Street Signs
Centre for Urban and Community Research

Spring 2010

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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
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photograph on front cover: i am here by Fugitive Images
**Introduction**  
*by Caroline Knowles, Professor of Sociology, Head of Centre, CUCR*

PhD students, visiting fellows and events are important sources of vitality in CUCR. All of these sources have been very active in recent months. I’ll mention a few. Dawn Lyon visiting from Kent University brought a visual and grounded interest in work as well as the faint whiff of fish from her early morning stints at Billingsgate Market. Beatriz Veliz Argueta a talented photographer visiting from Germany organized a well-attended seminar on conflict. Both we hope are conduits of future collaboration.

We also ran a number of high profile events with the Olympic legacies event *The Art of Regeneration*, drawing around 300 people to Goldsmiths from all over London and all works of live. A very successful public event, ably supported by Carole Keegan with the help of Anh Tu. Speakers included Emma Wheelhouse from the Olympic park Legacy Company, Sarah Weir; Head of Arts and Cultural Strategy at the Olympic Delivery Authority, Hadrian Garrard the Creative Programmer from the 5 Host Boroughs Unit, Graham Evans from London Met and our own Gesche Wurfel who also exhibited her photographs as an exhibition called *Transitory Spaces* curated by Kimberly Keith. This exhibition hangs in the stairwell gallery at Laurie Grove Baths until March 2010. Although critical voices from the platform were muted, members of the audience raised important and searching questions about what of lasting significance the Olympics might deliver to the benefit of Londoners, especially those living around the site. Social housing provision was a key concern for audience members, as well as the ways in which sports have been branded as arts and culture. The London rental housing market is either poorly provided for and inadequately funded (social provision) or overpriced in relation to wages (private sector). At the wine reception following the event, Sally Mumby-Croft and Xavier Zapata showed their film about the displacements around the Olympic site *Edgelands*.

Equally vibrant events included the *Normalising Conflict* seminar - with speakers David Theo Goldberg, Kirsten Campbell and Paul Halliday - which prompted a lively debate on everyday dimensions of urban violence in different contexts. And Ingrid Pollard’s furthering of black urbanism agendas in her fascinating talk on the *Black Boy Pubs* to which Susan Trangmar (Central St.Martins) and Caroline Bressy (UCL) contributed. This evening produced a lively discussion on ghosting and the impact of racialised imagery on contemporary landscapes.

Sadly, Ben Gidley, who has been at CUCR since 1999 and at Goldsmiths longer still, is leaving to take up a new position as a senior researcher at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford. Ben has worked on many CUCR projects over the years and is one of those rare academics whose contribution spans intellectual work and practical dimensions of urbanism in its impact on local people and communities. CUCR won’t be the same without his enormous contribution, we wish him the best of luck in his new job.

Caroline Knowles

For more information about the Centre, please refer to our website: [www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/](http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/)
Transitory Spaces

Written by Kimberly Keith
Photographs by Gesche Würfel

Transitory: adjective; existing only for a short time, not lasting.
Space: noun; the boundless expanse in which all objects exist and move;
a portion of this, an area or volume for a particular purpose.

“Through photography it is possible to engage the visible aspects of the changing landscape; through my images people can learn about an urban landscape which they rarely access in person, and therefore gain new critical tools for understanding the Olympic story.” - Gesche Würfel

The massive regeneration project that is transforming the Lower Lea Valley into the main site for the 2012 Olympic Games provides an opportunity for material and discursive space to intersect. Transitory Spaces brings together two photographic series by Gesche Würfel, Go For Gold! and Farewell From the Garden Paradise, which document the loss of public and communal space in the pursuit of Olympic glory.

As an artist with a background in urban planning, Gesche has said that her interests lay in the politics behind spatial development. She feels that over the last 45 years the Olympics have “been transformed from a sporting to an economic event”. That transformation in the purpose of the Games directly impacts on the material transformation of the Olympic site, whether that be in London, Atlanta or Athens, inasmuch as there is a trend for derelict industrial sites to be transformed into shiny new sports facilities, prompting urban renewal efforts which provide short and long-term economic gains through the creation of jobs and through the post-Games use of the facilities. But at what cost?

In speaking about her series Go For Gold! Gesche stated:

“I came to the Olympic site in the Lower Lea Valley in East London in 2006 when people were still working and living there. Go for Gold engages with the places and spaces of the Lower Lea Valley, a landscape that will be replaced by the structures of the 2012 Olympic project, which will attempt to eliminate all traces of the past and impose an entirely new spatial reality on the area. London’s success in winning the bid was primarily a result of its focus on urban regeneration in East London, as well as its emphasis on its multicultural character and the need to inspire young people in the area. The Olympic slogan Go for Gold! primarily reflects London’s desire to remain a ‘Global City’, without consideration for the needs of locals. Regeneration in this case is not about the Lower Lea Valley or East London, but it is about competing with other global cities. This will make London even more unequal since de-industrialisation will be enforced, financial services will be privileged, employment will be re-located and many people displaced. My photography poses important questions about these developments. When photographing I try to engage with the local people and understand their perspective.”
Go For Gold! is comprised of evocative images with provocative titles, which pose those important questions Gesche alludes to above. For example, BMX Track 1 and Media Press Centre 1 evoke a sense of pastoral splendour with their rolling hills and trees, yet their titles indicate that the peace found in their urban oases will be obliterated by motocross mounds and the hubbub of the media circus. Change is inevitable, especially in the city, and Gesche’s images answer the question of ‘at what cost’ is the price of that change. For some the cost is higher than others, as can be seen in the series Farewell From the Garden Paradise, which is an intimate body of work documenting an allotment which had been operating in perpetuity for over 100 years. Gesche commented:

“The Manor Garden Allotments were closed in September 2007 and demolished to construct a footpath for the 2012 Olympic Games. The plot holders allowed me to take photos of their shed interiors. The series Farewell from the Garden Paradise captures the long period of eviction. The images present the small personal spaces of sheds that have no place in the ongoing Olympic development. I raise questions about which approach to regeneration is most appropriate. I problematise the notion of the 2012 Olympics as ‘green’ (as often cited in promotional literature), by documenting the destruction of allotments that are a rare example of sustainably managed green spaces in East London”.

Farewell From the Garden Paradise is a visual requiem for the plots, the plot holders and the process of sustainable agriculture in the urban environment of East London. The Shed images convey a palpable sensation of decline and decay which cultivates a sense of melancholy in the viewer. Yet there is also a suggestion of warmth – the lavender chairs in Shed 9, the framed picture and accumulation of kitchen items in Shed 1, the puzzles and floral print cushions in Shed 3 – as if the inhabitants of these cozy if cluttered spaces have just stepped out, ready to resume their activity after the camera has captured a momentary lull. But there would be no more activity, and the sense of melancholy returns.

Gesche’s compositional sophistication, exceptional use of natural light, and adroit employment of a sociological imagination combine to make her one of the finest practitioners in the burgeoning field of visual sociology. Transitory Spaces provides evidence and expansion of her standing.
As I am sure many of you know, C. Wright Mills’ The Sociological Imagination begins with an essay entitled The Promise. A promise is a commitment to the past and yet it is also a statement of future intent or potential. This is partly why I think Mills’ book, while situated in time and place, is not confined to it. The enduring nature of the book is not simply its irreverence, its dismissal of much of what sociology had become in America by the time of its publication, but contained within it is a passionate call to the future. It remains an extraordinary book but revisiting it I want to ask: how is the promise of sociology today different from half a century ago?

Mills wrote The Sociological Imagination while a Fulbright fellow at the University of Copenhagen during the 1956-1957 academic year. It is a critique of American sociology and also is a legitimisation of his books, namely White Collar and the Power Elite (1). Its initial title was Autopsy of Social Science and, as Daniel Geary argues in a recent intellectual biography of Mills, it was written because of Mills’ conviction that American sociology had broken its promise and resulted in the Grand Theory of Talcott Parsons which obscured and deformed the empirical content. In The Sociological Imagination he was creating the discipline centred around his own concerns and in contrast to the intellectual trends identified within the book. Reception of the book and Mills’ work in Britain must be reported, however, that he has little importance to a youthful section of the British political community. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote to the close-up scenes of job, family, private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously up in the web of history, imprisoned by the expectations of others. Mills’ aspiration was to identify the varieties of men and women that prevailed in what Swados called “the fat and frightening fifties.” This is summed up in the aspiration to provide books that contain the political promise of helping individuals understand and control the larger structural forces that shaped their lives (7). Mills conceptualised here a ‘politics of truth’ and he distinguishes three potential kinds of roles here for intellectuals. First the ‘philosopher king’, the ‘man of reason’ who looks down and pronounces, then second the ‘advisor to the king’ who acts like a court poet and bureaucratic flunky and finally the idea that social science might operate like a “sort of public intelligence apparatus, concerned with public issues and private troubles and with the structural trends of our time underlying them both.” (8).

In the last half century we have also come to confront the fact that reason can be unreasonable in that it includes some automatically and not others. I think many of Mills’ stirring twentieth century slogans have become professional ornaments and academic clichés in the US academy obsessed as it is with status, tenure, publication etc… An American academic commented recently that Mills was teaching a class using Mills’ famous appendix on intellectual craftsmanship and his notion of ‘opening a file on an idea.’ One of the students said: “It all takes so much time – should we be concentrating on publishing journal articles?” Closer to home I think, there is a strong atmosphere of timidity and cynicism that hangs over the anxiety ridden sociological habitus preoccupied as it is the ever changing measure of intellectual value and audit.

Regardless, there is something very compelling in the way Mills centres the practicing of the craft - if not the methodology - of sociology in the imagination: “For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another – from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformation to the most intimate feature of the human self – and to see the relations between the two” (9).

Maybe for all the fragmentation, the crises about achieving the discipline, the different ways we furnish our bookshelves with theoretical ideas, the emphasis on movements of the imagination across not only time but by scale is an enduring sociological pledge. We brush this ordinary virtue aside as not being cohesive and coherent at our peril.

If Swados is right – and I think he is – that the popularity of Mills lies in his poetic vision then what are the images in Mills imagination? I am thinking particularly here of his image of the Cheerful Robot, the modern automaton. At the very beginning of The Promise Mills characterises the experience of modern life as analogous to a series of traps. Mills suggest that people are “bounded by the private orbits in which they live: their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators” (10). Far from being experts in our own lives Mills suggests we are spectators, caught up in the web of history, imprisoned by the expectations of others.

Mills evokes the atmosphere of an Arthur Miller play or an Edward Hopper painting. Hopper’s characters appear frozen in place, alone staring out of a window aimlessly or isolated at work or in a train carriage or simply motionless in the street. The task of sociology for Mills is to identify the larger social forces that furnish our most intimate personal troubles, to translate the ‘personal troubles’ of biography into ‘public issues’ of history and society. This quality of mind, for those who possess it,
"often comes to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar... Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountably dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again”(11). I really recognise that quality of astonishment that Mills writes about both personally and in the reaction of students. Perhaps, we need to maintain and cultivate that sense of astonishment.

