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Fishmongers in a Global Economy: Craft and Social Relations on a London Market

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Abstract

This article is based on multi-sensory ethnographic research into fishmongers on a south London market, the setting for a specific topography of work. We contrast Charlie, a white Londoner whose family has been in the fish business for over 100 years, with Khalid, an immigrant from Kashmir, who, even without the tacit knowledge of generations at his fingertips, has successfully found a place for himself in the local and global economy of fish. The research pays attention to the everyday forms of work that take place when the fishmongers sell to the public. We use these two very different cases to explore what constitutes work and labour and the different sensibilities that these two men bring to their trade. Drawing on observations, photography and sound recordings, the paper also represents the fishmongers at work. We take the two cases in turn to discuss learning the trade and the craft of fishmongering, the social relations of the market, and the art of buying and selling fish. More generally, the article explores how global connections are threaded through the local economy within a landscape of increasing cultural and racial diversity. It also critically discusses the gain of the visual as well as the aural for generating insights into and representing the sensuous quality of labour as an embodied practice.

Keywords: Craft, Embodiment, Ethnography, Fishmonger, Photography, Sensory Sociology, Skill, Tacit Knowledge, Work

Introduction

1.1 In Deptford High Street, in South East London, Wednesdays and Saturdays are market days. The shops spill into the street as stalls are set up early in the morning and displays are carefully arranged. Once the space fills with shoppers, the performance begins. Fruit and vegetables are sold next to kitchenware and curtains, and cheap clothes and toiletries along the road from second-hand goods. Street traders of small items – cigarette lighters, sunglasses, jewellery – hustle in the spaces between formal stalls. It's the stuff of and for the everyday, and it has an ordinary, unpretentious feel, serving a mostly local clientele of Afro-Caribbeans, Chinese and white British. It's a world away from the spectacle – and prices - of Bermondsey, just a few miles upriver. Amongst the many sensory delights of the place are two stalls and shops selling fish. And this is where our story starts.

1.2 The study we are presenting here sought to explore the experience, especially the sensory and embodied experience, of working with fish. It is based on visual ethnographic research into two very different fishmongers on Deptford market, which is itself the setting for a specific topography of work. We contrast Charlie, a white Londoner whose family has been in the fish business for over 100 years, with Khalid, an immigrant from Kashmir, who, even without the tacit knowledge of generations at his fingertips, has successfully found a place for himself within the economy of the fish trade.

1.3 The research on which we draw pays attention to the everyday forms of work that take place when the fishmongers sell to the public. We use the cases of Charlie and Khalid to explore what constitutes this kind of work and the different sensibilities that these two men bring to their trade. Drawing on observations, photography and sound recordings, the paper also depicts the fishmongers at work, and explores the gains of the visual as well as the aural for generating insights into and representing the sensuous quality of labour as an embodied practice. We take each case in turn to discuss learning the trade of fishmongering, including the art of buying and selling fish, and managing the social relations of the market. More generally, the article explores how global connections are threaded through the local economy within a social landscape that is defined by super-diversity (Vertovec 2006), one where urban multiculture has become the norm (Back 2009).

Methodology

2.1 This research emerged from Dawn's participation in Live Sociology in 2008, an ESRC-funded training project in the use of new media in ethnographic social research, run by Les and colleagues at Goldsmiths and elsewhere. In the first workshop at Goldsmiths, participants were sent out with cameras to visually document a space, an activity, or a moment of everyday life. Dawn stumbled across Khalid's display of 'sexy fish' (as in the image below) and Charlie's claim to 'know more about fish than anyone in England' (which we hear later) and was hooked. We (Dawn and Les) soon discovered that Les had spoken with both Charlie and Khalid on previous occasions, conversations which had left him curious. We found ourselves with a new project.

Image 1. Sexy Fish

Images 2a and 2b. The market

2.2 We returned to the market together and individually on around twenty occasions over the next two years, to both Charlie's and Khalid's shops, and the stalls that spread into the road directly in front of their shops on market days. We watched them work, and asked them detailed questions about their work. They appeared to take pleasure from our interest, with occasional flashes of irritation. They were accepting of our methods (photography, sound recordings and 'hanging around') which we explained at the outset and whenever further questions arose, but they were reluctant to be interviewed more formally. Taking photographs emerged from the conversations about what they were doing with knives and other tools as they negotiated the slippery materiality of the fish. Our visits were mostly unannounced. We would generally spend the morning undertaking observations (with or without the camera), exchanging ideas on what we'd seen with one another over cups of tea, and returning to the stalls for more conversation when there was expected to be a lull. Over time, we would stand around and chat, hearing fantastical fish tales and snippets of the everyday life of the market. On one occasion, we were able to record some of Charlie's more autobiographical reflections while he worked. We also once convinced Khalid to come for a cup of tea with us and tell us a little more about his life and work. We were part of the conversations that took place with customers too as they negotiated over price or quantity, and so engaged in the relations of the market.

