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Doing real time research: Opportunities and challenges

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Doing Real Time Research: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper emerges out of a programme of workshops on Real Time Research, funded by NCRM during 2011-12, which brought together a network of interdisciplinary scholars to discuss the possibilities and challenges of doing research in real time. As well as these discussions, we also engaged in various exercises designed to give us practical experience of doing research in real time. The past, present and future are always brought together in social science methods, contributing to temporally significant modalities of enquiry, such as the ethnographic present, prediction or genealogy. But the workshops were designed to address the implications of the 'timeliness' of research in the context of an increasingly digitised and informational culture that allows access to, and creates dependences on, quantities of data gathered from diverse sources, often as soon as they are produced. The main questions we sought to address were: How are the dynamics of an informational society and digital culture transforming the temporality of methods? What opportunities are offered for research by the ongoing expansion of the present? And how can social science make use of the availability of real-time (immediately and continuously accessible) information? This paper explores the opportunities and threats of doing research in real time.

Introduction: from the pencil and notebook to the smart phone and iPad?

The tools and devices for research craft are being extended by digital culture in a hyper-connected world, affording new possibilities to re-imagine observation and the generation and analysis of research data. These developments are also inviting social researchers to reflect theoretically on the history and social life of methods (see Ruppert *et al* 2013, Ruppert and Law 2013). Equally, the politics of methods and the jurisdiction of academic researchers has been keenly debated (Savage, 2011; Savage and Burrows) The promise of 'real time' research is the capacity to re-order the relationship between data gathering, analysis and circulation so as to offer the possibility of simultaneity in research and the multiplication of viewpoints. This can be done collaboratively in real time through a pluralization of observers and the 'crowd sourcing' of data. However, we argue that technological enchantment should not cloud critical judgment. New devices cannot fix longstanding epistemological problems with regard to how the social world is constituted through the methods and techniques we use to make data and enact social life (Law and Urry 2004). We may be moving to a situation where the pencil and notebook are being replaced by the iPhone and iPad but these devices produce new kinds of methodological problems as well as opportunities.

Researchers of all sorts are now increasingly expected to engage with the digitally-mediated nature of social life in information based societies. But what such engagement involves remains open to debate. In a piece by Edward Said on *The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals*, he notes that with the greater distribution of digital networks, while we reach wider audiences than before, still "the chances of retaining that audience are by the same token quite chancy." (2001: 29). We also need to ask how to archive our real time research efforts in a context where the availability of not only the tools but also the infrastructure of our research is mediated via commercial and political interests that change rapidly. This issue was brought home to us recently when we realised the digital blog platform we had used to record some of our real time research endeavours had been acquired by Twitter only to be closed down. This served us as a cautionary tale about the risk of research being swallowed by a digital black hole. And as commercial use of transactional data makes clear, crowd-sourcing data is not necessarily most accurately described as collaboration. In short, what is meant by 'real time research' is hotly contested, and rather than having some fixed definition is better understood as the focus of a questioning of not only the relations between research subjects and objects but also of the distribution of data, research practice and expertise. As such, it is not so much a matter of technology or even of temporality as it is of the politics of methodology and epistemology, of what counts as 'social' (Lury and Wakeford 2012; Back and Puwar, 2012).

Indeed, we suggest that one way to think about the opportunities and challenges of doing real time research is to consider how 'the sociological' and 'the social' are being brought into relationship with each other in what is, variously, called real time research. Of course some disciplines have always collapsed the distinction between the study of an object or field and the object or field itself – perhaps the most significant example here being 'biology', a term that may be used to refer both to the study of living organisms and to the living organisms themselves. Another perhaps more pertinent example might be 'computing', a term where once again the distinction between the object of study and the study itself is conflated. So, for example, while sociology seeks to preserve a distinction between the sociological and the social, there is now, for example, a Centre of Social Computing (UC Irvine), and a growing number of exponents of what is called social analytics, a field which is developing in tangent with the established discipline of sociology. So it is worth considering how it is, on the one hand, that a new set of 'social' activities (such as computing but also 'social' networking, 'social' innovation, 'social' entrepreneurship) are emerging at the same time that the relevance and efficacy of sociology is being questioned inside and outside the discipline. And asking: what role does Real Time Research play in the reconfiguring of (or doing away with) the value of this distinction between the sociological and the social?[1] Is this an opportunity for interdisciplinary research or for the dispersal of some and not other expertise?

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[1] The same question might also be asked in relation to 'big data'.

This paper emerges out of a programme of workshops on Real Time Research, funded by NCRM during 2011-12 (see Appendix 1), which brought together a network of interdisciplinary scholars to discuss the possibilities and challenges of doing research in real time. The past, present and future are always brought together in social science methods, contributing to temporally significant modalities of enquiry, such as the ethnographic present, prediction or genealogy. But the workshops were designed to address the implications of the 'timeliness' of research in the context of an increasingly digitised and informational culture that allows access to, and creates dependences on, quantities of data gathered from diverse sources, often as soon as they are produced. The main questions we sought to address were: How are the dynamics of an informational society and digital culture transforming the temporality of methods? What opportunities are offered for research by the ongoing expansion of the present? And how can social science make use of the availability of real-time (immediately and continuously accessible) information? To understand both opportunities and threats we did not just want to talk about Real Time Research, we wanted also to do it, so alongside a series of papers and presentations, we also engaged in exercises designed to give us practical experience of doing research in real time.

This is not a luddite defense of sociology, holding the discipline apart from changes in its object of study. We take it for granted that digital devices offer the opportunity to augment sociological attentiveness, to develop (more easily) mobile methods that enable the production of empirical data (more or less) simultaneously from a plurality of vantage points. But we want to set this awareness alongside a (sociological) discussion of the analytical status we give the digital representations as data and also a question of the nature of 'the empirical' today (Adkins & Lury 2009). For example, what might be called spontaneous (or contingent) sociology, often described as Real Time Research, seems to be everywhere from My Space to YouTube to Twitter (see Murthy 2013). For us, this adds another dimension to the issue raised by Carolyn Steedman's question as to who is the interlocutor of stories of self (Steedman 2000) because today self-revelation and self-narrative are uploaded without invitation. Is there any longer, following Steedman's analysis, a 'silent other' that elicits such tales? Perhaps the injunction to personal revelation is now automated and automatic.

