relative freedom of the web to explore innovative approaches to understanding work and to experiment with the forms of representation the web makes possible.

2.2 We came up with the idea for the site on our way back from seeing the exhibition by the documentary photographer, Martin Figura, *Work-Space-Work*, about the changing industrial landscape in Dunstable (Norwich Arts Centre, April 2008; see also Figura et al., 2007). We were frustrated with the way Figura privileges the composition of the image over the activity that takes place in the space. Where workers are present, they are pictured as representing the job, and in static forms. Amongst the dominant representations of work in contemporary photography, this attention to the aesthetics of space is common. For instance, Bridget Smith's (2006) photo essay on the refurbishment of the De La Warr pavilion (Bexhill) also relies on an aestheticisation of spaces, decay, traces of labour, tools and materials. In the work of photographers whose images are known for the centrality of workers, we find a relatively narrow range of representations of workers with a focus on manual labour and an emphasis (sometimes nostalgic) on forms of work in decline. Whilst these collections include astounding pictures that are very evocative of particular experiences of work, they tend either to reveal harsh and exploitative working conditions as in the work of Lewis Hine, and more recently, Sebastiao Salgado (1993), or to glorify work through depictions of strong, active, heroic and usually male bodies (see Jean Gaumy's (2001) *Men at Sea* for instance). They are 'dramatisations which emphasise particular parts of a story' (Strangleman and Warren, 2008: 74). Amongst them, women have rarely been represented as emblematic of productive achievement (Wolkowitz, 2006: 44).

2.3 Alongside our frustration with the dominant forms of representation of work in contemporary photography, we were also dissatisfied with the limitations in the forms of knowledge and representation we can convey in academic publishing. The publishing queue is a general problem, notwithstanding some recent initiatives to create web-based discussion alongside peer-reviewed publication (e.g. in *European Societies*). In these print-based media, space is always at a premium however, and the inclusion of a photograph (table or diagram) means foregoing a spatially equivalent number of words. This constrains authors in their use of images while the nature of the medium and publishing practices limits them to using static and silent black and white images only. A notable exception is *Visual Studies* which does not restrict the number or type of images, and does not count them against a word limit. More generally, in mainstream sociology publications, there is only partial acceptance of visual modes of enquiry, even a 'blind spot' with regard to their relevance, as Strangleman (2004) has argued on the basis

of his analysis of the material published in the journal, *Work, Employment and Society*. This is a curious failure to recognise the legacy of the past use of the visual in ethnography and qualitative research in the early twentieth century (Harper, 1988). These publishing practices also contrast with the instantaneous participatory culture made possible in a 'wiki-world' (Suoranta and Vaden, 2000; see also Les Back's 'Real Time Research').

2.4 Nowaytomakealiving went live in October 2009 and, at the time of writing, it includes around 135 thoughts about work, 20 projects, and several stories and reviews. We named the site after a mishearing of the Dolly Parton song, *9 to 5* (it should be 'what a way to make a living') to indicate our commitment to finding inspiration outside academia. (You can read more about work songs in 'Mr Walker, it's all over: gender politics in office songs'). There are currently close to 20 different authors with posts on the site and many other participants who have posted comments, including journalists, professionals in various spheres, and interested readers. The site can be searched under the main categories (thoughts, projects, stories etc.), through the 'tags' (part of the 'folksonomy' of the web, a mode of providing non-linear links between content (Beer and Burrows, 2007: 2.14)) that are used to mark each post, by keyword, or by contributor.

