

Growing your own: Designing an ethnographic approach to study the form, function and feel of allotment work

Abigail Schoneboom, Ph.D.

The City University of New York, USA

Running Head: Growing Your Own. Schoneboom
Word Count: 6011 words

Contact information:

Dr Abigail Schoneboom
Assistant Professor of Sociology
aschoneboom@lagcc.cuny.edu

Department address (based in UK until September 2011, please contact by email):

Department of Social Science, Room C459
LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York (CUNY)
31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, NY11101, USA
(718) 482-6048

Abstract

There are currently an estimated 30 applicants for every UK allotment plot, with projected waiting times of up to 40 years in parts of the country (Jones, 2009). This paper explores the possibility of using an ethnographic approach to study the day to day life of the allotment, paying particular attention to the potential for capturing the productive dimension of allotment activity and exploring the motivation and satisfaction underlying this unpaid yet often deeply satisfying form of work.

Introduction

Allotments have historically been intertwined with wage labour. They have provided food to supplement cash income; mitigated the physical and mental degradation exacted by the assembly line or coal face; and lessened the blow of periodic redundancy and layoffs (Crouch and Ward, 1988, Leivers, 2009). Increased living standards and the removal of wartime exigencies imbued allotment gardening with recreational status. Consequently, the productive aspect of this activity and its potential intrinsic value as a form of satisfying and socially valuable labour has been neglected. Scholarship on work tends to privilege *wage* labour as its object of study, paying insufficient attention to informal or unwaged types of production that play a significant role in contemporary urban economies and communities.

Recent government and news reports have tentatively linked the rise in allotment demand to the economic downturn and interest in healthy, locally grown food (Hope and Ellis, 2009, Jones, 2009, Murray, 2007). Scholarship on allotments and gardens in the UK has highlighted their therapeutic role in the lives of retired people (Milligan et al., 2004), their contribution to the construction of leisure as a meaningful social activity (Crouch, 1989), and their role on compensating for the sensory deprivation that modern work and consumption practices entail (Tilley, 2006). While such studies explore to some extent the productive and

sensually fulfilling aspects of the allotment, inadequate attention has been paid to precisely how they are linked to the labour process and to the notion of work. This paper argues that greater study of such forms of informal productive activity, which people undertake spontaneously in addition to their participation in wage labour, should become a more integral component of the scholarship on work, providing insights into self-worth and security as negotiated against the backdrop of an increasingly intensified labour process.

The paper draws on recent and classical scholarship on ethnographic methodology (Geertz, [1973] 2000, Van Maanen, 1988, Pink, 2009) to identify potential approaches to exploring the topic from a labour or organisational perspective. It reports briefly on my engagement with an allotment site in Newcastle Upon Tyne where I have experimented with various ethnographic techniques for exploring life on the allotment, considering autoethnographic, visual and multimedia components as well as more traditional fieldwork approaches.

In considering methodology, a strong focus is placed on how allotment-holders view their activity in relation to their notion of work and their need to engage in productive labour. Juxtaposing allotment work and wage labour entails exploration of how allotments respond to stressful and sedentary working conditions or economic and ecological insecurity. The relationship between autonomy, cooperation, and control in the allotment might also be usefully weighed against their wage labour counterparts. A research framework that emphasises the *sensory* aspect of gardening is proposed as a means to understanding the feel and meaning of allotment work, with a *porous* dimension that encourages reflection on allotment work in relation to wage labour. Noting the relative subtlety of organization and interaction on the allotment site, particular attention to the *social* aspect of allotment

production is proposed, paying close attention to the regulatory, public, and community-oriented aspects of this somewhat individualistic practice.

Allotment Work and the Labour Process

“What is life but activity?” asks Marx in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* ([1844] 2001, p. 111). Marx’s broad definition of human labour emphasises the conscious and purposeful nature of man’s activity as “a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates, and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” ([1867] 1992, p. 283). In the classical narrative, the process of capital accumulation causes man to become estranged from his own labour, the free and spontaneous character of labour is lost, and production – in the nineteenth century factory at least -- is oriented to profit rather than human development.