Upload culture and on-line social networks produce a kind of vulnerability - particularly for the young - that results in self-exposure. Thinking sociologically about real time research now also means navigating between the possibilities offered by digital culture while remaining cautious about the kinds of selves that are being produced through articulation of on-line experience (see also Kitchin and Dodge 2011). One way to think about this is in relation to the sociological desire to reduce for less violation, more democracy, a deeper ethical commitment. Real time research requires a digital sociological imagination to be committed in equal measure to innovation and critical reflection in data rich times (see Abbott 2000, Beer 2012). As Annelise Riles points out there is perhaps a warning to be found in the extent to which the notion of 'real time' itself is used in technocratic forms of power to foster market logic (Riles, 2004: 397).

What opportunities are lost when the generation and the analysis of data are collapsed, as the tools of on-line data collection bring them together in coding practices that are not visible – nor decided upon by their users? As Chris Renick writes, "In its early phase sociology had to create the data. Methods [were] signifiers of important beliefs".

The Opportunities and Problems of Real Time Research

The Real Time Research workshops offered an opportunity to examine the possibilities and challenges posed by the digital circulation of data. The workshops that took place over the course of a year in London, York and Coventry provided an opportunity to interrogate how the craft of research is being transformed within current technological and cultural environments. This debate was captured in real time by Les Back who wrote summaries and circulated them via iPhone to all the members of the network through the Real Time Research Blog (http://realtimeresearch.org.uk/). What follows is not so much a summary – a synthetic overview- as an attempt to capture the lines of enquiry, the vectors of insight, critique and transformation, of some of the key interventions in that discussion. They are postings not positions.

1. Noortje Marres ("Crawling and Scraping: Issues in Real-time Research", 3 December 2011) pointed out that textbook versions of the 'empirical cycle' usually separate out stages of sociological enquiry - data collection, data analysis and then dissemination. But digitization means that the empirical cycle of social research can be re-ordered so that analysis precedes collection; so, for example, Google scrapers may be used to analyse what people search for, transforming search into research. In a process of 'methods creep'. Data is formatted by the device.

2. Graham Crow ("The status of the here-and-now in re-studies and re-visits", 3 December 2011) talked about a project to repeat one element of Ray Pahl's work on the Isle of Sheppey (Pahl 1978). The project was animated by the belief that, 'Bringing archived data into the here and now can be vitalising'. In 1978, Pahl asked a group of 16 year olds to write short essays imagining that they were looking back on their lives as a seventy-year old version of themselves. Asking a young person how they imagine their lives from the vantage point of its end, both Pahl and Crow suggest, tells us a lot about how people see their position in the social world. The essays preserved by Pahl provided the basis for Crow's attempt to repeat the study and compare how young people might do the same exercise today. But changes in the wider media landscape provoked resistance: the written form of 'the essay' seemed very dated to the subjects of Crow's research who wanted to do a 'reality TV show' instead.

3. Gaia Marcus ("The Social Mirror", 23 & 24 March 2012) argued that social research has historically been on the side of its readers and researchers rather than its participants. By the time the analysis has been completed it is no longer an accurate reflection of the lives portrayed. Research is actually not *for* the participants even

though they are ostensibly the subjects of the work; the temporality of research methods is against them. The Social Mirror method being developed at the RSA is trying to tip the balance back towards the participants. So, for example, participant may choose to have their social networks represented back to the participants on a tablet almost immediately. There is another dimension here too, a looping reflexivity. The process of drawing and viewing social networks invites participants to reflect critically on their life in a potentially transformative way. The reflection in the mirror is enhanced and changed as a result. Marcus said, reflecting on the damage social class does in British society as a relative outsider, 'middle-class people think they make things happen in the world but for working-class people the world happens to them'. This offers another way to think about the potential value and impact of digital research methods for those people who allow researchers to share their time.

4. Mike Thelwall ("Large scale sentiment analysis in Twitter: Investigating reactions to media events", 23 & 24 March 2012) pointed out that large-scale sentiment analysis is possible using big datasets from Twitter. SentiStrength enables researchers to measure the strength of sentiment in tweets. Words are scored in terms of a statistical weighting and then text is filtered through a dictionary where sentiments are weighted. The device can also weight emoticons or altered, emphatic spelling like 'baaaad'. He discussed how the weighting of words for sentiment requires acknowledging how social media has changed language use: 'The social web has killed the word love'. The phrase "love ya" has become banal - a way of signing off.

5. Last.fm is a social network for music listening. People use Last.fm from a business perspective of recommendations - what gigs are going on, new releases you might like. Matt Taylor ("Using Last.fm data to do sociological research", 23 & 24 March 2012) argued what is sociologically interesting here is that you can analyse the way in which music consumption is effected by time and events by, for example, plotting how public reactions to celebrity deaths or world events are echoed in musical choices. You can also use the data to analyse changes in music genre and taste. This opens new possibilities for the sociology of culture. It complicates the debate about cultural omnivores and transcends the methodological debate that puts qualitative and quantitative approaches in opposition, cutting across macro-micro levels of analysis. This is not a cultural sociology that relies on what people say they are doing but an archive of what they do, how the users/consumers tag, organise and understand what they are consuming. Is this 'participant quantification'?

6. David Beer ("The value of vernacular sociology? From Last.fm's islands of music to the iPhone Mosaic app", 23 & 24 March 2012) reflected that there are ordinary forms of sociology going on in everyday life that we need to think about. Howard Becker's *Telling About Society* offers some clues about how we might expand the representational repertoires - or ways of telling - available to sociology or social research. The sociological imagination is everywhere in popular culture - The Wire, celebrity gossip, social experiment 'Tv Beauty and the Geeks' - but these investigations are not admissible in

the academic discipline of sociology. He asked, what role is left for the discipline of sociology when so many accounts of social life - informed by a sociological imagination - are in public circulation outside the academy. Mosaic, a free app for iPhone, enables profiling in terms of social attributes within postcodes, leading to an elaborate form of commercialisation of sociology. Ignoring these developments, he says, is a mistake. We need to think about how we might respond to the dense sociological narratives found across popular culture.