2.3 As the research progressed, we placed less emphasis on the visual and photographing the fishmongers at work. Instead, we recorded the aural dimensions of the interactions and banter on the market between fishmongers and customers, the background sounds of work in the market space, and the detailed gestures of fishmongering, such as the sharp sound of fish being cut or the scraping of metal on flesh as fish were scaled. We wanted to listen as well as look, not only for the stories that the fishmongers told us but for the rhythms of work and the kinds of social interactions that were lost in the 'freeze frame' of the photographic image. We could of course have filmed the fishmongers at work but felt that this would have led us to 'relive' the confusion of market activity and exchanges in our viewing of the films rather than help us to notice what we were not able to see when things were in motion. Instead, we preferred to limit the sensory data we collected, paradoxically in order to grasp more of it. (Pettinger and Lyon, this issue)

2.4 In the course of this research, we made several hundred images and several sound recordings, which we argue can be used to give us particular insights into this world of work. As Paul Sweetman (2009) contends, visual methods – and sound – allow us to document and understand areas of social life that are difficult for people to verbalise or articulate, that are in one way or another beyond or on the edge of consciousness, or that are part of one's ***habitus***. As Law and Urry argue, standard sociological tools deal poorly with the fleeting, the distributed, the multiple, and especially the sensory, the emotional, and the kinaesthetic (2004: 403-404). Furthermore, the over-reliance on the interview and its associated devices (from tape to digital recorder) has limited the sociological imaginations of researchers who have at times selected the means ahead of the questions of their studies (Silverman 2007; Back 2010). In contrast, the

photograph does more than illustrate; it illuminates and alerts us to things that cannot readily be seen in real time. But working with the visual requires 'skilled vision' (Grasseni 2004) both on the part of the worker being observed (as we discuss in detail later) and as an element of researchers' practices (Tiragallo 2007). Our own ways of visually documenting the fishmongers' work emerged from how we came to understand the way in which the visual was being used by them and how it relates to other skills and senses. Our questions to the fishmongers at the start of the project about precisely what they were doing revealed to us some of what they saw and informed what we then photographed. We can identify several aspects of the use of the visual in this research: looking in situ and looking in situ with the camera (research practices), both of which took place in relation to conversation with the fishmongers; looking at the images produced (data); juxtaposing the images to draw out questions about the work pictured (analysis); and putting images together, at times with sound, to convey gestures, skills and practices in work (representation), including what cannot readily be seen in the moment in which it is happening. Similarly, the recordings highlight the presence of distinct layers of sound that are hard to distinguish between when hearing them in real time (Makagon and Neumann 2008).

2.5 When we knew we wanted to publish this research and include several photographs in which the fishmongers are potentially identifiable, we returned to the market to ask explicit permission for the use of particular photographs. Unfazed by now by our interest, the fishmongers agreed without discussion, although Khalid especially appreciated the gesture. An inherent tension exists between creating ethnographic accounts that are more vital and empirically 'thick' and the consequence of such vivid data, which make people and places more easily recognisable and less anonymous. As a result we enter what has been referred to as the moral maze of image ethics (Prosser 2000). Our way of navigating a path through these dilemmas in the present research has been to combine a commitment to critical analysis, while returning to our participants to check repeatedly for both accuracy and consent.

Sensory sociology, work and the body

3.1 Over the last decades, the body has become an object of sociological enquiry (for example Shilling 2007). The growing interest in the body and the experience of embodiment in different spheres of life include work and the working body. There has been attention to all the work people do on their own bodies to maintain themselves as 'fit for work' (Shilling 1993). More recently the concept of 'aesthetic labour' has been put forward to refer to 'the mobilisation, development and commodification of embodied "dispositions"' (Witz et al. 2003: 37) in work, especially in customer-oriented, front-line service work. In addition, 'body work' is now recognised as a distinct form of work that involves a direct physical relationship to the body of another person (Wolkowitz 2002).

3.2 Alongside attention to the body, there has been an emerging interest in the senses, including in work and especially in relation to 'craft'. Craft-based forms of work rely on a 'corporeal comprehension' (O'Connor 2007) of the manipulation of tools and materials, which is achieved over time and through varying configurations of sight (usually) and touch (Sennett, 2009). There are shifts in these forms of work between the 'flow' of unthought bodily actions, sedimented into ***habitus***, and cerebral aspects of an activity which may give rise to interventions in practice. However, in spite of these developments, at the present time we have limited understanding of how it feels to be embodied and of the deployment of the senses in working life (Wolkowitz 2006; Hockey and Allen-Colinson 2009: 218).