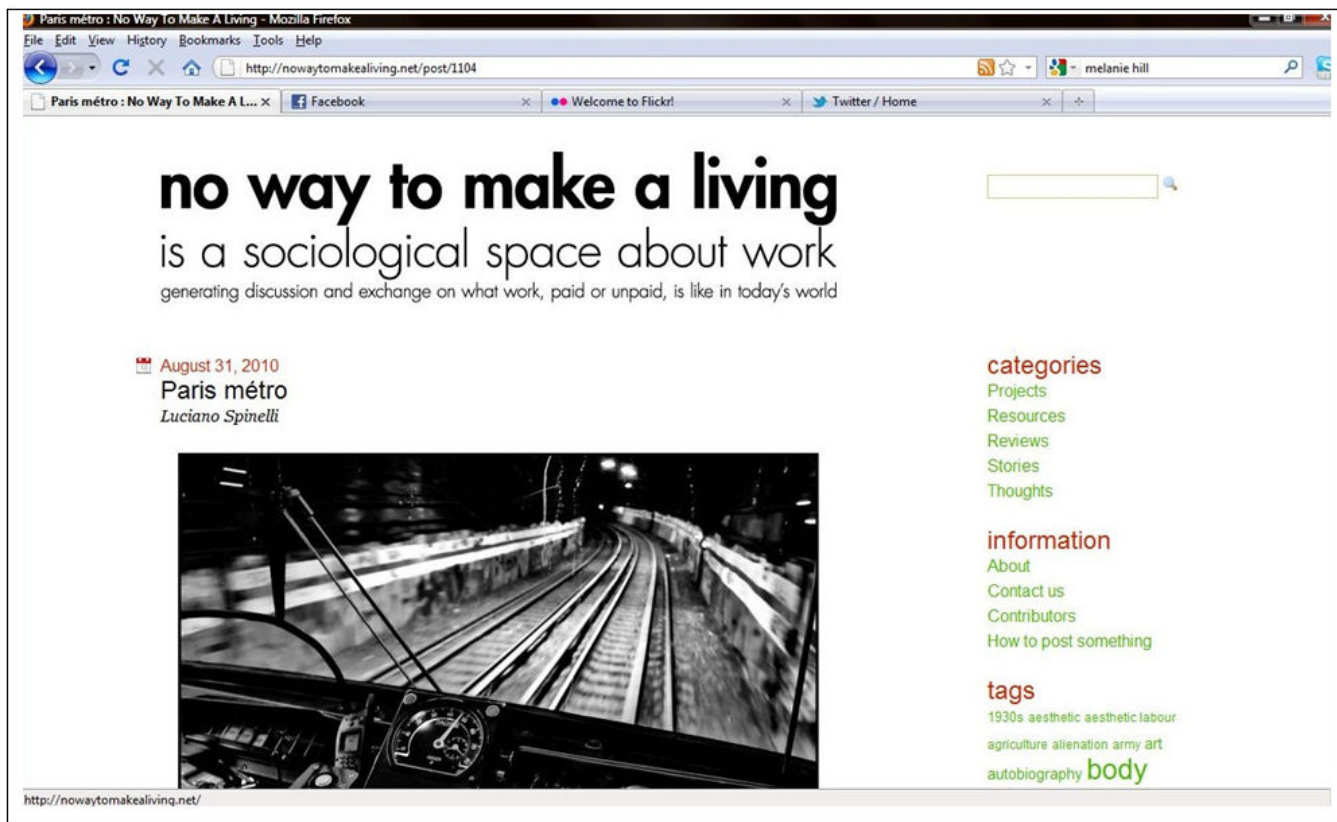


Figure 1. Screen Shot of Site

2.5 The different forms of post on the site make different kinds of contribution to it. Projects are ongoing sociological studies which present provisional findings or points for discussion. The posts in this category are usually elements of larger research projects. In some instances, they build on one another over time, e.g. Dawn's various posts on fishing, fishing communities, and fish markets. In contrast, some of our thoughts are written quickly and come from a sudden observation, a fleeting realisation - what Kathleen Stewart (2007) calls 'ethnographic happenings' (for instance, 'Ordinary Misbehaviour'; 'Work Undone' and 'Work Redone' - or responses to news items 'Care') or a critical engagement with policy announcements, 'The Emergency Budget'). None of these thoughts on their own amount to projects, although they may give rise to questions around which projects can be built, and may be inspired by ongoing projects. They might also arise from our sociological imaginations at play on the sidelines of our main interests, e.g. Lynne's posts on customer service work across a range of contexts, or Miriam Glucksman's observations on Norfolk reedcutters and a tradition in decline. Several of our 'posters' have given us brief insights into their larger research projects too, including Lara Maestripietri's 'Work in the Time of the Knowledge Worker' and David Harris' comments on realist filmmaking in factories.

2.6 It is also worth noting that in addition to the visual, the site permits broader and different forms of writing in relation to the objects and subjects of sociological enquiry than in mainstream journals, including analytical, autobiographical, 'thick description', and autoethnographic forms. Furthermore, what we are doing on the site is not a digital replication of what we already do in print or by voice. It is a different kind of space in which other forms of thinking and writing emerge. Writing styles and the length of posts are flexible and varied, and in writing relatively freely we have found that our involvement in the site has impacted on our writing beyond it.