The paternalistic regulation of Fordism and the iron cage of the 'white collar' office is the social landscape of Mills' imagination. As Antonio Gramsci pointed out in his essays on Americanism and Fordism the mode of economic life necessitated the “creation of new types of man” in which sexual repression and punctumism - notably signaled in the prohibition of alcohol - provided a new cast of masculinity (12). Gramsci is alert to the gendering of this - albeit sometimes cringingly - in ways that Mills is not. These highly gendered forms of social reproduction are very much part of the process of entrapment in which domestic violence, betrayal, suffocation are all lurking behind the white picket fences of twentieth century suburbanised white collar capitalism. We only have to watch a few episodes of Mad Men to see these processes of gendered unraveling or watch the recent film adaptation of RichardYates' novel Revolutionary Road which was first published in 1962.

There have been huge processes of economic transformation in the half century that has passed - the passage from Fordism to post-Fordism from the production of things to a reliance on information. The traps of today are of a profoundly different quality. The moral career's scripted by Fordism but also within large public bodies like the BBC have also been re-written. Georgina Born in her study of the BBC points out the devastating affects that the new culture of freelancing has had on undermining creativity and the accumulation of skill (13). Here biography is being dissolved within what Richard Sennett calls the ‘culture of new capitalism’ (14). Part of our current circumstance is that any sense of the relevance of the biography of the worker and the skills she has accumulated is deemed of little relevance. The New Capitalism according to Sennett requires not skills or craft but adaptability or the potential to acquire new skills required in some future situation. He concludes that in the 'fresh page of the present' way of working: “skills extinction is a durable feature of technological advance”(15). 'This I think results in a kind of erosion of the relationship between history and biography and for Sennett and many others the demands of mercurial flexibility are every bit as suffocating as the Iron Cage of Fordist bureaucracy. In this sense university education becomes an exercise in anticipating future skills and cultivating flexibility and learning adaptability summed up as the task of training graduates 'for jobs that haven't been invented yet'.

Mills certainly didn't suffer from humility. There is arrogance in his claim for superior sociological truth. The assertion of relevance as Mariam Fraser has pointed out is the sociological equivalent of the Hippocratic oath. I think it's important to remain sceptical about hyper political postures as well as sociological certainties. Even in the accounts of some of Mills closest friends he is bombastic, self involved and insensitive. Harvey Swados confessed in a persona memoir to Mills after his untimely death at the age of 45, that he didn't much like the book that had been dedicated to him. "I would be a liar if I were to say that Mills was a sweet and loveable friend, or that he understood and cared about many individual human beings any more than he understood or cared about many individual artistic creations"(16).

Swados goes on to say that Mills was unaffected by the atrocities of totalitarianism: "For him Nazism was something that could be comprehended by reading Neumann and some other books; there were no horrible unplumbable depths. Hence he was impatient with my continual reminding him of German anti-Semitism"(17). The same might also be said of his relationship to American racism. His unpublished manuscript Contacting The Enemy - which was planned to be a series of letters to Kovach a fictional Russian intellectual - contains a letter On race and religion written in the summer 1960. Expressing contempt for southern racism he admits: "The point is I have never been interested in what is called the Negro Problem.’ Perhaps I should have been and should be now. The truth is, I’ve never looked into it as a researcher. I have a feeling that if I did it would turn out to be a ‘white problem’ and I’ve got enough of those”(18). His famous study White Collar was in fact a racially segregated workplace. He had white problems all along he simply failed to acknowledge them. The challenge is to broaden our attentiveness to include not only the day time workers of the new capitalism but also the migrant labourers, some of them undocumented, discussed in Sukhdev Sandu’s Night Mounds (19). Those people who do the dirty work of cleaning, disposal and maintenance that keeps the city working. They might dwell in the executive boards for a few moments as the sun comes up but by 8am vanish from view.

Mills argued that the sociological imagination was becoming "the main common denominator of our cultural life” and he invites publics, journalists, politicians to embrace it (20). Mills believes that connecting the private and the public would automatically by a force for good or progress. It’s not hard to find examples where sociological ideas have travelled to unexpected places. The immigration officer who has done an MA in sociology who speaks about “creating the ideal circumstances to extract the asylum narrative” or the sensitive ethnographer doing fieldwork in combat fatigues for the military in the Human Terrain teams of Afghanistan or the presence of post-colonial and post-structuralist writers like Gilles Deleuze and Guy Debord on the reading lists of contemporary military institutions in Israel are all cases in point. These are examples of how the sociological imagination is debased.

Who does Mills’ imagination act for? Mariam Fraser had argued that Mills acts for the ‘ordinary man’ but, more than this, the entrapped agent is an artefact of knowledge not mere a reflection of reality: “This shift, from explaining daily experiences, as Mills describes it, to explaining the knowledges that produce experiences, does not itself require the empirical baby to be thrown out with the experiential bathwater”(21). In this sense, what is different now is that post-structuralism, feminist deconstruction and postcolonial critique have questioned the degree to which sociologists make realities or biographies rather than simply reflect or record them. How is it possible to acknowledge this critique and the implication of sociology and continue to carry on? To explore the mutual implication of knowledge and power and hold to the promise of speaking to, if not for, lived life, biography and history? I think I want to hold on to Mills’ promise but to re-figure it. I think much of our discourse seems disembedded, folded in on itself so that readers and students cannot recognise any part of themselves in the reading.

Mills offers us no portraits in The Sociological Imagination, no biographies. This is not true of his work more broadly. It is curious that his passionate appeal for sociology is devoid of people. I want to suggest that perhaps the biographies and the portraits we paint in writing need to be conceived in wider terms or broadened. The promise of sociology now should be concerned with the question of what kinds of order of human beings are being created in our time. Also, how does the human interact with the non-human. Biography here is not some raw experience. It can contain what Carolyn Steedman calls ‘enforced narrative’ filched and created by a silent other (22). People are witnesses and broadcasting themselves at unprecedented levels. We also have the biography of things and engagement with the matter of things and things that matter. So, I am arguing for an expansion of Mills’ notion of biography that is beyond his initial formation. However, in the era of the fresh page of the present, the linking of biography with history seems even more pressing. The individualisation of collective relations, the evaporation of history, the loneliness of personal responsibility all seem to suggest the importance of the relation between the individual and the historical. ‘Personality is a strange composite” wrote Gramsci from the isolation of his prison cell. “A product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory” (23).

The promise of sociology, I think, is the invitation to develop such an inventory. It should identify how we are produced as subjects, as biographies, so that we can be more than what we are already, more than those scripts. Perhaps it is also a matter of socialising the failings that neo-liberalism forces us to experience privately. I have been thinking about this a lot in my weekly 3rd year
Sociology here is not an exercise only in revelation but a navigation device, a set of competencies and ways of holding to the world, providing clues regarding how to defend itself against its whims and mystifications.

Mills’ The Sociological Imagination inverts that reason has the ability to reconcile private troubles and public issues. Understanding will bridge that divide in more habitable, and by implication, more comfortable ways. This is the tint of twentieth century optimism. I am reminded of the famous scene in The Matrix where Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) offers Neo (Keanu Reeves) his choice. Morpheus says: “You are here because you know something. What you know, you can’t explain but you feel it, you’ve felt it your entire life. That there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is but it’s there. Like a splinter in your mind.” He offers him a choice between the blue pill - the world of the Matrix where things that are equally true cannot be squared. It is but it’s there. Like a splinter in your mind.” He offers him a choice between the blue pill - the world of events where a powerful roar is turned down to a murmur. Where whispers are amplified to shouts of 25. Sociology here is not an exercise only in revelation but a navigation device, a set of competencies and ways of holding to the world, providing clues regarding how to defend itself against its whims and mystifications.

Cities are composed in the millions of stories of those who live there. Some stories are narrated in words; some are lived; some are inherited from the past and some are passed on. If everyone has only one story then Singapore has five million, plus the stories of uncounted soujourners. Cities generate collective stories too, that inflect and transcend residents and soujourners. These are written on its surfaces and hidden in its nooks and crannies. Cities tell stories as surely as cathedrals narrate biblical parables in their stonework. Which Singapore stories to tell?

Singapore is composed in three dominant urban stories: big stories that reverberate through everyone’s lives. These are the stories people live. These stories ground the verities underlying the lives composing the city’s social fabric. These are public stories; seminal urban tales inscribed in landscape and bodies. First are the stories of the restless mobility of migrants from China and other places too. Second are the stories of constant urban becoming as the city rises out of the sea and faces the future in concrete and glass clothing. Third are stories about the arrangement of the dead that mirror the arrangement of the living in the tower-blocks that compose the architecture of the public housing scene. These stories are connected not least because people live them simultaneously.

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Singapore is a city of migrants. Waves of them have made the human fabric of this island city state throughout time with greater tides of mobility from the early 20th century. Ethnic Chinese, Malay, Indian subcontinent and other migrants are officially administered in the government’s CMIO formula – Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others. In its Chinese and Indian migrant settlers, Singapore houses the two biggest diasporas of all time officially encouraged in residential and cultural specificity and separation, in China Town and Little India, in this block of apartments or that. Singaporeans with outward bound ancestors from coastal province in Mainland China made new lives in this city among mementos of the British Empire still visible in street names, monuments, mansions, graveyards containing the remains of seafarers working packet ships and their more settled relatives. The past and present are deposited in the road grid: Orchard Road, Cross Street, Church Street, Club Street, Mosque Street. Evidence of current coming and going is offered in the large new suitcases wheeled around little India's giant department store in preparation for visits 'home'.

Living with Diasporas and Empires challenges the imagination of artists and museum curators. Erika Tan’s Persistent Visions at the NUS Museum Art Centre collates official film footage from imperial scenes on three large screens and beams them simultaneously, generating a dialogue. Upstairs the personal film footage and paper archive of Dr Ivan Polumin, the British doctor and research scientist with a migrant Russian father, sits disturbingly bringing another more personal orientalist gaze, all the more powerful for curators suppressing the urge to comment. Curators dodge official notions of history, nation and ethnicity in their exhibition dialogs with permanent collections.

Singapore continues to rise out of the sea: it is urbanism in accelerated and controlled accumulation. It is five square kilometers bigger in 2008 than it was in 2007 thanks to new land reclamation project. Others are planned with new developments of land and water parks at Changi Point and Marina Bay. Life as leisure space is a dominant theme in city development with a focus on livable space and sustainability. Elaborate roof gardens are springing up on tower blocks; plants that grow in walls are grafted onto what were bare urban surfaces. Government plans for the next decade involve more outdoor green space and water conservation. In the ‘heartlander’ suburbs uniform numbered apartment blocks forge a landscape of neat and ordered high-rise living.

The government of Singapore is the world’s biggest landlord providing apartment blocks for purchase and rent at controlled prices it acts to curb land speculation as private profit. Government and city planners celebrate Singapore as a future-facing, wealthy, livable tropical city with democratic aspirations for the living standards of its people if not in terms of other rights. There is little evidence of homelessness and, like China, Singapore has traded civic and political freedoms for rising living standards, only on a smaller scale.