3.3 Our understanding of embodiment and the deployment of the senses in work and employment is limited in terms of our understanding of how it feels to be embodied in working life and of the specific deployment of the senses in work and employment is limited in terms of the volume of research in this field, how skill or craft become embodied, and how they are used in different contexts. There is a small but growing body of research that considers the embodiment and sensory dimensions of work. Existing research includes Doug Harper's (1987) ***Working Knowledge***, a close study of Willie, a small-town mechanic, and his problem-solving capacities; Erin O'Connor's (2007) detailed account of glassblowing; and Cristina Grasseni's (2004) analysis of the 'skilled vision' of cattle breeders. Overall, this strand of research adds up to a recognition of the embodied and sensory dimensions of work. The present research into fishmongers' labour makes a contribution to this field by documenting work that is under-researched, and by analysing this work in novel ways. It offers a detailed analysis of this labour by drawing on conceptualisations of craft (Sennett 2008) and skill (Ingold 2000), and by demonstrating the methodological gains of combining visual and aural methods with text. What we offer through the use of multimedia are representations that evoke the sensuous and embodied nature of work, as well as portraying the cultural texture and history of the places in which it is conducted.

Deptford: a topography

4.1 Deptford, located on the southern bank of the Thames to the east of the city, has long been part of London's riverside economy. Ships were built on the banks of the Thames, known as the 'jugular vein of empire' (Linebaugh 1991: 409-410). The river also provided the city with food. Billingsgate was constituted as a free and open market for the sale of fish by an act of Parliament 1699. Walter Thornbury, writing of the Lower Thames in 1878, cited a Parliamentary Committee which stated that in 1798:

> '400 fishermen, each of whom was the owner of a boat, and employed a boy, obtained a good livelihood by the exercise of their craft between Deptford and London, above and below bridge, taking roach, plaice, smelts, flounders, salmon, shad, eels, gudgeon, dace, dabs' (Thornbury 1878: 47).

4.2 In the nineteenth century, Deptford was called the 'Birmingham of the South' because of its distinctive local culture based on riverside manufacturing industries. Deptford market itself actually dates before this time, to the eighteenth century, and the market and the fish that are sold there are one of few remaining constants from these eras. The docks and industries which flourished there during the nineteenth and early twentieth century have now closed. The revolution in containerisation during the 1960s meant that cargo could be unloaded at the ports of Tilbury and Dover and driven by road. London became obsolete as a port along with the dockside workforce and the established industrial working-class communities.

4.3 Through the high point of empire this part of London was always cosmopolitan. From the 1950s it became a place of settlement for citizen migrants from the Caribbean, largely from Jamaica. Additionally, south London provided a home for Turkish Cypriots during the 1970s, Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s and, from the 1990s, West African migrants from Nigeria and Ghana. In the twenty-first century, the presence of eastern European migrants from Poland and Lithuania and South American migrants from Brazil and Columbia have added further cultural textures to the area. Deptford market has increasingly served as a kind of agora of multiculture in which the traces of social and cultural change are manifest on market days. Smelts and dabs are no longer taken from the Thames at Deptford, however, and today fish for the market are flown in by air and transported by road inside refrigerated containers.

4.4 Our story then is a tale of one street market and two fishmongers. We explore the place of the senses in the work of fishmongers and their different cultural configurations in moments of work. Our ethnography shows that the trade in fish is not a fixed craft. While there are skills that are embodied and passed on over generations, we show how newcomers to the business develop new tactics suited to the changing cultural dynamics of London. We argue that our ethnography of fishmongers illuminates both the sensuous nature of work but equally it shows the changing dynamics of the urban forms of multiculture in which they ply their trade.

The making of a fishmonger I: A 100 years in the business

5.1 Our first encounter in the market is with Charlie. He's a white Londoner, and the oldest surviving member of a family fishmongering business that's been operating on Deptford High Street for three generations. Les asks exactly how long the business has been going:

> 'About a 100 years', Charlie replies. At one time, 'in the old days, we had a pub next door. We had a fish fryer in the back and on Saturday nights when I was a boy the family used to serve battered fish to the customers from the pub. We're the only family-run fishmongers left in London.'

5.2 Indeed, all but one of the people working in the shop and on the adjoining stall today are family members: Charlie's wife, Julie, sometimes works with him or sells eggs and other produce next door. She

used to run the stall they had at Billingsgate. More recently, his teenage nephew, Tom, has joined him to learn the trade. 'Are you teaching him some tricks?' Dawn asks. 'Yes, but you have to go slowly. The knives, they're dangerous'. One of Charlie's sons, Gary (now around 50), is 'keeping on the tradition', according to Charlie. Gary, meanwhile, is planning a very different future (more on that later). Charlie's other son is also in the business but in a different socio-economic context, selling sea bass to people who 'don't ask the price' in North London.

5.3 As a young man with an entrepreneurial flourish, Charlie sought to prove himself in a different field. He left the family business and went into trading fruit and vegetables. Some years later, he returned to fish, with the accumulation of generations of knowledge still at his fingertips. So one way or another, he's been in this game for some time.

> 'How long?' Dawn asks.
> 'Well, I'm 72 now so about 60 years,' he replies.
> 'And how did you learn?'
> 'Well, you just do it, don't you?'