2.7 Over time a new kind of knowledge is accruing through the site. It is collaborative and cumulative, dynamic and open-ended. For example, to date we have inadvertently written a considerable number of posts about transport and published posts from four other contributors on this topic. In 'Paris Métro', the reader is positioned to see a driver's view of the tunnels and a sense of the speed and movement of the train in Luciano Spinelli's stunning black and white images. We get a different glimpse of movement through urban space in Lynne's reflection on 'Women Drivers', in this case, of taxis. In contrast, Mick Hutton's personal account of 'Being a Navvy in the 1970s' powerfully conveys the material weight and bodily exertions it takes to maintain the tracks for safe train travel. Transporting produce and goods is discussed in very different ways in several posts. In 'In the Orbit of the Tomato', Mark Harvey analyses his father's social documentary film footage from the late 1930s and we see 'the work of world-making' in which 'mostly men, mostly smoking, [are] engaged in manual labour of producing, lifting and transporting tomatoes'. This contrasts sharply with the unpeopled space evoked in Dawn's post on 'The Port of Felixstowe' since the advent of containerisation.

2.8 Less surprisingly, there are a large number of posts that in one way or another address the theme of work identity. Although not specifically intended as a collection, together they make for an interesting read alongside one another. For instance, there are connections across posts on the experience of unemployment in 'Work Identity and Worklessness', and the refusal of employment in the operation of the marriage bar in 'Congratulations on Getting Married, Now You Have to Leave your Job'. Readers can access a first-hand account of the everyday life of 'A Piano Tuner', alongside the research-based exploration of the creative labour of musicians in 'Silent Musician'.

2.9 There are also connections between posts which are about similar fields of work. For instance, in 'Bodywork', the aesthetic labour of flight attendants is depicted and discussed, which might be read alongside a reflection on the BA strike in early 2010, 'The Damage of the Strike' - and other strikes are discussed in 'Motor City on Strike' and 'The Postman's Uniform'. There are several posts about building work, from an analysis of Bob the Builder in 'The Fun is in Getting it Done!' to the labour that keeps the

lifts of the Eiffel Tower in operation in 'Work at Great Height'. These are visible forms of work, accessible to ethnographic wanderers, whereas other posts on this theme include an ethnographic project carried out in a space hidden from public view ('Seeing Work'), and a visual narrative based on a partial and particular view of building work as seen from Dawn's office window ('The Construction of a New Building').

2.10 Reviews of events and exhibitions provide an opportunity for making explicit links or discussing tensions between how visual arts or professional media represent work and workers, as in the posts on 'Mesrine' and 'The Working Lives of Londoners'. Tim Strangleman's comments on the photographer Stuart Whipps' documentation of the move of the infrastructure of car production at Longbridge to Nanjing, China, in 'The Remembrance to a Lost Work' discusses nostalgia, labour and the visual. And the imaginative analysis of alienation and the division and labour in Bob the Builder by Victoria Tedder will make you look at Wendy or Scoop in a new light. We can also reread images put together as photo stories by photographers. For instance, Rogan Macdonald's Emergency Response on the London tube on his own website is brought into a reflection on temporalities and hidden spaces of work in 'Down in the Tube Station at Midnight'.

2.11 *Nowaytomakealiving* uses blog software (Wordpress), and is cumulative and date-ordered like a blog. However, it avoids some of the defining features of blogs in practice. We do not publish for the sake of having a new post up that day or that week, unlike most blogs where frequency and currency are what matters. Our posts are written when there is something to say about work, and the time to say it. We endeavour to write well and to avoid stream of consciousness postings. Further, the site is not a project of self-identity, as Ewins (2005) suggests blogs, including academic blogs, tend to be. (See Melissa Gregg's <http://homecookedtheory.com/> for an interesting academic diary-style blog. Gregg notes, with reference to her research into information workers, though not her own blogging practices, how 'digital technology exacerbates anxieties particular to middle class subjectivity' (<http://homecookedtheory.com/archives/2010/05/27/white-collar-intimacy>.) (We, of course deny all middle class anxieties.) Whilst many of our posts are directly or indirectly political (Victoria Tedder's 'Working for an Occupation'; Rebecca Taylor's 'Should I Work for Free?'; or Lynne's 'A Hyper-precarious Labour Market' <http://nowaytomakealiving.net/post/1411>), the site is not explicitly political (unlike say 'Sociology with a Militant Twist'). Nor is it written predominantly for an audience of academics and intellectuals, as is the very interesting and collaborative 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made'. We do not (as does the often stimulating <http://potlatch.typepad.com/>) discuss intellectual ideas alongside diary-like happenings from our lives, unless the topic has a clear contribution to make towards understanding contemporary work. We are fans of <http://joemoransblog.blogspot.com/> (tagline: on the everyday, the banal and other important matters), whose subject matter suits admirably the blog format. There are many other blog-style sites run by academics, though none (so far as we know) explicitly about work. <http://workblogging.blogspot.com/>, from which we get many visitors, collates research into work and has a listing of work blogs, that is blogs written by workers about work (see Ellis and Richards, 2009 for a discussion of work bloggers; we did not realise until writing this piece, that we do not write about our own workplaces).