7. Robert Zimmer and Jenn Barth ("The Hybrid Social Researcher", 3 December 2011) talked about examples of the combination of computing and social science in the context of their work at Goldsmiths. We are moving toward a model of a 'hybrid social researcher' in which a range of skills will be important – being able to write python script, develop theoretical ideas and do an ethnography', Jenn said.

8. Emma Uprichard ("Injuring sociology with real time research", 3 December 2011) suggested that the danger of the 'real time' research agenda is that it is 'ridiculously focused on the present'. She argued that the focus on the present is bad for sociology. It diverts our attention from the dynamics of social change. Mills suggested that the promise of sociology should be concerned with the relationship between biography and history (Mill 1959). The emphasis on the 'now' within 'real-time research' may mean that sociology is breaking that promise and losing its connection to historical analysis and an attention to large-scale issues of social transformation.

9. Nathaniel Tkacz ("Time, critique, and Wikipedia Art", 10 & 11 July 2012) identified a common refrain in the discussions about real time - that the life we try to capture in research is always past or dead. So we write in the past but try to speak to the present. But we have to work in the time that we are given.

10. Nina Wakeford ("Liveness, 16mm film and the problematics of involvement", 3 December 2011) talked about some of her research with Intel and the real-time involvement of social science in a high tech corporation. She talked about how the concern within the company with 'the now' of technological and cultural life is always in the service of establishing 'the next' important social trend.
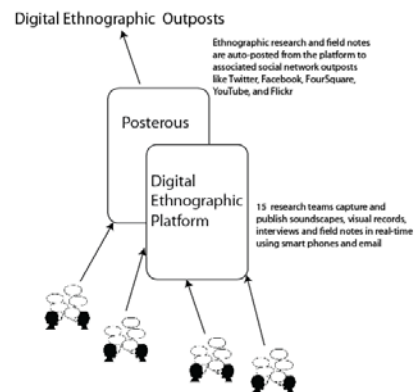
The workshops offered the opportunity to debate the practical and theoretical dimensions of real time research; however part of the ethos of the network was also to learn about these methodological possibilities through the trial and error of practical experience. We found, among other things, that doing real-time research cannot be done in an instant, but requires preparation and reflection.

Experiments in Real Time

    1.   **Uploading Ethnography**

In one of the workshops (*Uploading Ethnography: Developing a Real Time Archive*, Goldsmiths, 28 January 2012) we considered how ethnographic research may be augmented by conducting it in real time. Until the late twentieth century ethnographic research was set within a field framed by a particular sequence and set of time frames i.e. initial encounter, immersion and fieldwork, note taking, leaving the field and writing up often from afar. Ethnographies were written within 'the ethnographic present' that provided accounts of culture as if captured like timeless snapshots. Yet this version of ethnographic representation and authority has always been critically interrogated as ethnographers reflected on the implication of their own writing in the making of ethnographic texts. But the unprecedented level of connectivity that exists today poses a further challenge for researchers because the separation between 'the field' and the place of analysis and interpretation no longer holds (see also Murthy, D. 2008). The ethnographic present is expanding, resulting in the proliferation of ethnographic accounts that destabilise the relationship between 'the field' and the time and place of ethnography.

To consider how the relationship between field research and the production of ethnographic data transformed in an informational society and address the opportunities afforded by multi-media and on-line platforms for the creation of live ethnographic archives to be created in real time we experimented with the possibility of achieving simultaneity in the research process by trying to establish a 'real-time' multi-media (description, short interviews, still images, videos, commentary, all place and time located) archive. To add to this, our exercise in collective observation was intended to enable researchers – participants in the workshop - to be in dialogue with each other. Working in groups, participants travelled to our chosen ethnographic location – Deptford market - to record a sequenced series of soundscapes, photographs and videos, interviews, and field notes as real-time reflections on the ethnographic process. All this content is to be sent by smart phone to a web-based ethnographic platform published in real-time on Posterous, building in, so we thought, the possibility, of responses to each other. We set up a password protected closed space for this purpose. We would also have liked the platform to auto-post uploaded multimedia fragments linked to the ethnographic posts from social network profiles on Twitter, Facebook, FourSquare, YouTube and Flickr. In reality, while some members of the group were able to post responses the technology was too unfamiliar to many of the researchers to work. Another problem we found was that the quantity of the material being posted produced a cue and data bottleneck. Some of these problems

were technical, and we were able to solve them in a latter attempt, but other issues remained.

We only had limited time to analyse the date we did produce, but we became acutely aware that the process raised issues of the ethics – who is participating, who must be asked for consent, how can the data be used. We were also confirmed in our sense that quantity and quality of data do not necessarily grow together: group ethnographies or crowd sourcing data collection (and analysis) poses a challenge of an over-abundance that is hard to control or coordinate. Multiplying the vantage points of ethnographic observation makes it important to coordinate the network of observers.

Alice Corble and Alex Reynolds wrote on the Real Time Research blog: 'What does this mean – reality – time – research? Whose reality, and in what time? And what are we *re*-searching for? Reality as we experience it and reality as reproduced and reviewed later is very different. What kind of en-framing is taking place here? Technological en-framing, linguistic and narrative en-framing, not to mention the institutional and the disciplinary. Why do we collect snapshots of time, and which snapshots should we collect? We approach our task armed with a grid of questions and devices, and set out into the field with the hope that our immersion in the present moment will reveal a surprising world of traces from time present and time past.'

Later, having learned from this initial experiment, we used this platform in collaboration with Richard House, a Children's hospice in East London. A colleague at Goldsmiths, Yasmin Gunaratnam, had been approached by Richard House to help them find out more about the cultural landscape in which the hospice is located. The nature of the service they offer often means that while Richard House is very much a local institution it is not always well connected to the ebb and flow of East London life. This time, we trained in advance a group of researchers recruited in the techniques of uploading ethnography, and provided a set of research questions. We asked the young patients in the hospice to tell us about the places in the local area

that were significant to them. Also, members of staff in the hospice gave us lists of issues they were interested in arising from the deaths of members of different communities in East London. Informed by these cues we annotated a set of London Mini A-Zs to guide the ethnographers and sent the teams of researchers out into the local community.