5.4 Charlie's response to the question of learning the trade can be read in two ways. First, the refusal to give a verbal account may be an implicit recognition of the inadequacy of words to convey the depth of knowledge gained over decades that is in his muscles, felt through his skin, and dependent on cerebral and visual judgements too. These are, after all, capacities that are 'cultivated, like any skill, through practice and training in an environment' (Ingold 2000: 283), through 'practical hands-on experience' rather than explicit formalised knowledge (Ingold 2000: 291). If they are generally not amenable to articulation, this is perhaps especially the case at the time we ask our questions. He is working as we watch, fish scales flying, while the teasing exchanges of the market punctuate our discussion.

5.5 Second, Charlie likes to present himself as if he has always known how to do what he does, effectively claiming his skill as a 'prior property' (Ingold 2000: 291), and thereby erasing a time of not knowing, when he might have made mistakes or sustained injuries. He sidesteps Dawn's repeated questions about whether and how he might have hurt himself in the recent or distant past, but does not object to our taking photographs while he is cleaning, cutting and filleting with his fingers and knives. And when we take him copies, he seems amused by the close focus on his hands. This then opens the way to further conversations, sometimes prompted by our own readings of the images. Over time, we gather an understanding of how he claims discrete skills for fishmongers, what they know about fish and about handling and working on fish.

5.6 We pursue a similar line of questioning with Charlie's son Gary. 'How do you know what to do to what fish?' Dawn asks. His is a very different kind of response, where learning is more specifically situated in a life trajectory rather than something that has saturated his early years, as in Charlie's case. 'I was taken out of school because I was disruptive,' Gary explains, and sent to work on a ship at the age of 14. He was taught by a blockman (someone who cuts and prepares fish), an older man who had been in the trade since he was nine, according to Gary. As a result of this experience, and no doubt through being Charlie's son, Gary too has a deeply embedded knowledge of fish. He does most of the buying these days, starting his days at 3am to go to Billingsgate two or three times a week. Gary is proud of his experience, however tough it was, and his knowledge. 'I've seen things Jim's never seen,' he states. Jim is the only person who currently works for the business who is not a family member, although this relationship has a long history. At more or less the same age as Gary, Jim has had three shops of his own and more than 30 years in the business. Still, there are some things he simply does not know, cannot know, according to Gary, without Gary's experience and connection to the sea.

5.7 If gutting and filleting, cleaning and sorting are forms of work that have been disciplined into Gary at a bodily level – work as an 'incorporating practice' (Connerton 1989: 72) – when we first meet him in 2008, he was resistant to this as a determinant of his future and was planning to leave. He bemoans the impact of being in the fish business, with such early morning starts limiting opportunities for a satisfying social life, and he dislikes the cold and wet environment of this work. He would be happy never to gut a fish again, he says, as he bleakly works his way through sackfuls of scallops. Then in 2009 he married a Polish woman who he had met in London, and they set up home together in Poland (although we have since learned that he has returned to Deptford).

5.8 The claim to knowledge of fish, and being positioned through knowledge, is the currency of fishmongering. Over the course of our visits, Charlie talks in detail about the appearance, quality and provenance of the fish he works on. For instance, he explains the colours of different snappers, arising from the different corals they feed on. He talks about the size of a mature halibut and evokes its cold Atlantic habitat. He has a deep sensory connection to the fish as material, object and product of his labour. It sets fishmongers apart, both from chefs who perform and from supermarkets as suppliers of only poor quality fish, according to Charlie. Making money certainly counts too but it is 'knowing your fish' that brings recognition and respect. Interestingly, there are quite firm boundaries to this knowledge and neither Charlie not Gary are comfortable discussing recipes, although they do take part in conversations with customers about what they will cook. They have developed a keen sense of how the market for their fish has changed as the local population has become more culturally diverse. They import fish from all over the world to serve the local tastes derived from the international pathways of migration that have converged on London. Overall, Charlie is not modest about his knowledge, as you can hear.

Image 3. Charlie (Hover mouse over image for sound)

5.9 There's craft in what the fishmongers do to fish, in handling, gutting and filleting and thereby knowing the fish quite literally, inside out, through sight and touch. When watching the fishmongers work, we can observe how their bodies 'harbour a way of understanding the world that comes out of the physicality of their work' (Zandy 2004: 4). We watch them exercising capacities of care, judgement and dexterity (Ingold 2000: 291) through fine gestures and a 'focal awareness' (Sennett 2009). But it does not end there. On the market, they work on the fish alongside working the crowd. In both dimensions of work, skill is both 'a form of knowledge and a form of practice', 'both practical knowledge and knowledgeable practice' (Ingold 2000: 316).

5.10 We can see both dimensions of work – on the fish and on the customers – in the sequence of Jim below which shows him with his hand on the fish while also turning to the crowd. The value of the sequence is that it gives the viewer a sense of the fluidity of activity and interaction. Jim is in the fish – his thumb is literally holding his place inside it – and he is in the social interactions of the market in the same moment. There are connections between these two dimensions of fishmongers' work. The possibility of pausing in the labour of preparing the fish facilitates exchanges with customers (unlike glassblowing for instance, or playing a musical instrument). Jim can talk alongside slicing and cutting the fish, or he can pause to perform his market persona during short intervals when he takes a moment away from the concentration required to shape the fish.