Futurism disturbs the dead. When the city’s older burial ground was needed for a new subway station the dead were relocated to a green space near the zoo in the Eastern side of the island. The neat high-rise apartment block architecture of the heartlands is replicated in the arrangement of the dead. The dead are neatly cremated and placed in an urn behind a commemorative plaque in a numbered niche in a wall. Just as in apartment blocks higher slots (with better views) are more expensive, Price and social differentiation structure and transcend life. The crematorium is a model of organized efficiency. Ashes collection points are signed. There is a place for the Taoists who have special rituals with bones. There is a ‘smoking’ and ‘nonsmoking’ internment side for the religions that burn incense and those that don’t. As in other aspects of life in Singapore key dimensions of ethnic and cultural difference are part of the production of urban landscape.

Singapore’s three big collective stories intersect with the five million other stories that people live in charting their own routes through this greening, affluent city where the living and the dead are so neatly arranged.
Tijuana’s Zona Norte: sexualised projections and realities in the red light district of a Mexican-American border town

Sylvia Meichsner and Susanne Hofmann
Photographs by Sylvia Meichsner

“Welcome to Tijuana
Tequila, sexo, marihuana
Welcome to Tijuana
Con el coyote no hay aduana” (1)
(Manu Chao, Clandestino)

This Mexican-American border town, Tijuana, is located at the extreme north-western edge of Mexico, directly south of the US City of San Diego. Visitors and inhabitants alike often feel that ‘Tijuana is not Mexico’, and indeed, with constructions, infrastructure and pavement pressing towards the border fence, the whole set-up of the city seems to reflect an urgency to reach the other side rather than to connect to the territory it belongs to.

Tijuana’s tourist industry has flourished as the result of this geographical closeness to the US, since the first decades of the 20th century, when the production and sale of alcohol, gambling, boxing, horse racing and prostitution were outlawed in the US during the Prohibition years, Tijuana gradually became a place for leisure activities of this kind. What had been considered a sin in the USA became, with American finance and the complicity of Mexican authorities, a dynamic business sector whose profits flowed back over the border (2).

Polarisation between the twin cities of San Diego and Tijuana became more and more evident. Tijuana became seen as the incarnation of evil and social chaos, while San Diego continued to represent a model of the ideal city in terms of a clean, respectable and hard-working community (3). The geographical border between Tijuana and San Diego, between Mexico and the States, became a metaphor for the line between good and bad, moral and immoral (4). While San Diego was the place of legitimate (in the sense of reproductive) sexuality, Tijuana became the place where non-reproductive sexuality and forbidden sexual practices could be lived out by US citizens.

A reputation for violence completes the picture of Tijuana as a place of never ending vice and lawlessness. The city’s chronicler Félix Berumen, however, identifies this as an “imaginary construct” developed by puritan Americans. An image of “the hellish Mexican town” characterised by violence, immorality, vice and drug trafficking (5) is constantly reproduced by mass media and the arts, such that it hovers over the real, existing city. This construct, mediated by social representations, symbols, images and discourses, interacts with the reality and shapes life and living conditions in Tijuana (6).

The notion of Tijuana as a site of wickedness exists in the minds of American sex tourists who frequent the red light district, as Michael Hemmingson’s auto-ethnographic account of his encounters with sex workers in the Zona Norte demonstrates:

“I was feeling dark and I wanted something dark; I decided to travel down to the Mexican-American border. […] I thought how wonderfully seedy this was – and that I could easily be robbed or murdered up here. […] I was seeking another dark and sleazy experience” (7).

However, we want to draw attention to the lived reality of women who sell sex in the streets of Tijuana and how they experience this space that has been flooded with multiple externally produced projections.

Tijuana’s area of main tourist interest begins at five minutes’ walk from the busy border crossing point San Ysidro. Its ten square blocks encompass the city’s red light district, known as the Zona Norte. This area is inhabited by a majority of people who have little access to economic resources or formal education. Many Zona Norte dwellers are migrants, who try to make a living as day labourers, hawkers, food vendors, waiters, bouncers, barkers, or hairdressers. Most of their activities are in some way related to the local sex industry. Those who have no chance of surviving in the legal informal labour market engage in drug retail or robbery. Sex workers stand out against the deprivation of the resident population. Their financial resources together with their physical vulnerability expose them to real dangers in the zone. Constantly being prospective targets of violent assault makes spatial insecurity a significant daily experience for the women who ply their trade in the Zona Norte.

Those street sex workers who live in the Zona Norte itself are probably the most vulnerable individuals, since they have to walk home through dark, narrow alleys, carrying their just-earned cash on their bodies. Their daily rhythms are visible to the neighbours and their cheap, rented rooms are unsecurable and inappropriate hiding places for cash. Higher-rank sex workers who enter and leave the zone with their own cars still have to walk to the badly illuminated car park on the fringe of the red light district. Clothes, shoes and handbags are inadequate storing spaces for the significant sums of money they are transporting by the end of their work shifts. Even taking a taxi home at night or in the early
morning hours is not without danger. Despite changing clothes after a work shift, the fact that they are sex workers is difficult to hide, since the mere presence of women in this particular space at this time reveals their profession and exposes them to the risk of assault.

Historically, sex work has been restricted to marginal areas which expose involved subjects to danger and encourage an association between immorality, violence, disease and poverty (6).

This mélange of marginalisation and stigmatisation of a particular space and its users and inhabitants results in their abandonment by a supportive and engaged civil society, which then produces a ‘space of vulnerability’ that further complicates people’s everyday lives. Tijuana’s Zona Norte is inhabited and frequented by subjects who are vulnerable in multiple ways, for being poor, migrants, lacking qualifications and social networks, suffering from drug addictions, or working in stigmatised professions as sex workers.

The imagined and the real Tijuana are deeply intertwined. American sex tourists are enticed to visit the Zona Norte for the ‘dark’, nefarious experience it offers. At the same time, sex workers from all over Mexico and beyond are attracted by the cash that they bring to spend on sexual services, drugs and drinks in pursuit of their fantasies. One side driven by imagination and the other by the need to make a living, they mutually construct this space.

1. English translation: “Welcome to Tijuana, Tequila, sex and marihuana. Welcome to Tijuana, with the human smuggler there are no custom duties to be paid.”
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. The activities of the “Tijuana cartel”, an internationally operating drug trafficking network built up by the Tijuana-based Arellano Felix family are one of the main sources of Tijuana’s specific reputation (Félix Berumen 2003: 291).
6. ibid.

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Citizen Space, Denizen Noise

Nirmal Puwar

“It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (1).

Rhesus macaques monkeys walk the ledges of the Indian Parliament in New Delhi and court the gardens and fountains of the estate. Within the imperial plan of governance, the British planned New Delhi as the capital of the country, moving it from Calcutta in 1911. Designed by the architects Edwin Lutyen and Herbert Baker, Parliament House, a huge circular structure 60 feet in diameter and one third of a mile in circumference covering nearly six acres of area, was opened on 18th January 1927, at a ceremony performed by the then Governor-General of India, Lord Irwin. The imprint of empire is sculptured into the stone and engraved into the woodwork. The columns at the front entrance of the palace have bells carved into them; it has been suggested that Lutyens designed them with the idea that as the bells were silent the British rule would never come to an end. The woodwork around the Lok Sabha Chamber, has 35 gilded designs representing the various Provinces of undivided India, the Dominions and certain other British Settlements. While the design is not neo-gothic as were other buildings which were designed by the British in India and inspired by Westminster – such as the town hall in Bombay, the Gateway to India and the Victoria Terminus – the colours of the elected (green) and the unelected (red) members of parliament are replicated. Needless to say, the European presence looms large in the hybrid mixture of Indo-Saracenic architecture. In a special issue on ‘New Delhi’, of the journal Architectural Review (1931), Robert Byron described the chamber thus: “It resembles a Spanish bull-ring, lying like a mill-wheel dropped accidentally on its side.”

Today, all too frequently, the twelve iron gates of Parliament House provide grab rails for the monkeys. Not being able to secure a gated community with regard to these animals, Languar primates, on the leash of their keepers, are bought in as private security to patrol the grounds and scare off the Rhesus monkeys, who simply move on to another patch in the large government compounds of apartments and offices. Even ultrahigh frequency loud speakers could not deter the monkeys who hung out from window ledges screeching at the reporters who were trying to hold a press conference with visiting U.S. Secretary of State (2004) Donald Rumsfeld. While official signs request “Please do not feed the monkeys”, feeding continues. This is not surprising, considering that the monkey god Hanuman temple sits in close vicinity on Connaught Place. Here rituals ceremoniously worship the monkey for being a loyal and intelligent servant; in the Hindu epic Ramayana, Hanuman led an army of monkeys to fight the demon King Ravana.

Calls for a monkey-free city have been heard in the court rooms. While attempts to deport monkeys to neighboring states and detention prisons have been made, environmentalists, including Maneka Gandhi (Indian politician and environmentalist, who is herself a rebelled member of the Gandhi dynasty), point to impact of increased deforestation in the surrounding areas which has led monkeys to go in search of inhabitations and food within the drawers and cabinets of government staff and ministers. As if the in-tray of the Defence ministry was not already over flowing with complaints of noisy monkey presence, ripping cabinet documents, ransacking secret files, they swiftly move in groups through the iron grills that enclose the Parliament House estate, wrapping themselves around the architecture of the buildings, hunting and hooting from one quarter to another. Who are the citizens and denizens?!

The bus stop, the cathedral, fifty years on

Steven Hanson

Raymond Williams went to the bus stop by the cathedral, in Hereford, in 1958, to take a trip across the border into another country - his own - through the ruins of past powers and past industries, he also observed the ambivalence displayed towards those ruins by a bus driver and conductress, who were obviously in love. He wrote this journey into his essay 'Culture Is Ordinary.' The route Williams takes works metaphorically, as an indication of how state power and commerce can mean little to people interacting intimately, but also how the end of a journey to 'there', inevitably brings us to somebody else's 'here', with their bus stop, near to their place of meaning. The cartoon version of Gulliver’s Travels playing across the street at the cinema, in 1958, was re-presenting, via new technology, a version of Jonathan Swift's book, a tale involving a trip into the exaggeratedly unfamiliar cultures of others. (1)

Williams, like Richard Hoggart (2) was trying to map how mass consumerism impacted on the working-classes of the time. His concept of 'structures of feeling' tried to bring together this emerging world - the circulation of mass consumer messages - with lived experience. Williams also tried to re-think the Marxist concept of 'base and superstructure' and accommodate into it his understanding of everyday life as lived.

Buses still stop near the cathedral, and culture is still ordinary. In 2008 and 2009, I tried to track the 'credit crisis' in the Hereford streets, during lunch breaks from teaching at the art college. This activity also involved trying to join up lived experience with those wider economic narratives of consumer capitalism, which shoot through all our lives. Both Adorno and Williams have pointed out that we are capable of both absorbing, resisting, and enhancing ourselves through mass popular forms, as well as being negatively affected by them. One of Minima Moralia's aphorisms ends:

"People who belong together ought not to keep silent about their material interests, nor to sink to their level, but to assimilate them by reflection into their relationships and surpass them" (3).