In this paper, allotment work is viewed as a form of spontaneous productive activity that exists alongside, interacts with and responds to, contemporary wage labour. The allotment-holder, whether working, unemployed or retired, is seen as embedded in a society that is primarily oriented to wage labour as the primary way in which individuals and families sustain themselves. Recent critical scholarship has highlighted the opportunities for self-fulfilment, autonomy and consumption afforded by contemporary jobs while highlighting the *intensification* of wage labour, and the *precarious* nature of employment in an increasingly globalized economy (Ross, 2002, Warhurst et al., 2008, Webb, 2006). This paper explores how allotment work, as an alternative outlet for productive capacity, responds to or is triggered by the contemporary labour process. As Tilley (2006) argues, gardening utilizes sensory and perceptive capacities that are restricted in many office environments, and may be perceived as a response to contemporary wage labour and consumption:

Gardening as a craft and as a productive activity, is a primary way of redressing the existential alienation inevitably produced in a culture of mass production and mass consumption. We live without any longer making that which we consume and, for much of the time sit in offices and houses remaining cut off and insulated, suffering varying degrees of sensory deprivation, from the living world beyond. (Tilley, 2006)

Further study of allotment gardening with a direct focus on how allotmentholders compare their gardening activity to their experience of wage labour, might seek to build upon Tilley's assertion regarding the search for whole sensual engagement and direct, tangible production as an essential component of fulfilling labour. It may also explore how allotment labour sustains workers' ability to do their (sometimes deeply rewarding) jobs, creating a more tolerable or enjoyable overall 'package' of work that suggests future possibilities for organizing the work day.

Historically, strong linkages between labour and allotment gardening are evident. Early allotments were a product of the eighteenth century enclosure process that dismantled the commons as a source of livelihood. In the mid-nineteenth century the Select Committee on the Labouring Poor weighed the question of whether a labourer's allotment would 'become an inducement to neglect his usual paid labour,' and plot size was minimised to ensure that they supplemented but did not replace wage-based incomes (Crouch and Ward, 1988, p. 49). The standard ten pole (250 square metres) plot, which persists today, was set by the 1908 Smallholdings and Allotments Act as sufficient to 'feed a family of four for a twelvemonth' (Poole, 2006). In the north-east of England, which is the focus of this paper, allotments attached to pit cottages or on railway-owned land provided workingmen with an additional source of income that was, in a sense, bundled with the job (Armstrong et al., 2010).

During the world wars, interruption to distribution networks and resulting food scarcity promoted direct, local food production as central to national economic security.

During WWI, Newcastle Upon Tyne's allotments more than tripled (from a pre-war figure of 1450 to 5263 in June 1918), benefiting from Lloyd George's 1916 Cultivation of Lands Order, which massively expanded allotment provision and encouraged people to work the land. In the economic recession between the wars, allotments were provided in various parts of the city as a stop-gap for unemployed men. In WWII the 'Dig for Victory' campaign defined allotment work as a smart, highly valuable and patriotic activity, promoting female as well as male labour on 'wartime allotments' created by the 1939 Cultivation of Lands Order. In Newcastle, over 2000 wartime allotments were created, special exhibitions and lectures promoted the Dig for Victory effort, and the raising of pigs and poultry was actively encouraged (Armstrong et al., 2010, pp. 7-9).

Until the post-war period, the role of allotments in providing a livelihood and, during wartime, playing a key role in nation's food production apparatus, is clearly apparent. Allotment gardening as necessary labour, as an essential means of providing for the family to supplement or replace cash income, or as an integral part of the economy is easily cast as work, despite lying outside the capitalist production process, and regardless of its simultaneous value as outdoor exercise or respite from the industrial grind. In the post-war boom, however, allotments lose their link with necessity and become strongly associated with leisure and recreation. The 1969 Thorpe Report attempted to redefine allotments as leisure gardens, emphasising the recreational aspects of the pastime, and seeking to design 'model allotments' that were fitted with modern facilities (Crouch and Ward, 1988, p. 116). In Newcastle, during the 1960s, city planning officials sought to 'tidy up' allotments, imposing a more, recreational focus (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 5). These efforts were not widely embraced and, in the post-war period, demand for allotments was seen generally to decline, with the overall number of allotments in Newcastle shrinking from 5,298 in 1948 to 3,396 in

1992 (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 10), and a large number of vacancies in the city's allotment plots in the 1990s (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 21).