The project was called *Every Minute of Every Day* and fieldnotes, photographs and sound recordings were posted on a dedicated Posterous website. The results were quite extraordinary with the outcome that through the work of the researcher the life of the local community was brought into the hospice, while the imaginations and curiosities of patients and staff were taken for a walk vicariously. Technological difficulties did not disappear completely - for example, the arrival of posts to the blog were not quite simultaneous with their sending, but we did manage to make the findings of our ethnography available within a few hours or days.

The content of the posts were varied and pluralising the vantage points of observation meant that each observer brought their own ethnographic imagination to what they noticed and noted. Here is an example of a series of posts all written by Les Back that were uploaded to Posterous on Saturday 6th April, 2013:

Post: Green Streets Wakes Up

9.45am Upton Park. It's striking how few people there are on Green Street on this cold bright Saturday morning. The silver shutters are still down on most of the shops as I walk north from the station. Slowly Green Street starts to wake up. One by one silver shutters get raised on shop after shop like eyelids. The street is quiet, calm and relatively empty. A shop keeper advises me if I want a cup of tea I should turn around and head back to the station.

At 10.30am the quiet is shattered by the wail of sirens as four police cars with flashing blue lights speed past followed by a police van. The street is awake now and by 11.00am it is full of people Saturday shopping. Above the Halal Meat Market there is a large flashing red sign. "You buy we deliver... Marinated tandoori... Jerk Peri Peri... Smokey Barbeque... 100% non-stunned". On the opposite side of the street The Queens pub has a sign on the door "Toilets for customers use only".

Sitting in Percy Ingle's Bakery making notes and drinking warm tea to combat an hour spent in the cold. The three young women working behind the counter are comparing London styles of driving. "In my country (Nigeria) people drive on the right hand side. They drive like crazy" she tells her eastern European colleague. Another police siren sounds in the background.

Looking up from cabinet of illuminated pasties and sausage rolls there is a sign describing the various kinds of bread on sale. One is dedicated to "Cholla - Traditional Jewish bread made with added sugar and eggs, hand moulded and topped with sesame seeds." East End cockney voices hang in the air with the sound of Polish words. The radio announces today is Grand National Day.

Tea is getting cold. On the pages of the annotated A-Z is a quotation from Italo Calvino: "The city does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows." I suddenly realise that for the first hour of today's fieldwork on Green Street I have been using the back of my hand like a page from a notebook.

Each of the ethnographers made images, sound recordings and wrote ethnographic notes. The detail of that material is beyond the terms of the discussion but here we simply want to illustrate how this process worked. The subject of the blog posts ranged from descriptions of Islamic funeral rituals to personal memories to descriptions of local graveyards. One of the iconic local places identified as significant by the young people was Upton Park, the West Ham United Football ground.

Here are a series of posts on this theme to illustrate the texture of the material and how it was made available to staff and patients at Richard House:

Post: West Ham's Garden of Remembrance

Walking past Upton Park, West Ham United's home ground, on Green Street there is a garden of remembrance near the entrance. Sally, who is having a cigarette break, explains that fans can have their ashes scattered there. "Jeannie Bell ashes were scattered there, she worked for the club. The priest comes and blesses them and everything" Sally says. I explain what I am doing and that we are helping Richard House find out more about the area. Sally is very helpful and says that I am more than welcome to take some pictures of the garden.
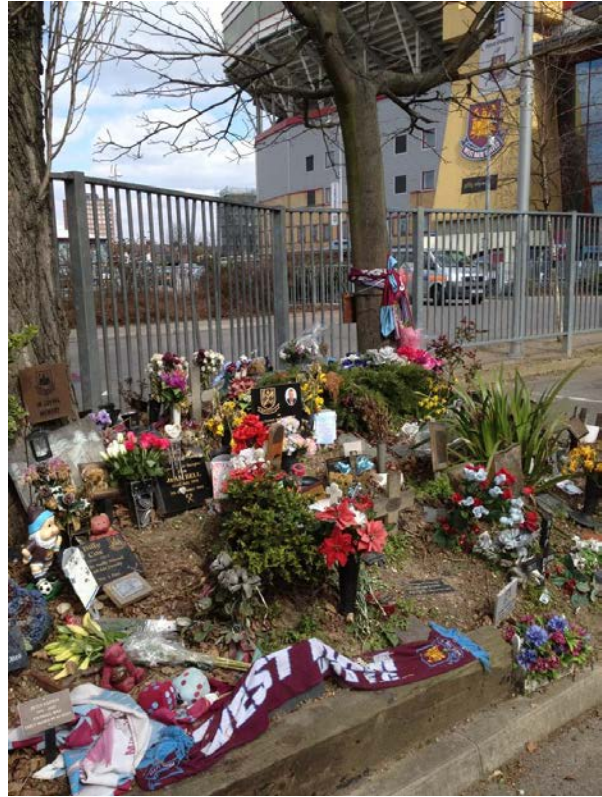
Post: Blessing True Hammers

The memorial services are conducted by Reverend Alan Boldin who is the club priest. "You can always tell him because he has 'The Reverend' on the back of his West Ham jacket explains a middle-aged man who works for the club. The garden is full of very moving tributes.

Post: Bringing in a bit of Newham Life: West Ham and Richard House

Inside the foyer Sally is now behind her desk. I explain again that we are working with Richard House and explain that part of what we are trying to do is bring a bit of Newham's life into the children's hospice. She wears her long blonde hair in a ponytail. I can see the fair skin on her neck is reddening as she is fighting tears back. "I just can't bear the thought of it" she says. "The lives of the young people in the hospice carries on and some of them are West Ham fans" I explain. She smiles regains her poise. Sally looks on the club website and realises that Richard House is one of the club's designated charities along with the Bobby Moore's cancer research fund.

Post: Flowers for Bobby Moore

At the southern end of Green Street is a life size sculpture of the famous image of Bobby Moore hoisting the World Cup in 1966.