Image 4. Sequence of Jim

5.11 Close-up images of Jim's hands (the two images on the left below) demonstrate how bodies, fish and tools interconnect. Fingers are like knives and knives are the extension of fingers. Ingold's contrast between the artisan 'handling their own tools' and being 'guided by his [***sic***] own perception' and the predetermined motions of the machine (Ingold 2000: 289) make sense in these photographs. However, the tool is 'not a mere mechanical adjunct to the body, serving to deliver a set of commands issued by the mind; rather, it extends the whole person' (Ingold 2000: 319). In the images to the right, Charlie has just made the first cut into a fish. His glove protects his fingers from the razor-edges of gills: 'Your hands would be torn to shreds if you tried to do this', he remarked to Dawn. The red of the glove is striking, especially against the white of the body of the fish; it symbolises the guts he is separating from the flesh and is a reminder of the fish as once living. The dirt on his clothes and body evidences the labour of making the fish 'clean'.

Image 5. The fishmongers' hands

5.12 Furthermore, the fishmongers' competence relies on the development of a sense of timing, and a specific order of the occurrence of action. There is coordination between Charlie and Jim in the passing of knives and pieces of fish. These working practices are underpinned by a highly developed awareness of sensation, a kind of 'tuning in' (Ingold 2000), especially through skin and muscles. There is a parallel to the work of Willie, a small-town mechanic, in Doug Harper's book ***Working Knowledge***. Willie, using his hands and tools, has a 'tactile, empirical connection [to his materials]' – Harper writes – 'that leads to smoothly working rhythms [...] and the interpretation of sounds and subtle physical sensations' (1987: 118). Or to the way Erin O'Connor (2007), in her account of glassblowing, learns, over time, to feel that kind of bodily connection to her materials, something that becomes a non-reflective practical knowledge. We might go as far as to say that the tools used to work on the fish, and even the fish itself, are 'integrated' into the 'sensori-motor apparatus' of the fishmonger (Warnier 2001: 7). In Gary's case, this is hard to shake off and out of the body.

5.13 The materiality of the fish is also an important part of this story. The fish can appear to be malleable, to resist the fishmongers' hands, to be made to bend or break if the gesture or pressure is not right. Charlie likes referring to his 'feel' for the fish. One day he tells Dawn about gutting and cutting a 40 kilo tuna earlier that morning: 'I cut around the collar, then cut a line along the back, put my hand in to push the flesh and it just fell away from the bone.' He looked up then added, 'It would take you years to do that'.

5.14 It might be that there is something particular about this form of work, in which the object of labour is the dead flesh of a once-living creature (as is also the case for the labour of butchers, abattoir and poultry workers). In occupations like these the experience of work does not only demand tacit and embodied skills and knowledge, but also involves bodily labour on the fleshy materiality of a recently living thing. There is considerable affect in the ways Charlie, Gary, Jim and other fishmongers we have talked with refer to fish, often through a vocabulary of beauty, especially as regards colour, as well as shape and texture. There is a temporal dimension to this relationship too as the fish, which is frequently talked about in terms of vitality, even days after its formal death, quickly fades in colour and vigour until it loses its value for exchange and can no longer be worked on or revived by the touch and labour of the fishmonger.

5.15 Finally, the temporal rhythms of fishmongering can quite literally be heard on the market and this gives us another way into understanding this work. As we stand at the stall in the midst of noisy happenings, movement and flows, in our attempts to hear what is going on, we find ourselves 'grasped by' the rhythm of the activity (Lefebvre 2004: 27). In the sounds accompanying the images here (which were not necessarily recorded in the same moment), it is possible to hear and sense the body at work. The banging of a mallet carries a force. It is heavy and unrestrained, but there is a looseness in the grasp to let the weight of it do its work. It is a particular combination of minimum force and release, mutually coordinated by hand, eye and brain (Sennett 2009). The knife cuts into the head of the fish to start, then the mallet guides it further through the bone. As they slam the blade into the slab, the fragile metal frame of the stall itself shakes. Standing in the market we can feel it move, and see the fish increase in size as its mouth emerges in a perfect double profile, inside and out, as in the images below.

Image 6. Working on fish (Hover mouse over image for sound)

Image 7. Working on fish (Hover mouse over image for sound)

Image 8. Working on fish (Hover mouse over image for sound)

The making of a fishmonger II: Craftsman of urban multiculture?