This resonates with Williams's refugred base-and-superstructure model, with the turn to culture, with the potential for what sits on the economic base to resist the 'corruption' of material interests, in Adorno's rightly-sounding description. But the amount of snake-oil salespeople at my door and telephone during the summer of 2008 were definitely not a 1958 cultural phenomenon. I wondered if Adorno would be able to breathe the cultural air of the early twenty-first century. I wondered how Williams might have revisited this place, fifty years on. In 'Culture Is Ordinary,' he mentions the cheapjacks in offices developing lingo to sell us things, but suggests that we might simply refuse to learn their new language. I wondered just how much this refusal had slipped into anmesia over the fifty years. Our credibility at the cheapjack's language were a large part of the crash. Their ceasing to be novel had assimilated them into the fabric, making a refusal much harder.

Williams only starts his journey in Hereford, before moving across a national border; going 'home', something which is always complex and nuanced in his work. There are borders though, even within the city of Hereford. The line you hear talked about the most is geographical, locatable. Like the way racism works, it is scopic. The class divide between the north and south of the river in Hereford is as perceived, as culturally real, as it is 'really' real, material, as much as it is also a horrible stigma applied to a massive swathe of difference. On arriving, in 2006, a taxi driver told me not to go near the south side, and certainly not to rent there. So I went there, often, there are many people who live happily, and others who have problems. This divide is spanned by two bridges, which are locally and very ordinarily known as 'the new bridge' and 'the old bridge'. There's a way back into Williams's concerns with cultural connections here, how they shift historically, in look and feel, although their functions may be very similar.

Yet there are disconnections, too. The way Williams figures the potential for everyday life to operate with 'ambivalence' in the face of power, spectacles of state and military might, is appreciated. Yet this ambivalence, as a disconnection, continues to enable it. On May 28th, 2009, the RAF set up a display in the centre of Hereford. Walking through it, I half expected a drunken Redcoat to be thrown out of a pub doorway at any moment.

Woolworths was an early casualty of the crash. In Hereford, the only businesses re-opening in the wake seemed to be pound shops. Chadds, the department store, closed in 2008 and a pound shop opened in one of its long series of ex-properties. Peter Beresford wrote about the significance of the 30,000 Woolworths jobs lost, which heavily affected female employees, but wasn't treated seriously "...as though these are workers who can just drift on to other casual work" (4). Beresford tried to relocate the significance of the loss, saying:

"...most Woolworths jobs were permanent jobs. I know people who have worked there ten and twenty years, with more than one generation in the family employed there. For Woolworths workers this is as serious a loss as a closure or redundancy for any car worker or banker; yet it is not treated as such." (5)

A Radio 4 comedy show around this time aired a song asking where all 'the chavs' would steal from now that Woolworths had closed. The class terms were very explicit.

The centre wasn't becoming a black void, if anything, it was a more dynamic field. Big chains were moving into more central retail units, including Carphone Warehouse, with a temporary sign, as scaffolding and building firms went out of business. The outlying rural areas were suffering, variously attributed to fuel costs putting rural pubs out of business (6) in contrast with village shopkeepers actually finding their takings up, as people weren't shopping in Hereford so much. A report on life in the countryside, published by the Commission for Rural Communities, highlighted 'rising house prices, a 3% rise in the number of people living below the poverty line" (6).

On January 30th, Prince Charles visited Hereford cathedral to see the art work of Ludmila Pawlowska, arriving at the end of my lunch hour. Pawlowska's work is inspired by Russian religious icons. The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall also viewed the start of the restoration project at the cathedral. The Close project, new lighting, artwork and gardens, has a grant of £5 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Charles is patron of Hereford Cathedral Perpetual Trust (7). The venture is aimed at establishing Cathedral Close as a sacred space separate from the nearby street and shops.

I thought of Williams's idea of a wall separating elite culture from the everyday. Prince Charles said:

"I hope and pray that the good Lord will ensure my preservation for a few good years so that I can come back and see the work." (6)

His controversial views on planned architecture are well known. Not far away, opposite my office, the John Haider building was incredibly run-down, a depressing sight, and seemed to be fully occupied. Yet towards the summer of 2009, it was renovated, a project linked to the newly built block of flats next to it.

The policeman who moved me from the Cathedral entrance was pleasant enough, commenting on my badge, 'state pension campaign, 1908-2008.' That morning, the Guardian reported on the unofficial Lincoln oil refinery protests. Workers were complaining about European labour being used in preference to British. Earlier in the month, Prince Harry had been criticised for his 'Paki' remark. Riots flared up in Paris the day before, on 'Black Thursday', where more than a hundred people clashed with police. Over a million workers were out on strike (8). They were expressing anger at the Sarkozy government and the financial crisis. It was interesting to see the use of wheelie bins as barricades on the television. Since Haussmannisation, Paris rioters have used many products of modernity to breach the wide streets, notably in 1968, cars. These new, almost Lego-like walls looked comical.

There were no riots in Hereford, even though the pre-Haussmannisation medieval narrow streets of High Town didn't require much barricading. The Prince of Wales had just come from a visit to the SAS...
headquarters in Creedenhill, so any risings would be quickly extinguished. In any case, David Harvey, at a recent Ralph Miliband lecture at the LSE had warned of vast tracts of business and finance, by both capital and state. He asked if we wanted our children to live in a world where such massive amounts of money are controlled by so few, adding that either we can resist or be passive.

Photographing a branch of the Halifax, an employee came out and asked me what I was taking pictures of, ‘for security reasons’. I suggested that the closed pound shop next door was empty because of the speculation of Sir James Crosby and others. She told me not to take any more photographs. Ever since the redevelopment of the post-1986 IRA bomb Manchester, I have read pound shops alongside the knowledge that massive areas in Salford Quays were sold to bidding developers, with names such as ‘Pound Empire’ re-signifying in the street. In 2008, the shop next door was empty because of the speculation of ‘the left bank’, Paris, were both predictable and ridiculous. Trying to prove if it is left or right in relation to the river is pointless, but more interestingly, it places itself, geographically and culturally, north of the river. Helen Hills (11) has written of how middle class culture often co-opts the connotation of the ‘wrong side of town’, but re-placed into a ‘safe’ zone.

Some icons of conspicuous consumption seemed to be vanishing. Charlotte’s wine bar closed not long after the crash, with its French script typeface windows whitewashed, yet as I finish writing it is re-opening, still as exterior faced out on to the Wye. The connotations of ‘the left bank’, Paris, were both predictable and ridiculous. Trying to prove if it is left or right in relation to the river is pointless, but more interestingly, it places itself, geographically and culturally, north of the river. Helen Hills (11) has written of how middle class culture often co-opts the connotation of the ‘wrong side of town’, but re-placed into a ‘safe’ zone.

On Friday, March 13th, I visited another site to speak to protesters are worried that the development will suck jobs which seemed to be vanishing. Charlotte’s wine bar closed not long after the crash, with its Lilliputian French script typeface windows whitewashed, yet as I finish writing it is re-opening, still as exterior faced out on to the Wye. The connotations of ‘the left bank’, Paris, were both predictable and ridiculous. Trying to prove if it is left or right in relation to the river is pointless, but more interestingly, it places itself, geographically and culturally, north of the river. Helen Hills (11) has written of how middle class culture often co-opts the connotation of the ‘wrong side of town’, but re-placed into a ‘safe’ zone.

Some icons of conspicuous consumption seemed to be vanishing. Charlotte’s wine bar closed not long after the crash, with its French script typeface windows whitewashed, yet as I finish writing it is re-opening, still as a wine bar, but re-named. At the same time, opposition to the Edgar Street Grid, a proposed retail development, gathers pace. Protest movements such as these are both radical and conservative, in that they stir up opposition to change, rather than stagnation. The Edgar Street Grid protesters are worried that the development will suck the life out of the town.

Adorno’s aphorism, quoted above, in which he circles the culture-materialism dialectic in a highly complex way, is called ‘Baby with the bath-water’, and explores the difficulties of negotiating cultural perceptions and the economic base. Yet to turn away from the complexity really would be the point at which the baby gets thrown out. Williams knew that we have to keep going, push on through the triumphs and failures, eases and difficulties, and that culture is central to this.

Here’s to the even longer revolution.
Fugitive Images

It is impossible to write about the photo-installation i am here without also elaborating, in quite some detail, on the context from within which the work emerged and where it was installed. That is because i am here addresses a particular socio-political as well as economical situation specific to where it is installed, on the façade of Samuel House, part of Haggerston & Kingsland Estate. The housing estate is located alongside Regents Canal in-between Kingsland Road and Victoria Park in Hackney, London. Over the past 10 years this area has become increasingly gentrified. As a consequence the transformation of the area surrounding Samuel House has been radical and the estate now finds itself wedged in-between luxury loft apartments and expensive live/ work spaces.

Whilst this rapid transformation has been going on in the area, nothing much has changed on Haggerston & Kingsland Estate since the early 1980’s. That is, except from an ongoing steady decline due to lack of maintenance and a gradual emptying of the estate. Since 2004 no new residents have been accepted, and instead, vacated flats have been boarded up. This is mainly due to the fact that the future of the estate has been contested for nearly 30 years. Although there has been no lack of proposals promising to create a better future for the residents at Haggerston & Kingsland, none were developed beyond the planning stages. However, in October 2007 the residents voted in favour of a stock transfer to L&Q housing association, and in September 2008 planning permission for the development was obtained. The estate is now scheduled for complete demolition and rebuild. All the current residents have been offered a flat in the new development and will be temporarily re-housed during the construction phase.

This history of decline and broken promises of late, played out amidst the rapid development surrounding the estate, forms the general background for the i am here project. To look in even greater detail into the context for the work, we need to return to April 2007, 5 months before the stock transfer vote. Without any prior warning bright orange boards were promptly fitted over the windows of all the vacated and empty flats on the estate. This rather bold visual statement further underlined the dilapidation of the estate. The blocks dotted with orange boards rapidly turned into an object of curiosity, especially for the passers-by using the increasingly popular towpath along Regents Canal for daily commuting to and from work, or for weekend strolls to Victoria Park and Broadway Market.

Being long-term residents on the estate we suddenly found ourselves living in a local photo opportunity. A situation we became quite familiar with as we frequently overheard, through our open windows facing the canal, people speculating about the estate, its possible future and state of decline. Often whilst documenting it with their camera or mobile phone. We felt that the orange boards had turned the façade into a projection screen for people’s fears and prejudices around estates, and the people living in them. We simply wanted to disturb what we perceived as a very one-way communication.

How could we as artists possibly intervene in this dynamic of being looked at and projected into? We decided to do it with the help of a photo-installation, replacing all the orange boards with large-scale photographic portraits of current and former residents of the estate. As to, so to speak, humanise the façade, complicate and return the gaze of the passers-by. Furthermore, we wanted to become an active part in the process that produces the visual environment of our increasingly gentrified neighbourhood. We asked ourselves, who and what is made visible and what is excluded in this rapidly changing urban environment, and for what purpose?