Moving closer I can see a bunch of flowers and a picture of a young Bobby Moore in a Hammers shirt

Isn't it strange to use cut flowers as a gesture of remembrance? After just a brief time deprived of water the blooms always wither and quickly fade like this bouquet. Perhaps freshly cut flowers are a symbol of the beautiful and fragile nature of life itself.

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These posts illustrate how we used the blog format to create and circulate small and vivid ethnographic illustrations. For those following the *Every Minute of Everyday* blog the outcomes of the research unfolded in a series of episodes from different observers. As a result they added complexities about how people grieve and remember. This sometimes undermined taken for granted generalisations and assumptions about Newham's diverse communities. For example, on the same day that the preceding posts were written we visited Woodgrange cemetery, which has a dedicated section for Muslim graves. There were no flowers on the grave because there is no tradition of using cut flowers to remember a deceased loved one amongst the local Muslim community. In Islam flowers offer the dead nothing, rather the way to honor the memory of a deceased loved is to do a good deed or to make a charitable contribution.

The speeding up of the circulation of data and findings was a real advantage from the Hospice's point of view. Rachel Power, Director of HR and operations at Richard House, commented:

"Richard House Children's Hospice has an exciting 3 year strategic plan which includes how we provide support for the wider community to recognise its ability to respond effectively in dealing with death, dying, loss and grief. To do this we must get to engage and understand our community and therefore we were delighted to be asked to participate in the ethnographic work conducted by the students at Goldsmith's We have thoroughly enjoyed following the work and have learnt so much about our local community." (Email correspondence 7th June, 2013)

We asked her whether it was different being able to track on-line the unfolding findings?

"Yes it really was. It made it feel really live and as it was small amounts I was busy telling people at meetings what had happened." (Email correspondence 10th June, 2013)

The 'real time' dimension of the ethnography meant the partners and beneficiaries of the research could have an on-going relationship with both the research process and what was emerging from the ethnography.

The upload ethnography format posted on posterous also meant that the patients – all of them suffering with severe illnesses – could engage with the work *in their own time*, when they felt well enough and only if they wanted to.

Every Minute of Every Day provided a good example where speeding up the circulation of ethnographic findings using digital platforms enabled us to engage with users and readers differently. However, we were chastened to find out in March 2013 that Posterous - the free multi-media blogging platform we used – had been sold to Twitter who had decided to close down this resource. This posed an immediate problem and revealed some of the challenges in using digital platforms that are not necessarily stable long term. This meant migrating the material from both the RealTime Research and Every Minute of Every Day and reconstructing them in another blog space (see http://everyminuteofeveryday.org.uk/ and http://realtimeresearch.org.uk/). The unstable quality of digital formats makes data storage an ongoing problem and ultimately undermines the longevity of live archiving.