6.1 Just down the street from Charlie is another shop and stall that sells fish. It is run by Khalid, who is in his late forties and originally from Kashmir – 'a country without any sea!' he laughingly reminds us. He works 'every day but Christmas', with other family members, including cousins and nephews. Khalid has been trading on the High Street for ten years. Initially, he was in business with his brother and they had a greengrocer's shop. They separated amicably and Khalid's brother started a new business trading in cosmetics and Afro-hair produce. Khalid sells fish, Halal meat, poultry and other 'hard to find' products aimed at the local multicultural population. 'I am originally from Kashmir,' he explains. 'We don't have no fish, we have lakes, mountains. […] We have dams very close and there is some fresh water fish but we have no knowledge about fish; everything I learned is [from] here.'

Image 9. Khalid's shop

6.2 Khalid folds his fingers together in front of him as he speaks - over a cup of tea in a local baker's - and we can smell the fish on his hands. What if, as in his case, you don't have the tacit knowledge of generations at your fingertips as Charlie does? How do you ***become*** a fishmonger?

6.3 Khalid explains that he learned the trade on the banks of the Thames, to buy and to fillet, although he is actually quite vague about this. Working on the fish is not the showpiece of what he does. He does not position himself in the centre of the street, shouting to passers-by to pull them in, as does Charlie. Indeed when one of his cousins raises his voice, he asks him to speak quietly, to be gentle. His business strategy is much broader than Charlie's, and involves marketing a wider range of products. What to stock, he explains, he 'learn[t] from the customers':

> 'If a customer passes by and they have a plastic bag that is transparent then I look at what they have bought down the road. I learn from the customers.'

6.4 If Jim works the crowd while he is working the fish, gathering them into his spectacle, Khalid observes the performance of the crowd. He reads the visual scene, but it is a very different application of the visual in his work from that of Charlie and Jim. Khalid trades on his attentiveness. He evokes other worlds such that people – potential customers - already recognise themselves in the spaces he creates. For him, it's not just about fish. There are other kinds of carefully selected products for the customer to look at whilst he's skinning or filleting quietly behind the counter. His work relies on his eyes more than his hands, sight more than touch. He uses his knowledge in a conscious way to create displays and to draw people in. Sometimes a blunt instrument works well enough, as in the image of 'sexy fish' above.

6.5 Khalid is probably more in tune to the cultural dynamics of this part of south London and its complexities of migration than any policy-maker or sociologist. He makes this his 'edge', his angle. In Charlie's case the selling is easy, it's the buying that is important: if the fish is cheap enough the selling will take care of itself. While Khalid has many other skills, the key trick in his trade is an ability to pay attention to changing patters of consumption and the tastes of the area's multicultural inhabitants.

6.6 Things have not always been easy for Khalid because the fish trade has its own hidden rules. Initially, he could not understand why the fish he bought from the suppliers at London's Billingsgate market were so expensive. The local trade in exotic fish was controlled by two people and one of them was his rival along Deptford High Street. 'I felt it was very unfair. Like me and you going into Tesco's and you buy the loaf for 30p and I am getting it for a pound.' He was being frozen out by Charlie's network. He had to get into what he describes as the 'psychological side'. So he mobilised his relatives and shopkeeper friends in southeast London and started buying fish for an informal cartel of Asian shopkeepers in Peckham, New Cross and Greenwich.

> Where they go [to Billingsgate] and buy five boxes of sea bass I buy 50 boxes of sea bass and now I pay less than Charlie. He doesn't know. He thinks I sell 50 boxes a week in the shop. He sees me buy 50 boxes and he watches the porters bring the fish out at Billingsgate and that makes me feel good. I walk in the market head high – I pay everybody. Here this is a cash business. I don't make money out of my friends but I get the boxes a pound cheaper.

6.7 There are convivial relationships between the two rivals. 'He is an elder in the market and he should be respected.' Khalid is not embittered but feels vindicated. 'There was nothing racist about it…' he says, although the details of these events suggest that the informal structure of fish trade has ways of excluding newcomers and maintaining its internal networks and boundaries, and Charlie on occasions has expressed his dismay at the cultural changes that immigration has brought to the High Street (Back 2009: 201). Regardless of this, when Charlie went to Poland for his son's wedding it was Khalid who bought fish for him from Billingsgate and made sure that the shop was properly supplied.

6.8 Khalid is a fishmonger but he is not dependent on selling fish. He has diversified and sells a wide range of produce – as in the images below – much of which is tailored to the tastes and desires of the diverse range of migrant communities that have made Deptford their home. The way the stock is laid out inside Khalid's shop is like a map of the local ethnoscape. There is a space dedicated to Brazilian customers; there is the contaduro that he sells to the Colombians, which he tells Les in hushed tones are thought to be an aphrodisiac; there is the cultured milk that he sells to Black Zimbabweans and South Africans, many of whom are nurses and part of the international labour force that staff Britain's National Health Service.

Images 10a, 10b and 10c: Produce in Khalid's shop

6.9 Through his watchful eye, Khalid undertakes much of the work of 'singularisation' and 'qualification', usually conceptualised by scholars of consumption as a joint activity conducted by both buyers and seller, through which 'the gradual definition of the properties of the product' emerges. For a sale to take place, the product needs to be 'shaped in such a way that it can enter the consumer's world' (Callon and Muniesa 2005: 11), to be moved from a general commodity to something specific for the customer, and that is what Khalid does so well. Customers already see their worlds in Khalid's version of them, and the thing, the fish or other product, becomes integrated into the customer's world, through a seamless process of 'attachment'.