As we have seen i am here evolved directly out of a particular context and so is not only intrinsically dependent on this context but also addresses it directly. As such, we are in fact using i am here as an instrument to state an argument, albeit perhaps an obverse one, in an ongoing debate. Doing so inevitably makes the work vulnerable to be used as an instrument by others.

Is it a problem to open up art to be used instrumentally in this way or is it a possibility?

The framework of the gallery and museum automatically guarantees that whatever one places or performs within its boundaries becomes art. Outside of these institutions there are no such guarantees, unless one manufactures them oneself either by authorising the work purely by means of one’s status as an artist, or by orchestrating the dissemination of the work in the media through art journals; online groups; and not the least on the location where the work is installed. In other words, when practicing in the public domain, the interpretation of the artwork as art is not assured. Consequently, the work may be appropriated and used by any of the stakeholders having vested interests in the context within which the artwork is located. It may turn out that there are parties wanting to claim the artwork for issues in no way related to the concept of the work itself but instead to further their own interests. These may range from commercial actors, interested in gaining publicity by proximity or association with the project. If possible and if desired they may be persuaded to become sponsors.

There might also be other parties involved driven by ideological/political reasons, wanting for example to promote issues concerning social cohesion by route of the artwork. Not to mention the media and their incessant search for stories.

Thus the issue of instrumentality requires the artist to pay close attention to the context framing the work. Consequently, context becomes something like an artistic material. However as an artistic material, context will remain a slippery one that never, unlike clay, will give itself up completely to the hands of the artist.

In spite of the apparent and seemingly unavoidable dangers of opening up artworks to used instrumentality, by placing them in the unruly social world, we see instrumentality as a possibility rather than a problem. Whereas the gallery and museum perform the important role of guaranteeing works to be interpreted as art and therefore allowing a highly specialized and precise discourse to exist, one may also see it as limiting artworks to be nothing but art. Placed in a wider social context artworks will inevitably be exposed to instrumental use but it also allows them to expand, participate in and address a much wider range of discourses. This, we believe, allows for artists a little more freedom to directly engage with social situations and the people populating them and not just be reduced to comment on them from the safe space of the gallery.

Fugitive Images was founded in 2009 by Andrea Luka Zimmermann, Losse Johansson & Tristan Fennell. It is an artist collaboration that grew out of a desire by the artists to capture the peculiar moment of the place where they live and work immediately prior to it being demolished.

www.iamhere.org.uk
before

after
Google Street-View: Shaping the identity of spaces
Matthew Hanchard

I noticed it first because of a pending dentist appointment. On a rainy autumn day, newly relocated to London, I had to find a way of getting there so I used Google Maps. Getting rough orientation from the cartographic layout I delved into the Street-View function. Traversing a photographic mapping of the route at street-level, the images seemed to missing something vital.

Thinking on the absence, I virtually travelled to, from and through several other places, jumping from one city to another, shifting country and continent at the click of a mouse. Old houses, holiday sites from childhood memory, places I wanted, and do still want to visit.

I found the absence. The map showed no rain, no ebb and flow of commuters, no shifting human make-up. The representation showed the world as a homogenous conglomerate of semi-sunny spaces, devoid of specific localised identity. Streets seemed to be sites for just ‘passing-through’.

The idea of a homogenising map such as Google’s Street-View may not at first seem like a major problem. After all, Microsoft’s Photosynth certainly includes the diversity that Google Street-View misses by proxy; it allows users to generate street level mappings of space by uploading their own images.

The problem here is simple; Photosynth (whilst inclusive) only covers the Earth in fragments, one site at a time. Google have managed to systematically map out entire cities. Key areas under private ownership are omitted (Canary Wharf for example) and sites with no access to cars are excluded, but as cartography goes, this is certainly a major feat.

According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2008, 65% of UK households had internet access (1), with 77% of online searches going through Google.

The implementation of Google is firmly entrenched, and, as I found researching the matter (2), Google Maps is most commonly used because of its ‘ease of use’, and often it is only the ‘only online map known’.

Google Street-View offers a homogenous world, a representation from the perspective of a car user. All places are intended for ‘passing-through’ and privatised spaces are omitted from public knowledge.

So, what is the problem with a homogenous representation as the dominant map?

Aside from limiting alternatives (after all the perspective of scientific rationality certainly seems most present here), the problem lies in the mental conception of space. The cognitive mappings formed with Google Street-View as impetus, and the limited range of potential uses of space as a result.

During a research process of conducting questionnaires and unstructured interviews, I asked several people (around ninety), what it was that they associated with Old Kent Road. Several people had never seen it, or been there. They knew it was a bad place, citing it as ‘rough’. The stigma was sourced, as the interviewees informed me; by the road being the cheapest property on the Monopoly board game. An informed mental concept changed attitudes and behaviours toward the space.

Google Street-View offers a homogenous world, a representation from the perspective of a car user. All places are intended for ‘passing-through’ and privatised spaces are omitted from public knowledge.

If mental conceptions are informed by this, affecting attitudes and behaviours, then questions must be raised about the implications for geo-spatial knowledge and practices being informed in this way.

Could tourism be affected? Could notions of perceived ‘normalcy’ or ‘propriety’ be refigured? Could the activities of social groups at times and spaces outside of the representation become excluded from the social imaginary? What does it mean to have one specific institution as the dominating party informing mental conceptions of space?

For this reason I have created a body of images, acting both as an alternative discourse, displaying diverse (temporal and spatial) use of spaces, mimicking Google Street-View and as a starting point to raise discussion.

(2) From a total of 90 individuals, 23 cited use of Google Maps because it was ‘easy’, a further 12 because it was the only known of or about.
Exhibiting ethnographic knowledge; Making sociology about makers of technology
Kat Jungnickel

Grassroots technology practices in suburban Australia
Kat Jungnickel
An exhibition exploring the ways in which technologies are made in suburban Australia.

Exhibiting the ‘homebrew high-tech’ objects and practices of ‘backyard technologists’ as well as Kat’s own methods of making sociological knowledge as part of a PhD in Sociology + blogposts, fieldnotes, photos, sketches, objects and film – the exhibition sought to generate dialogue about improvised, hands-on and object-oriented ways of thinking about and through knowledge production.

This is the second exhibition I have produced. The first was held in 2007 in one of my research field sites (2); the yard of a suburban house in South Australia. Drawing on the way my respondents were committed to making their own technological work-in-progress (blogposts, fieldnotes, photos, sketches, objects and film), the exhibition sought to generate dialogue between the central themes of diverse multi-dimensional materials and, at the same time, open up for discussion, improvised, hands-on and object-oriented ways of thinking about and through knowledge production.

Spatial inter-connections
Planning an exhibition involves choreographing not only a select series of objects but also the relationships between them. The process of spatially configuring my sociological arguments on the side of a suburban house and in the space of two glass cabinets at College opened up alternate means of interrogating my ideas. I came to see new relationships and connections between images, objects and texts. I was literally able to stand apart from my work and see it from different perspectives. It is rare to have the opportunity to experience field notes and materials in spatial, three dimensional form out of the field. The nature of a standard shared PhD office with a desk, computer, filing cabinet and shelving unit suggests analysis is a relatively contained, neat and two-dimensional process. This space is adequate for reading a textual argument or hearing a presentation. The exhibition continued to change throughout the display period. The range of materials and my experience of installing them served to render visible and tangible the complex and very messy ecologies of my ethnographic encounters and at the same time broaden my understanding of sociological labour.

New forms of sociological labour
Installing an exhibition is hard work. It takes time, assistance from others and a myriad of behind-the-scenes materials such as tacks, sticky tape, fishing line, hammer, nails, glue, rulers, pens and pencils, scalpels, rubber bands, cutting mats and scissors. The choice of many of these items necessitates an understanding not only of the materiality of ethnographic objects in focus but the location in which they are displayed. In contrast to the often solitary practice of writing, installing an exhibition is impossible to do without assistance. Help is needed to physically align lengths of fishing line, hammer tacks and nails in at the right angles and manoeuvre large objects (such as bikes) into small spaces. Exhibitions also require ongoing maintenance to ensure arguments do not literally collapse or fall down during the display period. The range of materials and my experience of installing them served to render visible and tangible the complex and very messy ecologies of my ethnographic encounters and at the same time broaden my understanding of sociological labour.

Messy edges
The weather played an important role in the Australian exhibition. Had it been raining or too hot, the event would have been postponed or cancelled. As it was, the wind had a significant and undeniable presence. Objects fell over and images blew away. Conversations were triggered not only by the content but also by bits of the exhibition escaping or getting tangled in the wind. I also noticed that blogposts were taken down by participants to read over the barbeque lunch and were replaced later in different locations on the display. Then, when people left they took pieces with them. This meant that the exhibition continued to change throughout the afternoon. It was a messy, dynamic and collaboratively produced event. Although protected by the weather and contained within glass cabinets, the exhibition in College nevertheless also led to a series of surprises: insights and engagements. For instance, a series of unexpected factors emerged during the installation process that helped shape the final display. Given the location of Kingsway Corridor near lecture rooms, I was conscious of making noise and interrupting classes. Therefore, I tried as much as possible to re-use and re-purpose materials left by previous exhibitors. This meant that many of the existing hooks and nails in the ceiling and walls of the cabinets influenced the layout of my objects and images. Similarly, chairs and tables from nearby classrooms, doubling as...
ladders, determined the height of my display. The array of materials lining the floors near the cabinet doors, in preparation for installation, also catalysed unexpected happenings. Stepping over these materials, passers-by frequently stopped to enquire as to the content of the display. Working inside or near the cabinets, I found I could observe their observations and overhear their comments. On several occasions I was able to engage with passing students, security guards, visitors and staff, many of whom I would not normally have the chance to talk with about key themes in my work. I found these informal and serendipitous connections made between ideas, objects and people created a way of reflecting on the ‘messes of reality’ (5).

Law defines mess as textures, ideas, objects, artefacts, places, people and emotions that are difficult to deal with within the traditional confines of social science methodologies; an indefinite array of complexities that are conventionally ordered and organised in the pursuit of sociological knowledge. He argues that current academic methods of inquiry ‘don’t really catch’ these messy aspects of life (6). Hine has similarly argued that, ‘Our methodological instincts are to clean up complexity and tell straightforward linear stories, and thus we tend to exclude descriptions that are faithful to experiences of mess, ambivalence, elusiveness and multiplicity’ (5). This desire to clean up contradicts our own understanding of the world and, in turn, limits the possibilities of other forms of knowing. What this means for ethnography involves accepting the presence of multiple unfolding field sites, shifting definitions, representations and meanings that surround them. Mess affords a way to consider sociological methods that embrace ‘impossible or barely possible, unthinkable or almost unthinkable’ versions of reality (5). An example of this is provided by Back, who recounts an exhibition that brought together sociologists and ‘subjects’ of an urban photography project:

“It was a unique event - I could not imagine a similar equivalent in the context of sociological or anthropological proceedings. It is rare that research participants are present at sociology conferences where their lives are being discussed. Somehow the presence of ‘subjects’ made it impossible for their representations to be cast of caricature. The people and the images were allowed to be prossic compounds of vice and virtue, they were allowed to be annoyingly human” (7).