2. Wordrobes: Re-designing Observation

The combination of art practice with social research has been a recent source of methodological innovation in the social sciences (http://www.studioincite.com/activities/projects/index.html). At the same time, there has been a renewed interest amongst artists in the possibilities of qualitative social research. One example of this is Michael Needham's *Neighbourhood Watching Project* which uses site based work to vitalise 'dead spaces' but also creates a kind of auto-ethnography (http://www.axisweb.org/ofSARF.aspx?SELECTIONID=19210). However, there has been little opportunity to bring artists and
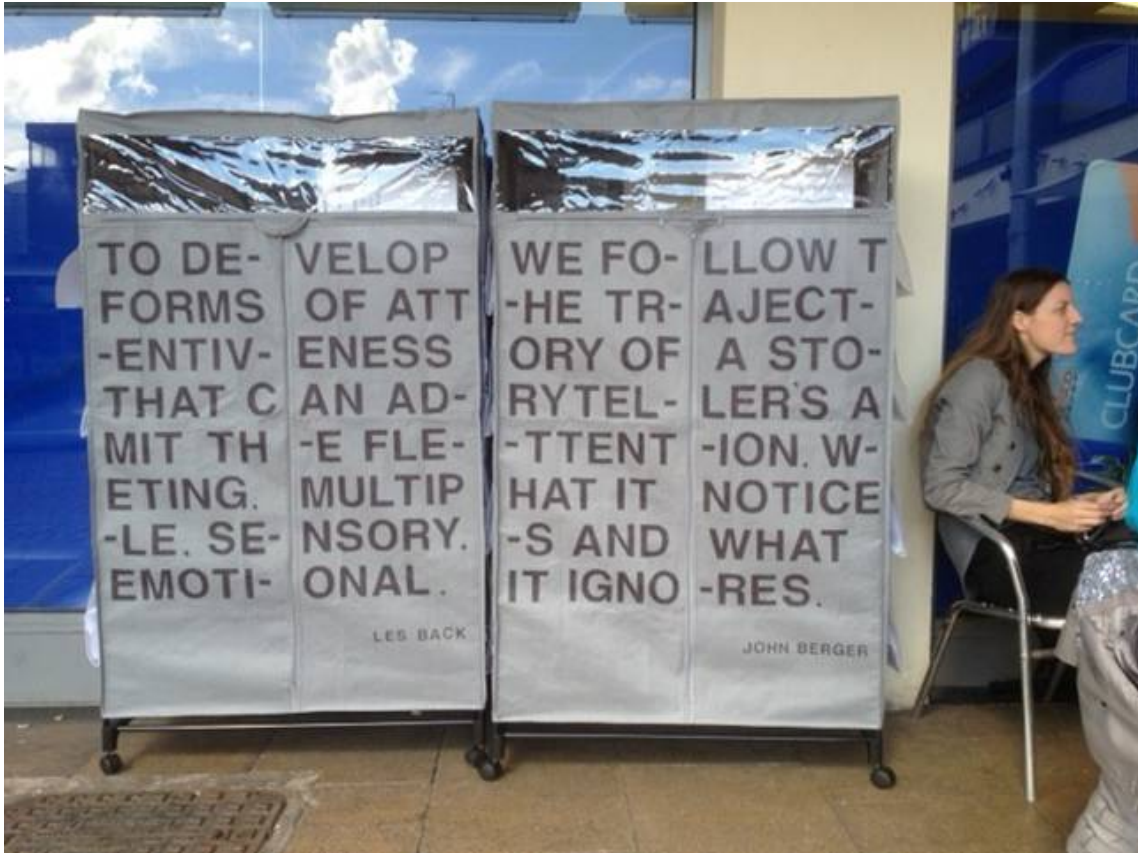
researchers together to share experiences and discuss the potential of installation methods and art interventions for researching the event-like qualities of social experience. Such interventions offer the opportunity to explore another type of real time research. We brought together practitioners and researchers to explore the possibilities of combining art practice and research methods.
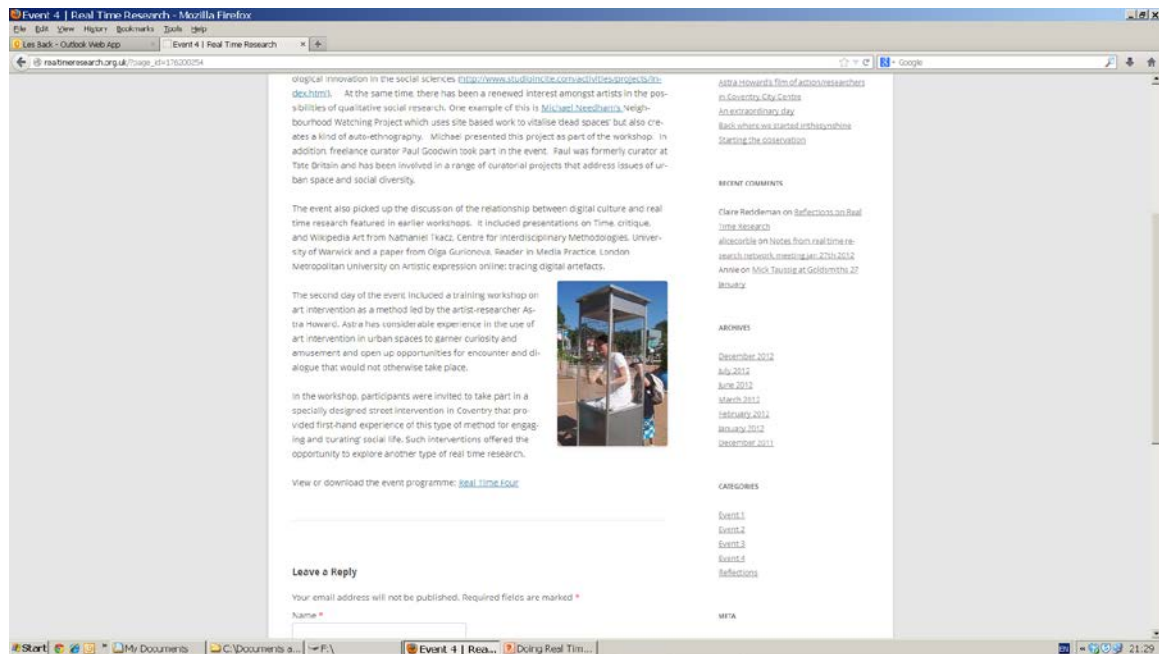
In another workshop ("New Modes of Telling and Researching Society" 10 and 11 July 2012), researcher and performer Astra Howard provided a radically different format for real time research. This is how she described what we did: **'**Participants will activate two enclosed portable 'observation vehicles', considering and recording their surroundings as they move through public space sites in the city of Coventry. The new field of vision transforms, as those involved map the local area, identifying details and interrelations that would otherwise go unnoticed in a less determined engagement with the city. These recorded (written) individual perceptions of place document specificities across several locations, the developing script attached to the outside of the vehicles, revealing to passers-by a broad range of observations and perspectives. The participant therefore acts simultaneously as an observer of social behaviour within the city and is, at the same time, the communication point of those observations, thereby creating a 'live and interactive' researcher/subject/recipient relationship.'

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JOHN BERGER

Our experience of carrying this out, suggested to us that we needed to be more playful in our approach to the idea of research: to try methodological experiments or art interventions and just see what happens. In this vein, we called the portable observation vehicles Astrid devised for us 'Wordrobes' (the suggestion of a colleague from Warwick, Cath Lambert). Talking about previous interventions, she described her work as something close to 'analogue blogging'. She takes her mechanisms for dialogue – and Wordrobes are only one - into a variety of spaces. In one instance, people are invited to write on a window and she responds writing backwards from inside the device: such public experiments create a boundary in order to facilitate dialogue and curiosity. The boundary (glass, canvas, box) creates social permeability rather than separation. In Brisbane, Astra set up a conversation booth. The booth provoked participants to offer up accounts and stories of urban frustration, curiosity and speculation, even queries as to whether the booth could be purchased for commercial purposes! In New York, Astra appropriated the generic 'I 'heart' New York T-shirt and superimposed stories of urban violence. Then she took the T-shirts onto the streets to sell. They provoked conversation and made people think about the commodified nature of urban space - typified by the T-shirt - and the complex loves and exasperations of New York life.
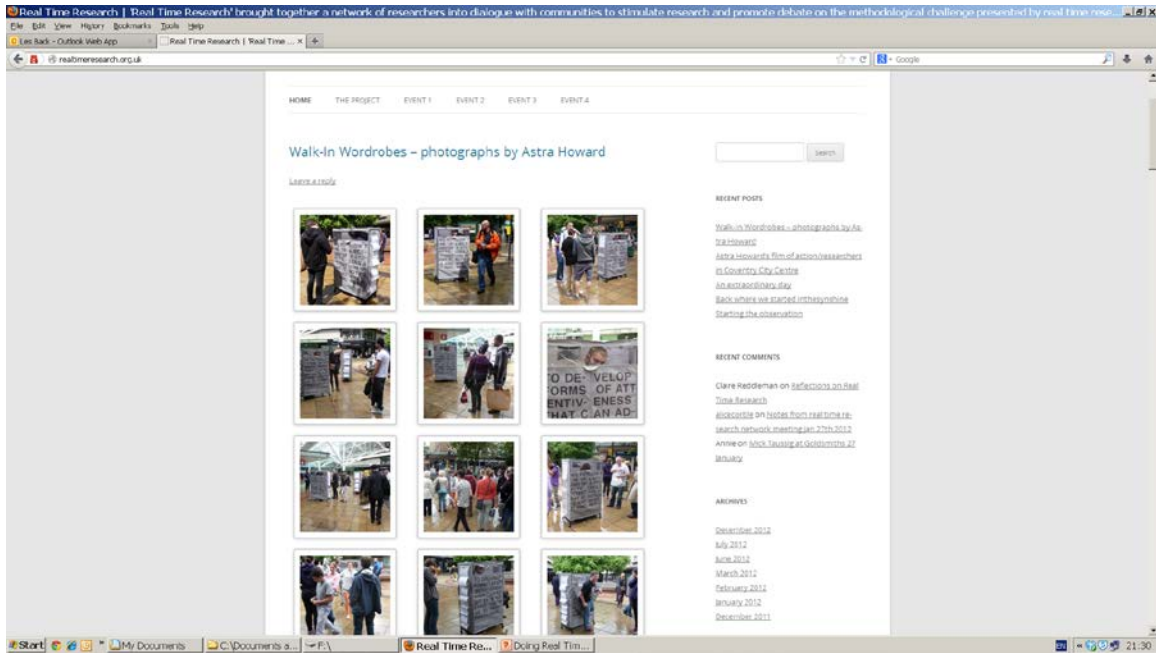
In response to our experience in Coventry city centre, blog observations included: 'It's so striking how people are drawn to the Wordrobes. It makes them curious, it makes them smile."