2.12 The site is inclusive but also restricted (cf Hall, 2009). As authors, administrators and editors, we decide to approve (or remove) comments; we work with contributors giving editorial guidance on the content of their submissions; and we informally collaborate with people whose working lives we write about (e.g. in 'Working in the Family Tradition'). We steer the site to become what we envisaged, and we appreciate the unanticipated directions it has taken, including by one another. Sometimes we share ideas for posts, including suggesting things to one another, often in the informal spaces of our friendship. Mostly we write independently but in a way that feels like part of a longer conversation. Although we chose to host the site outside of either of our employing institutions in order to retain maximum control of content and operation into the future, we did have support from both our Universities (Essex and Kent), who provided funding for the original design and training for us to get up and running. The site is now being archived by the British Library.

The contemporary complexity of work and the capacity of the visual

3.1 If the site emerged from our frustrations with dominant representations of work and mainstream sociological outlets for publication, there is also another level of concern to which we address ourselves. We argue that the contemporary complexity of work *exceeds* the central forms of sociological enquiry and representation available to us. Law and Urry contend that standard sociological tools (surveys and interviews) are not well suited to grasping current global complexity. They deal poorly with the fleeting, the distributed, or the multiple, and have particular difficulty in handling the sensory, the emotional, and the kinaesthetic (2004: 403-404). The nature of work at the present time is not a clear-cut object of study. A sociological understanding of work today recognises that it can be paid or unpaid, and formal or informal (Glucksman, 2005; Pettinger *et al.*, 2005). The same activity may therefore be carried out simultaneously in different socio-economic forms, or may shift between these forms in time or space. Alongside this, global divisions of labour mean that processes that are interconnected may be spatially dislocated, both in the production of goods, and in the provision of services, such as the global chains of care for children and the elderly (Hochschild, 2003). Furthermore, the problematic 'end of work' debate argues that work is no longer the primacy basis of identity as it once was, at least for those in stable occupations or professions (Strangleman, 2007). This all leaves us with something of a problem in understanding and representing work. However, in spite of these developments, at the present time we have limited understanding of how it feels to be embodied and of the deployment of the senses in working life (Wolkowitz 2006; Hockey and Allen-Colinson 2009: 218).

3.2 Visual methodologies, and more generally, sensory methodologies, are currently popular with qualitative researchers. Photography, whether produced by participants (sometimes called 'photovoice', e.g. Hillyard, 2007) or generated by the researcher, is the most common medium (see also Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi in this volume). The virtues of the photograph and the visual within social research are presented in a range of generalist methodology books (Banks, 2001; Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Pink, 2006, 2007, 2009; Prosser, 1998) as well as in specialist journals (e.g. *Visual Studies*). As part of this general rise in visual sociology, there has been a growing interest in the role of the visual in researching work, mostly through the use of photography (Harper, 1998) and video (Hindmarsh, 2009). The visual is especially effective for documenting certain aspects and experiences of work. Change over time which might otherwise be taken for granted can be noticed in its particularity from visual records (film, photographs or drawings). For instance, in Tim Edensor's (2005) research on ruins, traces of work can be glimpsed in abandoned or forgotten materials, objects and spaces. More generally, spaces of work are amenable to visual exploration through which we might gain insight into the divisions, boundaries, and hierarchies in work organisations (e.g. Halford, 2004). Visual technologies can be used to explore the bodily complexity of skill in work, for instance by slowing or speeding time (Harper, 1987; O'Connor, 2007). Similarly, certain forms of interactions and relationships can be documented visually (Hindmarsh, 2009: 991). In addition, existing images, not necessarily produced with sociological intentions, can be used to generate sociological insights. Indeed, whilst acknowledging a tradition in sociology of drawing on different visual resources, Strangleman and Warren argue that 'the sociology of work needs to develop a capacity and language to deal with the variety of representations of work' (Strangleman 2008: 73). This includes social documentary and industrial or corporate photography (see Strangleman, this volume, for an analysis of images from the Guinness archive).

3.3 If the visual can help in the problem of understanding and representing work, that still leaves the question of the *space* of representation. Sidestepping the problems of publishing images in mainstream academic books and journals, as discussed above, digitisation in general, and the web in particular, offers opportunities for developing the potential of visual methodologies to explore work.