However, during the last decade, there has been an explosion of interest in allotments. In spite of the city's higher than average level of allotment provision (national average is 15 plots per 1,000 households and Newcastle has 22.2 plots per 1,000 households), there is currently a waiting list of 826 for a plot on Newcastle's 2,640 allotment plots (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 22). This tendency mirrors a national trend toward high allotment demand, which is reflected in a number of recent reports that have sought to investigate the phenomenon and suggest policy strategies (Committee, 2006, Hope and Ellis, 2009, Initiative, 2007, Murray, 2007, Parliament, 2009). The reasons commonly cited for increased allotment demand are well summarised by this 2010 report from the New Local Government Network:

Allotments can improve people's quality of life, prevent exclusion, increase physical exercise, encourage a nutritious diet, support mental health, help people relax, teach new life skills, empower people, give individuals self-esteem, reconnect people with the food they eat, educate citizens about healthy food and environmental stability, tackle CO2 emissions, reduce packaging, support more sustainable waste management, conserve biodiversity, facilitate social interaction, build cohesive communities, strengthen social ties and networks, reduce crime and secure our food supplies. (Hope and Ellis, 2009, p. 28)

These reasons are mirrored in a 2010 study investigating attitudes to allotments, conducted by Newcastle University, which surveyed existing and potential allotment-holders via 1100 face to face interviews conducted around shopping areas in Newcastle in February 2010. In particular, the Newcastle study highlights the economic value allotment-holders place on being able to save money on fruit and vegetables by growing their own (about half said they rent a plot to save money, estimating about 950 pounds saved per year, p32). Other dominant reasons were access to pesticide-free food, stress reduction, and communing with

nature, as well as being able to educate children about where food comes from (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 32).

This paper aims to build on the findings of the above studies by exploring an untapped angle – looking specifically at how allotment gardening complements, balances or addresses the shortcomings of contemporary wage labour. Using the lens of work – in particular the concept of spontaneous and fulfilling productive activity that allotments appear to provide -- as a way to think about the rhythms of gardening and the time invested in cultivation, the intention is to conceptualise the practice in relation to wage labour, reflecting on the type of work that may be suited to a society increasingly threatened by sustainability crises, economic recession, jobless recovery and the rise of short-time working (Aronowitz and DiFazio, 1995, Birchall et al., 2009) as well as suggesting how a broader look at the types of work people choose to do might provide insights into how wage labour is experienced and navigated.

This approach is consistent with recent scholarship that has sought to move away from the notion of work-life balance, which treats work and life as distinct and separable spheres, toward a focus on work and life as overlapping domains where, subject to structural constraints, people navigate and set boundaries in order to optimise self-fulfilment and quality of life (Warhurst et al., 2008). Analysis of allotment work also contributes to discourse about future directions for labour process theory (LPT), which acknowledges the centrality of wage labour to labour process analysis but encourages interplay between LPT and perspectives that draw attention to informal and unpaid forms of work (Thompson and Smith, 2010, p. 13).

Indeed, in an increasingly boundaryless labour process, where work time overflows into all spheres of personal life, allotment work might be conceived as an embattled domain

that competes directly with capital's increasing interest in mobilising the hearts and minds of workers, inside and outside of working hours, in its service (Thompson and Smith, 2010, p. 17). As such, this paper engages the possibility that productive activities conducted outside of wage labour might contribute to Labour Process Theory's concern with the gap between purchasing labour power and extracting labour. As such, a method of studying allotments might look at the manner and extent to which digging and planting means time not spent catching up on work emails or thinking about job-related projects and deadlines. Similarly, in a context where job insecurity and work intensification loom, the cultivation of one's own potato crop might provide a tangible sense of control and self-fulfilment that lessens the centrality of wage labour in identity construction. And awareness of the potential failure of a globalised cash-based economy to provide food may subtly motivate us to invest increasing amounts of productive energy outside of the realm of wage labour in direct production.

A personal engagement with allotment work

For the past five years, my parents have cultivated a plot at the High West Jesmond allotments in Newcastle Upon Tyne. Over the past few years, I have spent increasing amounts of time on the plot, and its pull is one of the main contributing factors to my decision to move from the bustle of New York City back to the city where I grew up. Although I think of myself as an urban creature, needing the chrome interiors of cappuccino bars and the rush of crowded transit systems in order to thrive, the allotment holds out the possibility of doing physical labour to complement and sometimes displace the hours I spend in front of a laptop screen, becoming pasty and tense-shouldered. Gardening, because so tangibly productive, prompts me to question my choice of career, or at least to plant the idea that the perfect work day would be split between my academic job and a good few hours of digging. I sense this both in economic terms, when shelling out two quid for a small bag of spinach leaves from Waitrose that can be had for free at the allotment, and in terms of the

type of security and self-fulfilment that I think a day's work should give. As I dig, I have a vague sense that it's in my blood, transmitted through Irish great grandfathers or vegetable-growing coalmining ancestors.