This is what Law and Hine might term ‘messy’. It involved a gathering of things, not all of which were in the control of the researcher.

What remains constant through my research is a desire to make public my own sociological mess, namely all the work that takes place in the middle of my ethnographic process. These exhibitions came about in response to my respondents’ practice of sharing the messy tangents and mistakes, seemingly haphazard improvised methods and practices in the process of making new technologies.

Through this work, I attempt to be ‘annoyingly human’ (8) and ‘remain faithful to experiences of mess’ (9) by exposing my vulnerable ideas and random thoughts and seeking responses and feedback in a number of ways.

Although many researchers seek to expose their findings to as wide an audience as possible, the actual making of knowledge into anything other than text is an area that remains critically undeveloped. I anticipate that these experiences will lead to future research that contributes to the work of those who examine the design and production of, and responses to, alternative elucidations of ethnographic data (10).

The 2009 exhibition in Goldsmiths was gratefully supported by INCITE and the Sociology Department.

(2) Jungnickel, Katrina (2007) DIY WiFi: Making homebrew high-technology in Australian suburban backyards, Pilot Exhibition, 13 January, Adelaide, Australia
(4) Ibid
(8) Ibid 138.
As I step out of the airport, I see the taxi limousine. I am already late, so can’t wait for the bus, but I look for a less grand vehicle that could take me to my destination. I find an elderly man who offers me a ride in a small car. He consults with a limousine driver who speaks English. In a car, I am too embarrassed yet to speak Russian. It takes a few days for my other tongues to release themselves in cities abroad, but I do understand the image of a man crawling in the puddle full of leaves from the tree above. In the drizzling rain and cold, he scoops the leaves in his hands and spills them over himself. As we drive by, the driver hears my “oh” and laughs like I’ve just seen a local tourist attraction. As I turn my head away from the sight, he stops laughing, realising that selling this view as a circus act won’t work.

We continue through the aisles of salons for nails, hair, tans, weddings and finally hit the city centre. I know this by a large trolley bus stop and a building with the sign I can read as a “workers entry”. The building looks like the central administration and is the headquarters of the philharmonic. Grey and spent architecture surrounds it, barely any light. On the way to the hotel, I get bitten by a dog. The old lady who had it on the leash does not look all there, so I can’t complain and the bite is barely a bite, more like a bruise of welcome.

The hotel is great, but it is above the casino, has a spa and I can listen to the TV in the bathroom. A lifestyle of wonder and I witness it for the next few days. Pizza Jazz serves the worse pizza ever, but the waiter of this chain asks if I liked it, as this is a family restaurant. Strange this western-like behaviour and the fact that it’s almost impossible to buy local produce. Not many people are around, but the ones that are are very young. I stumble across graffiti that simulates Dali and Matisse. I wonder whether it’s because their works are not presented in the Museum or whether Kaunas streets simply need a bit of colour. At the university gallery I attend an opening of a photography exhibition where photographs are displayed so purely, it looks like a student room, images blue-tacked to the wall. I like the projected work although it is so small, the injustice to the piece is visible.

I try to make friends, but the effort is too much. I brought heaps of reading just in case, but I try for much longer than I want to, have conversations and go away feeling wasted. I can’t wait to go home tomorrow. In the morning, I visit the textile biennale and my mood changes. A dozen of artists in residence are from all over the world and their cubicles together look like a painter’s palette. The noise of different languages and actions undertaken – hammering, cutting and typing fills me with joy and I do not wish to talk, just be there for a rest. Finally, a space to be safe and feel oneself, people going about their own business and happy to have you go about yours or enquire about theirs. Wool, clothes, slides, children everywhere – a public space in Kaunas that is finally friendly. I can now eat and go home feeling this trip was not for nothing. I take many photos, start talking to the artists and almost miss my plane.

Kaunas
Nela Milic

Kaunas biennial TEXTILE 09 involves artists working with others to create opportunities for direct experience and live examination of art production. The main part of the biennial consists of 30 projects’ residency programmes live examination which was realised by 60 artists from 20 countries during October 2009.
Website: no way to make a living

Dawn Lyon and Lynne Pettinger

We were on a train when we first had the idea for a new website about the sociology of work. Returning from seeing the exhibition by the documentary photographer, Martin Figura, Work-Space-Work, about the changing industrial landscape in Dunstable (1) (Norwich Arts Centre, April 2008), we started to articulate our frustrations with this kind of representation of work: “No one was pictured doing anything! How can you see work if there’s no activity?” “Yeah, and it was a strange choice to use portraits to show work, he must have interrupted what people were doing to get the pictures.” Although the exhibition in Norwich got us going, we’d long been frustrated with the limitations in the forms of knowledge we can convey in academic books and journal articles. Or, to put it another way, the contemporary complexity of work ‘exceeds’ the dominant forms of sociological representation available to us.

By the time our journey was over, it was all settled. The website, no way to make a living (as we later decided to call it), was conceived as a sociological space about work that would give us the freedom to discuss what work (paid or unpaid) is like in today’s world, to post short thoughts on everyday working lives, to showcase research projects, and to explore different kinds of textual (fictional, autobiographical and analytical), aural, visual and imagined representations of work. We named the site after a mishearing of the Dolly Parton song, we’d long been frustrated with the limitations in the forms of knowledge we can convey in academic books and journal articles. Or, to put it another way, the contemporary complexity of work ‘exceeds’ the dominant forms of sociological representation available to us.

In addition, we’re compiling ‘resources’ as the site grows that will be useful to visual sociologists and photographers in particular. You can search the site under the main categories - thoughts, projects, stories etc. - or through the ‘tags’ that are used to mark each post. For instance, you can find several posts under “transport” (perhaps it was the original train journey that inspired us).

To give some sense of what’s on the site, we’ve included excerpts of two different types of posts here.

Project: Seeing Work: Time, Space and Labour on a Building Site

Dawn Lyon

This project analyses the social organisation of work on a building site and the different forms of labour that go into the refurbishment of a building. The project was based on ethnographic work undertaken in collaboration with Peter Hatton (University of Kent) in 2007.

Relationships to space – builders & architects and engineers

The work that people do produces different kinds of relationship to space. Builders monopolise the physical manipulation of the building – as process and object. They live and breathe it, quite literally, as its dust, paint and debris get under their nails and skin, and into their hair and eyes. In contrast, engineers and architects know the building as a conceptualised space, through drawings and measurements, reports and schedules, and observe it as a ‘landscape of viewing’. For builders, however, the conceptual is also part of the everyday experience of building work (3) as they resolve problems in practice. The collections of images here indicate these orientations (Lived Space and Conceptual Space).

The body at work

One of the gains of the visual for the sociology of work is in seeing labour as an activity. How to effectively represent this is an ongoing challenge. In the composition here of a building worker laying screed, by making use of and superimposing multiple images, our attention can be drawn to what we are not necessarily conscious of in a single picture. For instance, we can sense both the movement involved in the stretch of the upper body, and the weight and discomfort of the position of the lower body (kneeling on the wood).

As well as accounts of established research projects, such as Dawn’s building work, the site has lots of smaller ‘thoughts’. Lynne wrote about the work of the postman, during the peak of the recent Royal Mail action.

Thought: The Letter and the Parcel and the Eternity of the Postman’s Job

Lynne Pettinger

There are forms of work which are unamenable to technological change. The question of technology replacing labour is an ongoing story in the study of work (see Braverman (4) on deskilling, or Sennett on the loss of craft skills). Some accounts of service work suggest that these are the least ‘vulnerable’ to replacement, although researchers at Saitama University is developing...
The postman’s job is unreplaceable, but it is affected by technologies. The bicycle and the delivery van; the rubber band; the sack and the street storage boxes; the uniform and the letter box in my front door are all parts of this. And that is without thinking about the technologies of collection, sorting and movement. The fundamental job of the postman, though, is to move from door to door, up my street and down yours. It requires body work and an engagement with the material cultures of people’s homes and their private and public messages. There is no way of not having a postman if the post is delivered. So thank you postman. I think you have a romantic job.

Though booming internet shopping might keep some postmen in work, even as Royal Mail loses the con-tract to deliver Amazon parcels, his job isn’t quite as romantic as once it was. Gone are the days of daily letters or postcards, even bills are now delivered online. That seems like a loss to me, I like getting and sending postcards. So please send me a letter. Send me the pillow you dream on. Send in the clowns.

Get involved

Finally, we’d like to stress that no way to make a living is not just for academics. We get lots of sociological inspiration from the work of artists and photographers, journalists and commentators, from films, songs and TV programmes, as well as from people going about their everyday routines. So we welcome submissions from academics, postgraduate students, artists, photographers, writers and anyone else who is interested in understanding work in contemporary society, whatever way you making a living.

See ‘How to post something’ at: http://nowaytomykealiving.net/help or send your stuff to down@nowaytomykealiving.net or lynne@nowaytomykealiving.net (you retain copyright).

(2) You can read more about work songs under the heading ‘Mr Walker, it’s all over: gender politics in office songs’ at http://nowaytomykealiving.net/post/37.
(5) Kobayashi,Y, Kuno,Y, Niwa, H., Akita, N., Okada, M. Yamazaki, K. and Yamazaki, A. (2009) ‘Assisted-Care Robot Initiation of Communication in Multiparty Settings’. Chi 2009 conference, Boston MA. (The next bit of the story is a bit confusing but it evolved a friend arriving from Jamaica promising to take her travelling. This involved her ditching Donald in his favour; which turned out to be a mistake as the Jamaican friend turned out to be gay.)

‘Where are you travelling to today?’ asks the lady in the pink hat at the bus stop.

‘New York!’ I say ‘but I live in London.’

‘Where! Luton?’

‘London.’

‘Where’s that?’

‘England.’

‘Oh London. I used to live there. In Hammersmith and Paddington. I trained to be a midwife there.’

‘Really?’

‘And Scotland.’

‘How long have you been in Canada?’

‘Since 1957. And you’re going to New York. Alone?’

I nod. She shakes her head.

‘My goodness. Imagine that. Is someone meeting you in New York?’

‘No, but it’s ok, I know where I’m going.’

‘Good because I was worried. Not worried, just … concerned.’

‘Do you have a boyfriend?’

‘Yes.’

‘And where is he?’

‘In New York.’

‘Ok, just so long as you’re not alone.’

‘You know Hammersmith? I used to go dancing there. I met a lovely man in London. Donald Peacock. I still remember him. We used to go to dancing lessons together but the teacher didn’t like it when Donald and I were partners. If we danced together she used to stop the dance. He was tall.’

‘… so I threw the money back in his face. God never sent me a husband. But I wasn’t that interested. There was another man. The Lord told me he was the one I should marry but he married someone else, I ended up nursing her sister. He was a lawyer in Scotland. He loved me, but they all loved me! I wasn’t interested.’

‘I wonder what happened to Donald Peacock?’

‘I have no idea.’

‘I had lots of plans for what I was going to do when I stopped working but I didn’t realise my body was tired. I was one of two girls in a family of eight. I had so much responsibility, sometimes it still makes me cry. My brother is in a retirement home in Germany, he was stationed there with the British Army, but I phone him every Monday. And my sister, she’s the youngest, she lives in Florida.’