"The thing that is hard to explain is how joyous the whole experience has been. People engage with the Wordrobes and smile; they are curious. It starts a conversation."

Les: Would you like to try the observation?

"This is really interesting. I spent a lot of my time in boxes protesting animal rights and human rights. I'd like to try but I've got to go back to work."

Astra's Wordrobes produces an extraordinary experiment in ways of artfully generating conversation and dialogue in public space. Transforming the experience of Saturday afternoon shopping in Coventry, people were drawn to the booths: a passer-by said, "Something interesting is happening".

Conclusions: Between Technophilia and Technophobia

Through a mix of discussion and debate the Real Time Research project tested the opportunities that exist to re-think the craft of research today. We learned to question the naive sense that there is a 'technological fix' to longstanding epistemological questions. Instead we came to the view that a careful course needs to be navigated between a technophilia – that is enchanted with the digital devices – and a technophobia that dismisses the impact that digital media is having on the production of knowledge. In this final section we want reflect on what we have learned and also what others may take from this experiment in doing social research differently.

While the promise of simultaneity in research – i.e. to create and circulate data immediately – is a hollow one, the project made us think about the distributed spatio-temporality of old and new research devices. The relationship between the field notebook and time (in which the latest entries are last) are different from the ethnographic blog (where the latest entries are first). Our experiments with upload ethnography showed that the speeding up of the circulation of ethnographic descriptions and insights can lead to problems of cuing, abundance and data excess. Equally, the dangers of 'digital black holes' opening up – illustrated through our example of the winding-down of Posterous as a public platform – adds further difficulties beyond a simple matter of data storage. Put crudely digital formats and platforms may not endure because of the pace of technological change.

We have accentuated the inclusive possibilities in speeding the circulation of research material and using social media for public engagement (see also Kitchin *et al* 2013). However, as David Beer has pointed out 'the message' of the research is also likely to be transformed as a result. He warns: "Research [...] has always had a life of its own. If we are to drop our research into new media's data circulations then this research is likely to take on some vibrancy and unpredictability of these informational swirls. In other words, our research is likely to have a life that is even livelier. We need to be prepared" (Beer 2013a: 95). Conventional modes of academic dissemination have always had a preservationist quality and stepping outside of them is likely to be risky. Beer suggests this calls for an attention to the 'politics of circulation' (Beer 2013b). Our experience suggests it is a chance worth taking because in a social world full of screens and lives that are lived oscillating between them, as researchers we can no longer rely on paper formats alone to deliver an audience.

Our discussion of possibilities of 'real time' has also made us reflect upon the giving and taking of time in the craft of thinking, researching and writing. Speeding up that process can undermine the quality of thought and our engagement with the past in the present and undermine the importance of retaining a historical perspective. At the same time social media offers the possibility for the circulation and interaction of hunches. Trying out an idea in 140 characters on Twitter offers a sounding board to see if it resonates and is re-tweeted. As we saw in the example of the *All Day Every Day* project uploading

ethnographic insights can offer participants and non-academic partners the opportunity to engage with research *in their own time*.

Regardless of the problems in defining real time research, we suggest the re-ordering of the relationship between space, time and knowledge offers an invitation to cultivate a new kind of research sensibility. This might be described as a commitment to fostering imagination beyond existing parameters. To conceive of possibilities beyond the confines of what is currently thinkable. Secondly, it is the training of an attentiveness not only confined to the predominant lines of sight, the focal points of public concern or attention. What's within the broader depth of field? What we see or hear very often effects what we can imagine. A different attention fosters a wider sense of possibilities (see also Marres 2012).

The third part of the researcher's craft today is not only generating empirical information but also measuring and weighting or evaluating data. This is particularly relevant in a digital age and challenges the conventional understandings of validity since it requires us to focus on how methods make the social in the moment of representing it. This has always been applicable to all forms of information including academic knowledge, but the possibilities afforded by real time research make both the use of a wider range of media more accessible and extend the opportunities for participation.

Finally, ethical judgement is at the centre of research craft, never just a matter of simply seeking and getting past the "ethics committee". Research ethics is on-going practice. In a way social research has been inhibited and regulated through a kind of ethical hypochondria (Back 2012). One of the things that is exciting about vernacular sociology – with which real time research intersects - is that it isn't confined by such concerns. Nonetheless ethics as an on-going concerns with the consequences of using 'big data' or "transactional data' or scraping Twitter etc.[2] The tension between surveillance and respectful attentiveness remain at the heart of research act itself particularly in the Web 2.0 environment (see Fuch *et al* 2012). Reflective practice and a concern with the ethical dimensions of knowledge creation is one of the key qualities of mind that we are arguing for. Described in these terms, research craft is not just a method or technique but a sensibility.