Nowaytomakealiving has a particular (but not exclusive) commitment to the visual. Both the web-based character of the site that permits image (still and moving), sound and hypermedia (Pink, 2006), and our attention to documenting multisensorial dimensions of the organisation, appearance and experience of work mean that the site can be a space to discuss and represent some of the current complexity of work and working lives. It is very well suited to showcase visual methodologies in particular and sensory approaches more generally. For instance, time-lapse photography permits a slow motion unveiling of how 'The Carpenter's Body' moves whilst his head remains stationary. Embedding video, sound or image into text is technologically easy (as *Sociological Research Online* has showed for many years; see Lyon and Back in this volume), and offers us as researchers the chance to experiment with analysis of image-based material, and with the presentation of this material to different audiences. Overall, we are enjoying riding the wave of the current interest in sensory methodologies, and argue that the web provides a productive and under-utilised space for presenting such work. However, if the website provides multi-media opportunities to gain new insights into work, it is also a space which problematises the use of the visual and other sensory methodologies for producing knowledge about work, as we discuss in the next section.

Sensory methodologies as beneficial abstractions

4.1 Justifications for researchers working to incorporate non-word methodologies tend to be twofold, and draw implicitly on a presumption that visual representations are accessible, even dominant in our experience of the social so that, 'not only do we confront the image at the scene of the screen but we confront the logistics of the image wherever we turn ... not only do the denizens of capital labor to maintain ourselves as image, we labor in the image' (Beller, 2006: 1). First are the methodological benefits: the merit of the photograph (or other visual media) is as a means of access to different dimensions of the research field, not only when images are directly produced by research participants. Some things can be more easily seen than spoken of, and an ethnographer with a camera holds a conversation starter in his/her hand that then allows him/her to visually document the research site as part of the ethnographic process. Further, the photograph is communicative and may convey an understanding of the social world more effectively (or at least differently) than text.

4.2 Those working with sensory methodologies have learned from the broader qualitative tradition, for example, in the development of ethical codes of practice (see the BSA Visual Sociology webpage at: <http://www.visualsociology.org/about/ethics/ethics-statement.html>; Papademas and the IVSA, 2009), and in discussions of reflexivity. Sarah Pink has written a series of accounts as to what incorporating 'the visual' into text based ethnographic and anthropological practices might entail (2007; 2009), inspired by Clifford Geertz and the turn to literary forms of ethnography. Pink's work is careful and sensitive to what visual methodologies can and cannot do 'just as reality is not solely visible or observable, images have no fixed or single meanings and are not capable of capturing an objective reality' (2007: 32). She offers reflexivity and attention to gendered subjectivities during research practice (2007: 24-7) as tools for managing multiple meanings and uncertainty. What we see here are sensory methodologies integrated into a longer standing research tradition.

4.3 We find Janet Wolff's arguments compelling for recognising the autonomy of the image. Against a sociological reductionism that implies the image is (straightforwardly and only) socially constructed and reflects a comprehensible social world, albeit one which requires 'careful interpretation' (Grady, 2004: 18), Wolff suggests 'we have seen the image strike back' (2008: 120). In recognising the presence and autonomy of the image we should avoid a narrow sociological reading that makes the image entirely interpretable by the researcher. An image with a text, within a research project, is too easily presumed to evoke a micro-world and be a shortcut to understanding. For Wolff, images are active in social processes, not mere reflections. They may speak directly to the viewer without an intervening researcher interpretation. We use the web to make this happen, to open our research work and allow for interpretations beyond our own. Wolff's work has been influential for how we understand what *nowaytomakealiving* is doing when presenting ideas about sociology of work to a student or non-university audience. It is a way of remembering that interpretations of images are not controllable. The texts we write in relation to images may prod a reader to share our interpretation, but may not convince them.

4.4 We use visual and other sensory material and methodologies on the site in several specific ways. First, images are used to illustrate text, for the prettification of the page. For instance, the photograph of a post box alongside the text in 'The Eternity of the Postman's Job' does not in itself move the argument along. Secondly, images are used to show something 'real' (see Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi in this volume for discussion of the complexities of the concept of realism in visual research). In some posts, the aim of the image is to show the activity or space of work. As Barthes says, 'it is always *something* that is represented' (2000: 28) and such images are supplemented with explanatory text. Third, we use images and other non-verbal forms to evoke. Luciano Spinelli's images bring to mind the feel, smell and sound of a journey in the Paris Métro, for instance. Dawn's soundscape of the San Benedetto fish market in Cagliari in 'The Sound of the Sell', draws attention to the layers of sound that compose the activities of the market. Fourth, in 'Scaffolding', for example, the meaning of work is articulated through the ways that images are related or 'interact' with just a few words of context. Finally, we use images and sounds as 'imagination'. Sometimes sounds bring into mind places the viewer does not know, and collages and photo-animations stimulate new understandings of work. Across these different deployments of the visual and sensory, we explore interaction between different senses, in particular sound and sight.