6.10 Khalid does not advertise in the local newspapers, but he has had key rings with the shop's name on them made, decorated with a range of different national flags, and national flags adorn his shop. He sells cheap and/ or speciality items that remind people of home, which can only be brought from him at a price: 'The customers teach you everything. The Columbians, Brazilian want four items – they want coal, sea salt and steaks and the beers – we don't sell beers.'

6.11 Khalid's is a globally accented and heterolingual trade. His approach is best illustrated by the case of the 'Chinese chicken'. There is a long-established ethnically Chinese community in this part of London, composed mainly of Chinese-speaking Vietnamese people who settled in this part of London in the mid 1980s. 'The Chinese go to the Chinese to buy,' Khalid says. 'I noticed that they had these particular kinds of chickens.' They were bagged, small and had Chinese writing on them and Khalid had found out that they were being sold for £4 a chicken. He sourced the chickens and found out that they only cost £2.50 each. He started selling them three for £10 and soon the local Chinese speaking community were coming to him. 'When the customers come along we hold the bag and say: Chai [chicken].' His Chinese competitors complained to the supplier only to be told that it sold to Khalid at exactly the same price as the other stall holders on the market.

Discussion: Conviviality, work and place

7.1 The two quite different cases of fishmongers' labour presented here each tells us about the construction of particular kinds of spaces of work that are enacted through work itself. Charlie's stall is literally in the street, surrounded by the flow of people and objects, in and of the market, deliberately set up there on Wednesdays and Saturdays (market days) as a setting for the social relations of the market.

Ingold points out that skill needs always to be understood in the context in which it is used: 'not an attribute of the individual body in isolation but of the whole system of relations constituted by the presence of the artisan in his or her environment' (Ingold 2000: 291). Charlie's and Jim's spectacular performances of work on the fish and their interactions with the customers in the market space, including the use of humour as a 'privileged medium of negotiation' (Porcu 2005: 74), produce the social relations of the market, relations which are often gendered. While Charlie and Jim are working on the fish, sexualised banter tends to dominate the process of exchange: 'I'll come over for dinner then, shall I? 'Are you cooking me dinner?' are amongst Jim's favourite lines. He also throws in references to Viagra or getting in trouble with his wife or the customer's husband; in short, he performs a version of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (Connell 1995). Unlike Jim, Charlie is not directly flirtatious. He asserts himself through his knowledge of fish and success in business. He knows more than others in the trade, as we heard earlier, and comes, as he once explains, 'from a top family'. His stance can be read as a form of competitive masculinity (Collinson and Hearn 1996).

7.2 Khalid's conduct contrasts strongly to Charlie's and Jim's. Whilst Khalid is also an astute businessman, there is not the same sexualised interaction in his shop, although there is a blatant instrumentalisation of sex in his provocative 'sexy fish' label. His labour is motivated by and expresses a more paternalistic form of masculinity (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Khalid's shop and stall might be characterised as a space of encounters and multicultural conviviality. Gilroy describes such forms of conviviality as 'local and specific', as emerging within an 'unfolding of cultural formations' that 'do not announce themselves, preferring to remain hidden and unpredictable' (Gilroy 2004: 161). More generally, Deptford market is one such space of habitable conviviality but it is also paradoxical and not a simple or romantic utopia: it is multiculture at work. There are ambivalences and rivalries and not just between Khalid and Charlie. Khalid's brother sells skin lightening creams and hair relaxing agents to African and Afro-Caribbean customers and sometimes 'coloured yobs'- as he refers to them – come and 'make trouble'. There are also the controversies over who can and cannot sell 'Chinese chickens'. An unruly and unstable sense of a convivial community of difference is established as Khalid sells through and across difference. This is part of his trade – one might characterise him as a craftsman of urban multiculture. Khalid's qualities are closer to what Ingold describes as ***skill*** rather than craft. Ingold stresses the habitual form that skills take within a particular cultural context, which for him always involves 'qualities of care, judgment and dexterity' (Ingold, 2000: 291). He writes: 'They are like the map of an unfamiliar territory, which can be discarded once you have learned to attend to features of the landscape, and can place yourself in relation to them. The map can be a help in the beginning to know the country, but the aim is to learn the country, not the map' (Ingold 2000: 415). Khalid's skill is his ability to inhabit the map of urban multiculture to the point of attending intuitively to his customers and their dynamic cultural tastes and changing alimentary flavours.