This particular allotment site is fairly hidden from view, and sheltered from northern winds by tall hedges and fences. The site runs alongside the metro track and was formerly railway land. One enters along a worn grassy path through a natural archway formed by forsythia bushes, where the smell of moist earth and fresh leafy scents mixes imparts the feeling of entering a secret garden. My family's plot, which is roughly triangular, is right at the entranceway to the site, and consists of ten or so flower and vegetable beds, a shed and summerhouse, and a wooden compost bin, separated by paths of grass and paving stones. At the time of writing (late August), the potatoes have died back ready for harvesting; green beans clamber up a lattice of bamboo sticks; and plump white onions sit on the soil ready for entry into this year's allotment show. The border alongside the railway is thick with flowers – tiger lilies, roses, irises, and eight foot sunflowers, towering over a small pond from which this year's tadpoles graduated a few weeks ago. Nets, children's windmills, and foil ribbons hang over the cabbages and strawberries, deterring opportunistic butterflies and pigeons. The quiet buzzing and rustling of the site is punctuated by the noise of metro trains that pass by behind the fence a few feet away but obscured from view by a thicket of rose-bay willow herb.

The site is sensorily rich and also affords deep physical engagement, as in this recent autoethnographic fieldnote about digging:

I came out today in my digging shoes and old trousers, hoping to dig over the bed that we emptied of potatoes last week. I donned gardening gloves and fetched the spades from the shed. The dark soil is fairly loose and digs over easily allowing me to move swiftly from left to right, turning the earth. As I dig, I lean in and out, pulling up horsetail (a pernicious deep-rooted weed) and tossing it to the edge of the bed. I am also collecting 'boodie' from the soil – stems of clay pipe stems discarded by decades ago by railway workers and colourful bits of broken

crockery that we collect in pots with the idea of making a garden mosaic. I am struck by the herby smell of a weed I dug up from the corner of the bed and take it over to X (holder of neighbouring plot) who tells me it is feverfew and that I could eat the leaves to keep fevers at bay. I also find a few purple and white potatoes that we missed when we harvested – enough for a ‘boiling’ later. (fieldnote, 19 August 2010)

The above fieldnote captures some of the sensual and rhythmic aspects of gardening, as well as the language of the allotment (that is in turn linked to memory and even folk wisdom), which distinguishes this space from the world outside the fence. The anticipation of allotment work through the ritual of putting on special clothing links the experience to the idea of coming to the space from elsewhere – in this particular case I had actually been wearing my ‘allotment clothes’ all morning while catching up on academic duties, hoping that being dressed appropriately would guarantee that I’d get in some digging as relief from staring at the computer screen. This sensory and physical dimension is key to understanding the distinct nature of allotment work; it is experienced *with* and not separate from the other spaces (nearby city centre, the desk and laptop where I spent the morning) it touches, something that an appropriate methodology might seek to capture.

There is also a social dimension to the fieldnote above, which is important to note – my consultation with a neighbouring plotholder, which provided a break from the solitary labour of digging. Finding a neighbouring plotholder there was a somewhat rare occurrence. Although allotment holders invest, on average, at least ten hours a week working their plots (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 10), my engagement with an allotment site in Newcastle reveals that observing this industry in action is harder than one might expect. Gardeners come and go at their own pace and on their own schedule, so that at any given time there are only usually from zero to 2-3 gardeners present on a 15-20 plot site. Full-sized plots are spatially separate so that from one plot one might observe one’s immediate neighbours working but further afield the view is blocked by thickets of green beans or tangles of flowers. A stroll through

the site, however, reveals bountiful evidence of hard work: freshly dug plots with bevelled edges, tightly netted strawberry patches, and freshly hoed rows of peas and potatoes. Piles of manure appear periodically at the top of the site then disappear, absorbed into plots in a process that requires strenuous digging. Except for the annual meeting and other exceptional social occasions, interaction between plotheolders is limited to the comings and goings of allotment-holders to and from their plots, and interactions are managed in a way that allows the interlocutors to break off and get back to the gardening. While gifts of surplus produce and advice and consultations over matters such as blighted berries or compost bin construction are frequent, people generally stick to their plots and work their own parcel of land in their own way. Within a plot, the experience of gardening may be shared among family members but much of this interaction is wordless, there are no meetings or other formalities to index and observe. The organisational aspects of the site are subtle, evidenced by notices that appear on the gate or the notice-board of the communal shed. An appropriate methodology needs to be sensitive to the problems of observation and subtle organisation that the allotment presents, recognising the social dimension as key to the meaning and significance of allotment work.