‘I grumble sometimes, but then I think the Lord told Moses to lead the people across the Red Sea when he was eighty. And Moses said ‘But I have a lisp’ and the Lord said ‘I’ll fix that.’ So really I have nothing to grumble about.’

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She gets off the bus and I’m left on my way to the airport picturing the lady in the pink hat and Donald Peacock twirling around the floor of the Hammersmith Palais.
Do you have to dance on the dance floor?

Harriet Smith

Not that far from you

Auckland, Spring 2007

Miranda Weigler

I was in a taxi tonight, and the driver didn’t understand me, and I didn’t understand him. We were both in a foreign city and he wasn’t totally sure where he was taking me, or how to get there. In other taxis I had simply noticed the names of our drivers- Jass, Hasan, or decided I didn’t need to know their names to understand something about them - the man who loved fishing and beer, didn’t understand why we would waste time with chi chi food markets and knew that we would ultimately hate the place he was taking us but took us anyway unquestioningly because that’s what a good taxi driver should do. Or the man who took us from the airport and loved to talk to us about where we came from, and what New Zealand was like. I don’t know why, as I hadn’t asked the others about themselves at all, but as we sat waiting at a red light I pointed to his card and asked how to say his name. He smiled- a slow, small thing, and said in a voice I had to strain to hear, Leake. His voice was gravelly and quiet. He had pride as he said his name. I repeated it, in a voice to match. My voice was young, and confident, but wanted to learn his sounds and I repeated it once more, just to myself as I looked into the shops on the busiest street in Auckland.

We had very little to say to each other, understood almost nothing, and will never see each other again. But I know his name, and he knows I care enough to learn it.

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The Perpendicular Patriarch

Estelle Vincent
Words by Rachel Gorevan-Schofield

Found in Copenhagen amongst discarded family memories captured from a time past. A powerfully moustached man with an arresting stare appears assured of his place within the world, with his wife demurely at his feet. The textured garden wall supports the father in this unyielding position. If he were to shift and move, the stones look like they could tumble and collapse. As our gaze is taken over the bridge of the couple’s cherubic children this staged image reveals the pecking order of the family. Eyes finally fall on the mother. Averting her gaze and preserving her modesty she paces in an unusual position, balancing precariously on the ankles of the perfect perpendicular patriarch.

By managing to seek the connectivities across time we come apart, loosened from the talons of the present that holds our identity within the frame of acting. For a moment we join an energy which exists through all dimensions, the presence of the histories and space enfolding out, showing the forgotten words that fell from the lips of giants. Where ultimately does this lead us to? Do we become extinguished by language and the verbiage of the histories? Or are we lifted outside into other parameters where tacit experience filters through the hard brick work and colonial sweat, and is somehow totemed up into a dance whilst the cool sun shines on.

The photograph is of a section of wall next to a telephone box, just off Cricklewood Broadway, London, NW2.
Dog-walking on Hampstead Heath: 
a temporary community in a public space

Jana Averbeck

When I first started walking the dog, Jessie, I was amazed and amused at the same time that there seemed to be a little self-contained world in Hampstead Heath in the morning. Apart from the occasional mothers or grandmothers with a child in a pushchair, some joggers, or very rarely a school class lining up to watch birds, the only people at this time of day are dog-owners and walkers. These form a community of their own, and one I at first did not want to be part of. However, as I met the same people every day and ‘my’ dog became rather fond of their biscuit supplies, this was not avoidable. With some amusement, I too soon talked to dogs, knew some of the walkers and even could allocate which dog belonged to whom.

The main topic of conversation is the dogs, or rather, the dogs give them a reason to talk to each other. Or, as I encountered bewilderment, information is passed on. The main topic of conversation is the dogs, or rather, some of the walkers and even could allocate which dog became a temporary community in a public space. People called the phone number on her dog tag so I could locate where she was. This, I figured, did not only require people taking care of one another in what can feel like a cold and lonely city, but also some knowledge of the park explain a location so that I could find a total stranger.

On the occasions where she did run away and left me literally running and shouting through the park, I encountered another kind of dog-owner/walker community. People called the phone number on her dog tag so I could locate where she was. This, I figured, did not only require people taking care of one another in what can feel like a cold and lonely city, but also some knowledge of the park explain a location so that I could find a total stranger.

Leaving the park I leave the community, I automatically become part of the moment I entered.

Jessie is a rather independent dog. Her walker changes about every six months and she ran away a couple of times from me (to my embarrassment, as this apparently never happened before). I put this discomfort down to my huge dislike of authority and hierarchy, which in this case puts me in a position of ‘being the boss’. And as much as I don’t mind responsibility, I do not like to tell others – even a dog, as it turns out – what to do.

In the words of the editors “the objective of ‘Critical Cities’ is to open-up debate, reacting to how official discourses about urban environments have narrowed. This volume is divided into four chapters: ‘Legalities of Space’, ‘Migration and Home’, ‘Public Memory’ and ‘Creative Destruction’. Each section interweaves global spatial-social debates, cross-disciplinary discussions and exchange, research proposals, photographic essays, transcripts of conversations and interventions. Which have been presented in a series of TINAG Salons and the first ‘This is Not a Gateway’ Festival held in East London, October 2008.”

These events have drawn together international practitioners from a range of disciplines for example: Architecture, academia/research, art, design, community organizations and activists, film-media, law, photography and sociology. (Including Head of CUCR Caroline Knowles and practitioners-researchers affiliated with CUCR: David Kendall, Gesche Würfel and Tristan Fennell who contribute the curatorial project ‘A Line is There to be Broken’ and Paul Goodwin who discusses ‘Re-Visioning Black Urbanism and the Production of Space’, with John Oduroe).
Jim Goldberg: Open See
Sandra Abegglen

Open See, the first UK solo exhibition of Magnum Photographer Jim Goldberg, has opened at The Photographers' Gallery in London on the 15th October 2009. The show documents the experience of refugees, immigrants and trafficked populations who Goldberg met on their search for a better life. The show consists of small objects, photographic prints, polaroids, videos and written texts. Typically for Goldberg, the photographs are often defaced and written on by the people they portray. As such, they are shocking and gripping at the same time. They tell personal stories, although only as fragments that appear and disappear like the people themselves. One image shows for example a little girl in a pink dress that is standing in the middle of an abandoned place. Another image shows a man and woman who are having sex – hastily, without any romance. And yet another image shows a body full of bruises. Each story is unique, but nevertheless part of a larger whole. As such, the show manages to give a glimpse of the live that happens outside of national boundaries. Goldberg shows people who are normally invisible – the ones who leave before they have arrived. The ones on the move.

There is also a book (1) (or rather four paperback books) of the same title that gives an overview of Goldberg’s ongoing project - although with hardly any words, apart from the ones written on the photographs themselves. As such the book leaves us, similar to the exhibition, with visual impressions of refugees. Nonetheless, it confronts us with the difficulties of migration - and life as a whole. It shows us in a direct and uncondensed approach the poverty, pain and suffering of those people, but also their hope for a better life. Goldberg manages, however, to go beyond the typical stereotypes.

He lets the individuals speak - through his images, but also their comments. As such, the book is in line with Goldberg’s earlier works - Rich and Poor (2), Raised by Wolves (3) – which also involve a long-term, in-depth collaboration with marginalized groups. As Goldberg states: ‘My work is based in trust. And I don’t work well the opposite. I really feel like intimacy and trust are the guide to my work.’

Goldberg’s work is therefore situated somewhere between art and documentation. It has an aesthetic value, but portrays its subjects in an honest and direct way. It does, however, not have a political aim, although the presented material is highly political. Nevertheless, Goldberg makes us think – about the people he portrays but also ourselves. Photography at its best.

see http://www.photonet.org.uk


Why I love Zotero
Paolo Cardullo

I started using Zotero, an advanced referencing software, about two years ago, partly as one of many other extensions to Firefox (free open-source web browser). At the time, I was also daily commuting into work, so my reading was often on public transport, and my note-taking very patchy. But only recently, when I began assembling resources for my Literature Review, I realised how useful, easy to use, and powerful Zotero was. Its slogan is ‘Research, not re-search’, with good reason. It is now an essential tool of my daily work-flow.

Zotero has been unusually built by practising researchers and teachers, at the Centre for History and New Media at George Mason University, Washington D.C. It is hugely efficient, with a combination of the traditional bibliographic functions (e.g. the ability to grab and edit in one click information from other online services and export it to a host of metadata, so no need to re-type), and an intuitive, easy navigable interface. The latter function has often been compared to the resilient habit of many researchers using index cards and making connections between them by way of spreading them out on the table. With Zotero you can easily move into a three-layered database and build links between resources (using tags and links), while simultaneously having at hand all the notes taken for each of the resources.

Aside from this, and very importantly for the current state of research practices, another unique feature for Zotero is its location. Previous software required you to move into other tools to do your research, making your work-flow fragmented into multiple, generally unrelated windows (such as a Word processor, a Web browser and a standalone citation tool like EndNote). Zotero, however, ‘lives’ in your browser (it is in fact ‘only’ a Firefox plug-in). It is therefore already where you are online. This also allows you to access your referencing and note taking while trawling the web.

I cannot stress enough how simple and useful Zotero is. Instead of me continuing to write about it and possibly making it sound complicated, the best thing is for you to start using it. There are plenty of useful tutorials and documentation on the Zotero website: www.zotero.org/support/screencast_tutorials

Another thing I want to briefly mention is the underlying political issue around Zotero, which makes it even more appealing to me: a bit of Foucauldian digging, so to speak. Zotero is distributed under the Educational Community License, which is OSI-certified, and GPL-compatible. General Public License is a free, copyleft license for software and other kinds of works, while the Open Source Initiative logo means that the Zotero code is open to further improvement, as well as being of course free to use.

This has got huge implications for universities.

Let me give you a quick example. With your Goldsmiths username you receive (in the package of IT benefits) also a license to use EndNote Web, a version of the EndNote software distributed by the multinational Thomson Reuters. While studying, you are able to collect your references and build your bibliographies for your college work for free. When you leave with your degree though, you are faced with two choices: either you leave your collected notes and sources behind, or you buy a licence from Thomson at the current price of $300, plus upgrades.

Zotero is not only available for free to everyone, but has, compared to EndNote, additional features such as providing a pioneering multi-platform for collaborative working. Zotero also provides (and encourages the use of) an import function for people who want to migrate from EndNote.

Finally, a curiosity: apparently ‘Zotero’ is not an ancient Greek word, as I have always thought, but comes from the Albanian verb zotëro-j, ‘master, acquire, learn fully’. The final -j marks the 1st person indicative (the regular citation form for Albanian verbs); in the imperative, we would get the bare verb root zotëro. Finally, a curiosity: apparently ‘Zotero’ is not an ancient Greek word, as I have always thought, but comes from the Albanian verb zotëro-j, ‘master, acquire, learn fully’. The final -j marks the 1st person indicative (the regular citation form for Albanian verbs); in the imperative, we would get the bare verb root zotëro.