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[2] The 2013 Digital Methods Winter School at DMI, University of Amsterdam is devoted to emerging alternatives to big data. The Barcamp, Hackathon, Hack Day, Edit-a-thon, Data Sprint, Code Fest, Open Data Day, Hack the Government, and other workshop formats are sometimes thought of as "quick and dirty." The work is exploratory, only the first step, outputting indicators at most, before the serious research begins. However, these new formats also may be viewed as alternative infrastructures as well as approaches to big data in the sense of not only the equipment and logistics involved (hit and run) but also the research set-up and protocols, which may be referred to as "short-form method."

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Appendix 1. Summary of Real Time Research (RTR) Events

The opening session was held at Goldsmiths on 3 December 2011, bringing together a range of researchers to discuss 'real time' research and to set an agenda for the project. In a series of presentations from members of the network and invited speakers, the day-long session considered the implications for ethnographic method brought about by the technology-enabled ability to connect the site of enquiry and the site of analysis, continually gathering and transmitting real time data from the one site to the other. Presenters discussed issues of temporality ("The status of the here-and-now in re-studies and re-visits", Graham Crow; "Chunks of Time", Carolin Gerlitz; "The Real Time of Politics", Nirmal Puwar; "Injuring sociology with real time research", Emma Uprichard), new forms of data and of data analysis ("Real Time Methods: Re-ordering the 'empirical cycle'", Noortje Marres; "Liveness, 16mm film and the problematics of involvement", Nina Wakeford; "Think Different: Why a rudimentary understanding of Computing concepts might be useful to a Social Scientist", Robert Zimmer and Jenn Barth) and sociological attentiveness (Introduction, Les Back; "Detours and Puzzles in the Land of the Living", Andrew Irving). Celia Lury closed the session by describing the network's future plans.

On 27 January 2012, Real Time Research presented a public lecture at Goldsmiths by Michael Taussig (Columbia University). Delivered to an audience of over 300, Taussig's lecture, "Occupy Ethnography", described his use of the fieldwork notebook as a type of modernist literature, the place where writers and other creators first work out the imaginative logic of discovery. It focused on his recent study of the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York. We invited participants attending the lecture to illustrate the ideas and we collected the doodles, drawings and sketches made during the talk. The lecture provided a vivid context for the first practical Real Time Research workshop on the following day (28 January 2012), where a group of students and researchers learned the technique of "Uploading Ethnography: Developing a Real Time Archive". Led by network members Jenn Barth and Chris Brauer, the workshop instructed participants in the use of mobile devices to conduct field research in a local street market. Data collected using smartphones and tablets, and taking the form of text, photographs, sound recordings and video snippets, was posted in real time to the project's test blog on Posterous, whilst a Twitter feed enabled participants to report fieldnotes and observations directly into the blog. Participants returned to discuss their experiences of these new ways of gathering data, reflecting on how the method transformed their approach to their research practice: "We have been walking, talking, looking, seeing, hearing, thinking, recording. We are struck by how the speed and immediacy of this form of research seems to concentrate our experience and thought processes. It's fascinating how the fleeting details are captured in the moment". Participants also debated the ethical implications of the method.

These public events were preceded by a closed network meeting, at which members considered the issues which had arisen from the first event, and planned the next stage of development, during which the network team would continue to explore the relationship between research methodology and new technology in real time.

Moving to the University of York, the third event took place over two days on 23 and 24 March 2012. Entitled "New questions for new times and new places", the colloquium asked academic speakers and network members to explore how changing 'times' and 'places' not only presented researchers with new social and cultural issues that needed to be pursued, but made changes which also allowed for new forms of social research to emerge. The presentations considered in more depth the theoretical background which had informed the practical workshop at Goldsmiths. At this point, 42 individuals had subscribed to the Real Time Research blog on Posterous; subscribers included network members and participants from the workshops and events, but also blog users who had found the site and decided to follow its progress. Posting live from the third event, Les Back was able to summarise and relay presentations to this unseen audience. The issues under discussion included the history of the survey method ("Methods in early British Sociology", Chris Renwick; "On the BBC Great British Class Survey", Mike Savage), new tools for survey methods ("Large scale sentiment analysis in Twitter: Investigating reactions to media events", Mike Thelwall; "Features in Multi-Media Archives", Parag Mitall; "Using Last.fm data to do sociological research", Mark Taylor; "SwiftRiver and Ushahidi", Robert Zimmer) and the cultural and social application of the new methodology ("The Social Mirror", Gaia Marcus; "The value of vernacular sociology? From Last.fm's islands of music to the iPhone Mosaic app", roundtable discussion led by Roger Burrows and Dave Beer).

For the final event, the University of Warwick hosted a two-day workshop on 10 and 11 July 2012. Beginning with a series of presentations on the theme of "New Modes of Telling and Researching Society", the project turned its attention to the combination of art practice with social research as a recent source of methodological innovation in the social sciences. Freelance curator Paul Goodwin and artist Michael Needham each described the interaction of their art practice with ethnographic methodologies, discussing the nature of knowledge production in the context of curatorial and artistic processes. Invited speakers Nathaniel Tkacz ("Time, critique and Wikipedia Art") and Olga Gurionova ("Artistic expression online: tracing digital artefacts") considered the temporal implications of online presence.

Finally, artist Astra Howard introduced the audience of staff and students to her "Trojan Horse Effect: personalising experience (of the city) by design". Describing her use of art intervention in urban spaces, Astra characterised the results of her encounters as 'analogue blogging', and introduced participants to the methods they would be employing in the following day's practical workshop to curate social life. The next day, participants helped Astra to construct 'Walk-in Wordrobes', portable boxes in which an observer could stand and write field notes and observations which were then posted

into specially designed see-through pockets on the walls of the device. Contending with rain, Council officials and competition from satellite TV salesmen, participants sited the 'Wordrobes' in the centre of the city of Coventry, and invited passers-by to contribute to the accumulation of field notes displayed on the device. Workshop participants recorded how the devices provoked "interest, curiosity and laughter". A concluding roundtable discussion aimed to decide definitively the meaning of Real Time Research.