4.5 As well as linking to each other thematically, posts are linked methodologically through demonstrating the possibilities and partialities of text, sound, and vision and various combinations of them. In Kat Riach's piece on sound, you hear people getting ready to go to work. Her respondents recorded their activities from waking to arriving at work. It is a surprising insight into ordinary noise, and it is the ordinary, taken for grantedness of the sounds that are so interesting to Riach.

'soundscapes have allowed me to not only think about the representation of sound, but the expressive experience of sound, something that now makes me hesitant to erase the noise I encounter in my other research interactions' (<http://nowaytomakealiving.net/post/632>).

4.6 As well as containing material (an MP3 recording) that has no obvious publication outlet, Riach's post asks the listener to consider what ordinary sensory experiences they take for granted. Riach's piece prompted Lynne to write 'Noticing Work Spaces', on how sound draws attention to work when workers cannot be seen and contrasts with studies of work which start by talking to workers themselves. Inside the noisy shed photographed for this post, all sorts of activities were happening. Such tensions between sound and silence are considered more extensively in 'The Silent Musician', which presents a detail from an ongoing photography project on musicians, where Lynne has been exploring the issues raised by the counter-intuitive use of photography to illustrate and stimulate reflection about the work of performance. The image here, and the set it belongs to, often prompts discussion about what can be seen (one viewer was certain they can tell what the band's music sounds like, despite never having heard it). In stripping out the obvious dimension of a phenomenon, this silent, immobile photographic work (Lury 1998: 173) actively produces an absence that contains both omission and a call to imagination and interpretation. Viewers might make an interpretation that is not about the work of performance.



Figure 2. The Silent Musician

4.7 Dawn's work with collage seeks to transcend the photograph's immobility. Inspired by David Hockney's photo-collages, the resulting compositions are at once analytical and imaginative representations of a place or activity. Dawn interacts with the printed photo (looking, cutting, resizing) and uses the manipulation and repetition of similar images, and in particular, the layering of time in space, to address the absence inherent in a solitary and static photograph, and to disrupt its apparently real character. The collage below is of the façade of a refurbished building ('Seeing Work') put together from photographs taken over the seven months of the process of refurbishment. The viewpoint is similar in each image although there is variation in distance and proximity and at times, angle. The collage brings adjacent moments (in time and space) into the same moment of seeing (now), seeking to create a heightened awareness of work through time for the viewer. This creates an opportunity for gaining insight into work that we cannot get through observation alone, or in a single image (Lyon, forthcoming).



Figure 3. Building Work

4.8 Each of these posts asks questions about the partiality of the representations produced by sensory methodologies. For Riach, the concentration on sound is a way of noticing what is otherwise ignored, and she prioritises one sense to generate imagination. Dawn's collages use multiple images to speak of movement or change over time, whereas Lynne removes movement and colour to concentrate attention. One of the pleasures of working with sensory methodologies is the way excess and lack can be used in analysis in such ways, and reflexive awareness of how the researcher influences this mutability is important. So too is consideration of how the different aesthetics produced might be received by the viewer.

4.9 We present research using sensory methodologies on the site in part to reflect on one of the dangers of the appeal of such methodologies which appear to counterbalance a previous omission. There is a risk of seeing the 'new' methodology as a panacea for the constraints of conventional methodologies. We see not only the compensations and benefits offered by sensory methodologies, but also their particular limitations. And although we find sensory methodologies productive, we are cautious about claiming that

they are 'better' at abstracting or representing the social. Indeed, we are critical of sociological reductionism that makes images readily decipherable within a strong 'social constructionist' framework, arguing for the sociological significance of paying attention to absence as well as presence. In the examples above, sound negates silence, and generates reflection on silence, sometimes a number of images are needed and sometimes only one. In all cases, partiality remains. We argue that sensory methods 'overcome' some former absences, but produce and conceal other absences. This should remind us of the incompleteness of research narratives, but there is a further dimension to absence which is more exciting, potentially, than merely this reminder not to get carried away. In the case of photography, for example, the partiality of the photograph has been extensively discussed: Berger describes

... a photograph is a trace of appearances seized from the normal flow of the eyes. ... photography is rather like memory ... the problem is that an event, when it is isolated from all the other events that came before it and which go after it, is in another sense not very authentic because it has seized from that ongoing experience which is the true authenticity.' (John Berger, interviewed by Paul Willis, 1978, in Alvarado, Buscombe and Collins, 1978: 166).