If anyone wants further information about issues raised in this article, or wants an informal chat to share any technical matter relating to Zotero (e.g. synchronization, book-up, groups, compatibility), or to organise workshops, or even to promote a ‘Zotero Society’, can email me at p.cardullo@gold.ac.uk

The Sense of Making Sense part 2
Alex Rhys Taylor, Karla Berrens & Paul Halliday
Saturday 7th May 2010

Following on from the first workshop in November, which focuses especially on the relationship between the eye and the ear, the second will take place over one day in May and focus on the nose and taste buds. It will start with a brief overview of work on these ‘other senses,’ before inviting participants to divert their attention to aspects of sensory experience that they might not otherwise have thought of. The participants will then be given an opportunity to practice sensory urban investigation, by going out into the field and developing field notes that reflect upon the breadth of sensory experience. They will then be invited to return and discuss the potential value of the ‘other senses’ to their practice, as well as exploring the difficulties posed when trying to ‘represent’ these aspects of experience to an audience.

This workshop like the last is intended to be of interest to, and open to, all. However, they will draw on prior knowledge and practices of ethnographers and photographers.

Islands and corridors: the urban biosphere
Peter Coles, (photographer, journalist and researcher at CUCR)

‘Nature’ is everywhere in a city like London, from cracks in the pavement to rooftops, parks and rivers. Metaphors abound: Victorian cemeteries can be conservation ‘islands’ where species thrive. Rivers and railway lines can be ‘green corridors’, allowing species to migrate and maintain sustainable populations. Meanwhile, the ‘edge’ where humans and ‘nature’ meet in urban spaces can tell us a great deal about distant and recent local history, as well as current use.

This photography-based workshop, spread over two successive Saturdays, invites participants to explore the relationship of people to ‘nature’ in an inner-city area, using photography, on a walk along the Ravensbourne River and Deptford Creek in South-East London. The derelict, urbanized tidal Creek is, in fact, extraordinarily ecologically diverse and alive. Studies have revealed over 25 aquatic species, 300 terrestrial species or insect and other invertebrates, over 140 trees, shrubs and wildflowers. The Creek is also home to breeding black redstarts, which are nationally rare birds.

The Eyes of the Street Look Back: with a camera in a (very) foreign city
Saturday 13th March 2010
Ariadne van de Ven (tourist, photographer and urban researcher)

When we visit a foreign city, we find ourselves at an unfamiliar urban edge: we don’t know the way the language, the people or the street behavior rules. Even if we do not use a camera, we wander, we wonder; we look, we interpret what we see. This workshop will explore the politics of photographing and of seeing in cities in the majority world (or ‘Global South’). The starting point is the connection between the two, and the ways in which photograph-and, crucially, the making of photographs-can ask important questions about seeing and the judgments we attach to what we see.

The vocabulary of photography pins down a one-way process: taking, capturing, shooting. The language used by critics of photography frequently assumes the same power imbalance: the gaze, objectification, commodification.

The workshop will approach these issues from two different angles: first, the making of the photograph as an interaction, a collaborative, visual improvisation: the eyes of the street look back, and in doing so, they subvert assumptions about otherness, about power relations. And, second, we shall also explore to what extent the resulting photograph, after the long journey ‘home,’ can retain the spark of this interaction.

This one-day workshop is for everybody who wants to explore visual reactions to very unfamiliar urban settings. For the past seven years, I have been going on holiday to Kolkata, or Calcutta and I shall bring photographs of my own; participants are expected to bring their own stranger-in-the-city-experiences with their images (digitally or printed). I hope the session will leave us all productively baffled.

Please contact CUCR for further information on these Urban Edge Workshops.
Email: cucr@gold.ac.uk
Tel: 0207 919 7390
Analysing Practical Knowledge: Workshop Report
Dawn Lyon

There’s a long tradition of sociological inquiry into the taken for granted. Making the familiar unfamiliar is part of what many sociologists do in their work. What happens then if the taken for granted of what someone is the subject of research does isn’t something they can narrate? And what if it’s not something that can be easily viewed or recorded in some other way either? Knowing more than we can say means that people are not always able to give an account of themselves or of what they do when that knowledge is practical, embodied or tacit. And they may not want to. There may be no impulse to represent what is already known to them – after all, it’s not puzzling, but already incorporated. What then are possibilities and limitations of talk, sound, image, and objects in undertaking research and producing understandings of practical knowledge? These questions were explored in a workshop hosted by the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths on 11 November 2009, on analysing practical knowledge.

The first paper at the workshop, on photographing sound, was given by Lynne Pettiger (Essex). Drawing on Gadamer’s concept of the ‘withheld’, Lynne talked about two silent and still photographs from her research on the working bodies of musicians in performance. At first sight, photographs of musicians appear limited because the working bodies of musicians in performance. At first sight, photographs of musicians appear limited because of the inherent absences of this form of representation. However, she argued that these absences are imaginatively productive because what is withheld problematises any simple reading of the photograph as real representation and forces the viewer not just to make their own understanding but to recognise that they are making this understanding for themselves.

Alison Rook (Goldsmiths) reflected on her own experience of acquiring practical knowledge in the process of training and working as a carpenter prior to her second career as an academic. Formal training as a carpenter requires learning skills such as how to handle hand tools and lengths of timber; as well as technical drawing and mathematics, know-how which cannot be gained from text books and training manuals. It relies on the acquisition of a tradesperson’s habits and the ability to demonstrate confidence on building sites and in timber yards, notably for women in what is a male-dominated trade. In addition to her own experience, Alison drew on material from the Gender in Construction Research Project, carried out at CUCR, which made use of audio diaries to analyse barriers to women’s inclusion in London’s construction labour market and to discuss the relationship between the acquisition of both craft skills and other kinds of practical knowledge that are integral to success as a tradeswoman.

‘Stumbling’ is a routine technique used by volunteer community WiFi members in Australia to look for wireless digital ‘noise’ to be able to install or upgrade an antenna. Kat Jungnickel (Goldsmiths) discussed her ethnographic research with a community in Adelaide making use of found, home-made and adapted objects to produce wireless technologies. It was in part through developing her own practical knowledge - balancing in precarious places, learning to see ‘noise’, re-appropriating technologies – that she gained understanding of the role of objects, place and making practices in Australian grassroots technology culture.

Embodied skills can be thought of as an accumulation of ways of making sense of and acting upon the world, specific to a particular cultural, economic or historical context. Alex Rhys-Taylor’s (Goldsmiths) paper on Dickson’s Healing Soaps, made and sold in Hackney, East London, discussed how embodied skills from numerous ‘elsewhere’s and ‘other times’ can be combined in one body and one practice. Bringing together the aromatic memories and tactile experience of Ghanaian folk practice, skills acquired through formal education in London, and a sensitivity to the epidermal needs of his neighbours, then mixing these skills into a soap bar sold at the hScreens sensual street market. Dickson’s hybrid practices actively curate the complex life of an East End street market. In the final presentation, also concerned with the social life of markets, Les Back (Goldsmiths) and Dawn Lyon

CROSSING LINES: A collaboration between CUCR and London Independent Photography (LIP)

A proposal is being made to establish an on-going forum for collaboration between photographers and researchers whose central interest is the urban situation, its constituents and its dynamics. MA students, staff and researchers associated with CUCR and Sociology who see photography as a central tool to their research and members of LIP. Greenwich, based at the Viewfinder Photography Gallery, shall have the chance to build upon contacts, maintain collaborations, discuss ideas, receive feedback and create further opportunities, especially after formal studies have been completed.

The idea is to foster an exchange between photographic practitioners and researchers and create an environment where innovative models of collaboration can be tested and experimental work find an audience. The aim is to provide an opportunity to pursue joint projects away from academic demands and to find alternative channels for disseminating a project, such as publications or exhibitions. The way the forum functions will be fluid, self-sustaining & evolve with its membership.

A suggested starting point is ‘London: city of villages’, intended as a ‘provocation’ relating to the concept of the ‘Urban Village’, contesting the conventions, illustrating the implications of this view and providing us with a starting point for debate and encouragement to action.

The first meeting will be on Tuesday 19th January 6-8 pm at Goldsmiths College, University London Room RHB 356

Everyone interested in coming along are asked to provide, by 12th January 2010 a brief (60 word) summary of their research/photographic interests for circulation before the inaugural meeting.

Please contact John Levett at john.levett1@gmail.com

www.londonphotographyorg.uk
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The MA in Photography and Urban Cultures has been developed in response to the increasing interests in urban theory and the visual representation and investigation of urban life and the physical environments of the city.

Who is it for?
Photographers, visual artists and media practitioners, as well as those with a background in social sciences, interested in exploring the creative interplay between cultural research, urban studies and photographic practice. You should have a degree or equivalent in a relevant area.

Structure
A combination of written and practical work to include a research dissertation and a portfolio of photographs and final exhibition. It can be followed either full-time or part-time.

Next available entry point: October 2010.

The MA is run by the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), a national and international leader in research on urban and community life. CUCR is multi-disciplinary and focuses on issues such as citizenship and cosmopolitanism; social exclusion and cultures of racism; sport, popular culture and music; regeneration and wealth creation; issues of crime and community safety; technology and new patterns of digital culture.

What do you study?
The course intersects literature from urban planning, architecture, cultural and postcolonial studies, subaltern urban studies, global studies, digital media and design, urban ethnography and sociology, environmental studies and sustainable technologies, geopolitics, governance, and economic development.

The program consists of three core courses:
* Remaking Urban Life: from Dakar to Guangzhou
* Inventive Methods for Researching the City
* Navigating Urban Life
And an option selected from any department in the college.

Further information and how to apply: UK and EU students: Admissions Office, telephone 020 7919 7060 (direct line), fax 020 7717 2240 or e-mail admissions@gold.ac.uk; Overseas (non EU) students: International Office, telephone 020 7919 7700 (direct line), fax 020 7919 7704 or e-mail international-office@gold.ac.uk;

For further information about the Centre: Please call 020 7919 7390; e-mail cucr@gold.ac.uk or visit www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/
CUCR Occasional paper series

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Brown Youth, Black Fashion and a White Riot, 2007

Brian W. ALLEYNE
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Mette ANDERSSON

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Colin KING
Play the White Man: The Theatre of Racialised Performance in the Institutions of Soccer

Larry LOHMANN
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Ben LOOKER
Exhibiting Imperial London: Empire and City in late Victorian and Edwardian guidebooks

Hiroki OGASAWARA
Performing Sectarianism: Terror, Spectacle and Urban Myth in Glasgow Football Cultures

Garry ROBSON
Class, criminality and embodied consciousness: Charlie Richardson and a South East London Habitus

Flemming RØGILDS
Charlie Nielsen’s Journey: Wandering through Multi-cultural Landscapes

Fran TONKISS
The ‘marketisation’ of urban government: private finance and urban policy

Danielle TURNEY
The language of anti-racism in social work: towards a deconstructive reading

Gordon WALKER and Karen BICKERSTAFF
Polluting the poor: an emerging environmental justice agenda for the UK?

Louisa THOMSON
The Respect Drive: the Politics of Young People and Community

please refer to www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr for downloads and further information.