7.3 In terms of the work itself, the distinctions made by Harry Collins (2010) between tacit and explicit knowledge are helpful here. For both Charlie and Khalid, there are elements of their work that rest on knowledge, skill and understanding which are explicit in the sense that they can be directly communicated to another person. However, for Khalid, breaking into the economy of fish (and other goods) required him to undertake the work of making explicit the 'relational tacit knowledge' (Collins 2010: 91) that Charlie and others effectively concealed from him. In a similar way, Khalid uses his 'practical attentiveness' and interactions with the customers to figure out and make explicit for himself their tastes and choices. It is no surprise then that he is hyper-conscious of the acquisition of his skill and knowledge in the ways he talks about his work. This is in strong contrast to Charlie, whose 'on the job' learning over decades and subtle understanding of the economy of fish steer him away from direct talk. Charlie is nevertheless explicit to us about some of his business decisions, although he leaves us with the sense that he could have said much more if he had so wished. In his work overall, this form of knowledge about the economy of fish is combined with his ability in handling the fish, or what Collins (2010) calls 'somatic tacit knowledge'. Charlie cannot fully articulate or explain these skills but they can be performed and observed. Collins argues that there is 'nothing mysterious' about tacit knowledge and the body's central role in its acquisition (2010: 8), although, as we argue and demonstrate in this article, close attention to how such work is performed and experienced deepens our understanding of the deployment of the senses and the body in work. Furthermore, it is helpful to disentangle the 'nature of knowledge' that underpins different aspects of work (Collins 2010: 104) in the overall labour of fishmongering.

Conclusions

8.1 As Carol Wolkowitz has argued the sociology of work needs to be much more attentive to the sensuous and embodied realm. 'If bodies R us' she writes, 'then our existence as embodied beings has to be integrated into the study of all employment, not treated as a separate field' (Wolkowitz 2006: 182). If we change our modes of attentiveness and admit multimedia forms of recording and representing work, does this change the way we think about work? We argue that in the case of the research presented here the photographs and sounds we selected and sometimes put together in sequences or montages help us to focus on the embodied and sensuous character of work. Taking and reviewing photographs and sounds helped us to establish what might count as relevant data and to identify directions for analysis, enabling us to see and hear what we could not quite comprehend in the moment, and alerted us to connections that escaped us when in the field. Later on in the research process, the images and sound together with the text can be used to evoke for readers the worlds of work under discussion, and convey more than we might say with words alone. More specifically, our ethnography emphasises the interplay of the senses – both embodied skill and practical attentiveness – in the craft of preparing and trading fish. Using photography and sound recording enabled us to access or evoke the surfaces and sensations, the touch, the smell and sounds of the experience of embodiment in work.

8.2 We have stressed two main points. First, an attention to the sensuous nature of work brings to the fore the interconnections of mind and hand, and knives and fish (tools and materials), but also listening to the background rhythm of the market allows us to access the interactive dimensions of the social staging of work that are not always remarked upon explicitly. Second, we have stressed the importance not only of craft but also how the training of attentiveness to the social landscape itself becomes a skill.

8.3 There is a lingering nostalgia for disappearing trades and skills. This can take an ethnocentric form that results in a kind of industrial melancholia, particularly where it coincides with a sense of loss of community (Strangleman 2007). In a way Charlie's business is one of the last remaining points of connection with the industrial dockland landscape of Deptford. The docks and the factories have closed and luxurious gated housing communities have been built in their place. Charlie is deeply sceptical about the future of the trade that he has mastered because of the cultural and economic changes taking place in London. Yet, the market and the fish trade have endured for three hundred years. There is a compelling lesson in this historical fact that suggests continuity even alongside periods of profound social change. The work of the trade changes, it adapts to the new historical and culture situation and takes on new forms.

8.4 Khalid's case shows that the labour of trading is not just a matter of embodied physicality with an emphasis on working with the hands. In his case, it is the deployment of a form of 'skilled vision' (Grasseni 2004) and explicit knowledge (Collins 2010) in conjunction with the work of his imagination that brings a diverse community into his shop. Khalid works on interpreting the social landscape, tactically making it work for him. He sells fragments of material culture and food that activate the sensuousness of diaspora. This globally accented trade links Deptford market not only to other places like Harare and Bogotá but also to other times, memories of home and past associations carried in and through food. Objects such as fish may offer us a way tracing the global interconnections that give local environment their vitality. Attention to objects also makes us resist the impulse to picture work exclusively through and in the body of the worker, allowing us to notice how Charlie's family fishmongers is doing something very similar to Khalid's practical attentiveness. Although Charlie has misgivings about the diversity of his customers, he says that he is able to read their tastes, providing, for instance, the cheapest lobsters in London at Chinese New Year and massive snapper heads for fish stews made in a West African style. In this post-industrial landscape new types of trade are emerging, formal and legal, or informal and illegal, such as those undertaken by the young Chinese DVD sellers who open themselves to the risk of violence selling bootleg copies of 'The Latest Harry Potter movie' in the local pubs. There is life and vitality, scams and dealing inside the decay, loss and melancholia. This is not quite the insecurity of the new capitalism populated by flexible workers (Sennett 1998; 2005), although it is certainly precarious. It is a form of sensuous labour in which workers need to read the cultural landscape in order work and trade within it.

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