4.10 This, like Sontag's 'thin slice of space and time' (1979: 22), is a reminder of the silence and selectivity, absences and exclusions (Neudorfl, 2010) inherent in using photography as a research medium. Such absences may invoke what, following Gadamer, can be described as 'the withheld' (Davey, 2006: 166-167), that is meanings which transcend direct words, interpretation and explication but which prompt imagination. This suggests that looking at the photograph demands consideration of what is withheld within the image as well as what lies outside of the frame. That is, the silence of the photograph calls attention to what is presented, represented *and* omitted. The withheld tells us that there are insights we might not verbalise, and personal connections and intimate imaginings that might be produced upon engagement with photographs or research reports, all of which may sink into our experiences. In Knowles and Harper (2009), images appear without captions, encouraging a different kind of reading from the viewer of the combination of text and image. We have experimented with ways of combining text and image, from minimal and descriptive stories in the cases of 'The Works' and 'Scaffolding', to text that is more extensive and significant – as in the illustrative images in 'More Small Encounters' – and even posts with no images, only words. This seems important to us in making the site more than a knowledge transfer point, but a place where feelings about work are evoked.

Promoting an open sociology

5.1 As discussed above, we use visual images in different ways: realist, illustrative, evocative, interactive and imaginative, and our audience are likely to take different ideas, thoughts, and feelings from this work. We have found sensory methodologies inspiring in our research practices in offering new and distinctive avenues for analysis. We are also excited by the potential offered by sensory methodologies for collaboration and communication with a range of possible audiences, including interaction between researcher and participants, for teaching, and in academic writing. The combination of using sensory methodologies and presenting them to an unknown web-based audience demands accepting of a loss of control of how our abstractions – visual and textual – are decoded and interpreted. This is something we are not yet sure what to think about. Our comments threads have, fortunately, been free of 'trolls' (though not of critical comment), and so we have not yet had to confront an audience that dislikes our work.

5.2 Presenting sensory material to an unknown audience is nevertheless a peculiar delight, and we have not fully explored the interactive possibilities for co-creating knowledge. In the context of *nowaytomakealiving*, the partial presentation of the world that an image or a sound entails to an unknown audience involves reception and interpretation beyond academia. The potentially wider audience for the photographs and other ideas we present, and the potential for the audience to be involved in both the co-construction of knowledge (through comments, for example) and for using the site and its ideas in unpredictable ways, is motivating and challenging. We see benefits to presenting ideas *as images* (as well as alongside images), as this offers different ways to connect to our audiences. We celebrate the idea that readers will take unintended interpretations from our material: as Gadamer says, 'the participant belongs to the play' (Gadamer 1986: 26), that is, the image or post requires its audience to cooperate in playing along, to interrogate as they look, and for their responses to be free to complement or contradict the forms of knowledge produced by academics. This assists us in recognising how interpretation of research 'products' does not rely on sociological training but that these may contain something meaningful distinct from the professional speech acts that surround them. Interpretations exceed academic controls. Yippee.

5.3 We conceived of *nowaytomakealiving* as a form of 'open sociology', and we continue to curate the site as a collaborative space where sociological ideas about the world of work are developed and shared. We read with interest Burawoy's (2005a; 2005b) call for public sociology, a sociology that is 'an extension of our educative role, bringing sociology directly to diverse publics' (Burawoy, 2005b: 322), and the subsequent debates (see British Journal of Sociology vol 56, (3) for British sociology's response, or Deflem (2005) for a very critical perspective, also <http://deflem.blogspot.com>). We share with Deflem reservations about a 'public sociology' presented as standpoint, and which holds too tightly to a top-down notion of education. Our site is a collaborative feminist endeavour that is avowedly sociological, but seeks to include readers and writers who are not "sociologists" and in our writings we draw on other disciplines (art, history, economics, literature). We lay claim not to be doing public sociology, but are working towards an open sociology. As such we feel we work within the spirit of the discussions of the disciplinary boundaries of 'fortress sociology' (in this journal) held by John Scott (2005a; 2005b) and John Urry (2005). For us, an open sociology involves a commitment to doing work to prompt thought, to being stimulated by wide-ranging discussions and unexpected connections, and to being imaginative in how we delve into the social.

5.4 We are wary, following Beer and Burrows (2009), of claiming too much for what the site has done or can do. They suggest a rhetoric of democratisation pervades Web 2.0, but this is not matched by practice. The website does exist in open, accessible space – unlike most academic journals, access to which are controlled by publishers and university libraries – but the question of who accesses it, and what use they make of it is worth some consideration. We are a small site, even in comparison with other sites produced by academics, and recognise we reach a limited audience. We have a small amount of information on our audience, derived from personal communications with readers, comments made on the site, and the site's statistics.

5.5 We started the project with a commitment to speaking beyond the academy, and to open dialogue. Our academic friends, and those of our contributors, are a key audience, illustrated in the discussion prompted by 'Careers Advice', and we hear of the site being used in teaching. Whilst students are an important audience, we did not set the site up as an obviously 'educative' project. Non-academic friends also read the site, and some have proposed contributions (see Keith Hargreaves' cartoon 'A Librarian's View' for example), whilst others have given us suggestions about topics ('Sex at the Job Centre'). This has to some extent helped us answer the questions friends and family sometimes ask, 'yes, but what does a sociologist do?'. In 'The Visibility and Invisibility of Washing' in Cagliari, comments came from a relative and from a Sardinian academic writing as a Sardinian more than as an academic. Through the web of links via facebook and twitter (Lynne tweets as *gerolmifut*), the site, and specific posts, have a readership well beyond our immediate networks. Other professions have made use of the site, and have been involved to some extent. For example, the piece on 'Care' garnered comments by a carer, a campaigns officer for a carer charity and an academic interested in healthcare provision; and the argument in 'The Damage of the Strike' was used by *Guardian* journalist Aditya Chakraborty. We never write posts directly targeting particular groups of readers, the web excites us most when it is unpredictable.

5.6 Our other readers are part of our unknown and unknowable audience. We use a facility called 'statcounter' which enables us to see what people were searching for when they found us, how long they stayed and what they read, whether this is their first visit or a repeat; we can also see the country and town their web service is hosted in (it's not big brother who's watching you, it's us). The numbers vary, but there is an average of 1500 visitors per month. These visitors come from all parts of the world; from Japan to Kazakhstan, from India to Canada. We have a small number of posts about work outside the global North and are currently gathering further international contributions. Many visitors come via our university webpages, and others by web searches, in addition to the links and social networking discussed above. Not all readers are looking for sociological insight, quite a few are interested in the price of seabass at Billingsgate market and find 'A Day's Work at Billingsgate Market'; others are looking for work as a bus driver or hotel inspector and find the related posts. We wholeheartedly enjoy the serendipity of this. Such visitors do not often stay long at the site, but we hope that they find something

interesting! Our reading of the statcounter data points to a conundrum we face about audience. We are consciously 'audience facing' as a site, interested in speaking out to an audience beyond our *academic* peers. Whilst we do have a varied audience, we do not know very much about it, and have only limited dialogue with that proportion of it who are strangers to us. We know most about the effect our site has on people like us – our friends and colleagues – and far less about what the site's wider readership takes from it. On the one hand, we like the possibility of the anonymous reader enjoying our work and taking something from it that is beyond our knowledge. On the other hand, we are curious about how our sociological ideas are received.

Conclusions

6.1 We're writing at a time of cuts, change and debate about the nature of the university as an institution. It looks as if there will be renewed restrictions in principle and in practice on who gets access to what kinds of learning resources. In this context, a project that has a life both within and beyond the university is one which allows us to keep our sights on the spirit of sociological engagement, and to take inspiration from Illich's (1971) notion of educational 'webs' rather than educational 'funnels'.

6.2 As we've made clear in this article, *nowaytomakealiving* is not just for or by academics. It can be read, navigated and used in different ways by different audiences. The site uses and showcases visual and sensory methodologies and we have considered what advantages and limitations are claimed for these approaches to gain insight into the social, and in particular about what work is like in today's world. Although not intended as educative in the sense of explaining concepts and ideas to students of sociology, the site is nevertheless a useful and cumulative resource where short thoughts and research in progress illustrate in specific ways some of the lived and observed examples of broader sociological debates that students may be grappling with. But it goes beyond this in ambition and reach in what we have discussed as a project of 'open sociology', addressing audiences and engaging publics in other disciplines and outside of the university.

6.3 Although work is the clear focus of the site, work itself is very broadly understood. We discuss areas we've not studied in depth, mobilising our sociological imaginations in a relationship of 'productive uncertainty' (Back, 2007) to some of the topics we explore. This is the experimental nature of the site and one which enables a different sort of encounter with research on contemporary work than is possible through mainstream journals. We intend to continue with the site and encourage interested readers of this piece to take a look, and to consider submitting their own work. Alternatively, they may consider setting up a comparable space themselves, one which encourages open discussion beyond the walls of a classroom or pages of a journal.

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