Although the reflection here is based on initial self-reflection about my own involvement with allotments, an ethnographic method to study allotments as work would move beyond autoethnography to engage fully with other plotheolders, attempting to access the type of sensorily rich data that I have alluded to above, while at the same time endeavouring to situate allotment activity in relation to wage labour in its personal and social dimensions. Such a methodology is explored in the following section, considering allotment work in relation to recent and classical texts on ethnographic method.

An ethnographic methodology to study allotments

Designing an appropriate ethnographic methodology to analyze allotment activity in relation to the idea of work must take into account how allotment work feels, its physicality and rhythms along with the multisensory experience of being in an urban yet natural setting. Such an approach, which seeks to evaluate how allotment work feels and how it is valued *in relation* to wage labour, must assess how gardeners feel about their activity, not merely in itself, but in relation to their broader job commitments and career. In trying to understand allotment activity in relation to the concept of labour, the study might benefit by exploring how the informal mode of organisation at the allotment compares with more formal work environments in which allotment-holders often participate. Bearing these considerations in mind, this paper proposes three main criteria around which a methodology might be developed: a *sensory* emphasis that aims to capture interplay between physical and mental experience that occurs during allotment work; a *porous* dimension that draws on outside experiences of wage labour and how they give meaning to allotment work, examining how feelings about work are fed by current experience as well as through memory and association; and *social*, exploring the often subtle organizational, community, and ecological ties that infuse allotment work and contribute to its meaning and value.

Pink (2009) reconfigures ethnographic research methodology in order to accommodate not just embodiment (the idea that the researcher learns through the body) but a treatment of researcher and subjects as *emplaced*, recognising the ‘sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment’ (2009, p. 25). Drawing on Ingold (2008), Pink articulates place as movement, as ‘zones of entanglement’ in which subjects engage, yet being open to the comings and goings of subjects to ‘places elsewhere’ (Ingold 2008, p1797 quoted in Pink p32).

For Pink, the goal of sensory ethnography is not to untangle and separate sensory data from the context in which it occurs, but to attend to smell, touch, sound, and taste as well as the visual or verbal in creating a densely layered ethnographic account, endeavouring to experience these sensations as directly as possible through the rhythms of daily life. Such an approach is mirrored in Tilley's account of gardening, which emphasises the intermingling of the senses as "a synesthetic experience involving all the five human senses - sight, smell, touch, sound and taste, which usually intermingle and feed into each other" (2006). In a sensory ethnographic approach, the interview is seen as an 'event' rather than a mere conversation, rich in sensory data other than the spoken word, and attention is paid to location and action (for example, interview might take place on the plot, while involved in gardening activity, or researcher and subject might enter the site and walk through it together). As part of this approach, links between the senses and memory are also explored in order to understand the associations that create meaning in the daily lives of participants.

Sensory ethnography seems particularly apt for an exploration of allotment work. A research design that incorporates direct participation in the physical labour of digging and planting, and visceral experience over time of the Sisyphean struggle against weeds and the ravages of the elements, can allow an emplaced understanding of the type of fulfilment and frustration that this type of activity entails.

Conceiving of the allotment holder as coming to and going from the plot from elsewhere allows the larger sphere of wage labour to permeate the research, achieving the porousness needed for an exploration of how allotment fits into or complements the sphere of work. While driven by a critical orientation that is primarily focused on the relationship between allotments and phenomena such as work intensification, interview questions and

reflections might also take into consideration concepts such as flow¹, which capture the intrinsic satisfaction and pleasure entailed by different kinds of everyday activity. The concept of flow has been successfully applied as part of organizational research (see Kaiser et al (2007)), taking into account criteria such as freedom in choosing one's goals, ability to exert an impact through one's deeds, and participation in reciprocal social exchange. The concept of flow might help participants reflect comparatively on their engagement with, for example, a day at the office versus an afternoon at the allotment.

Conversations with allotmentholders or journals kept by participants might emphasize reflection on their activity in relation to where they have come from, whether a busy office or a fruitless job-hunt. Conducting interviews and collecting data with an attention to the smells, tastes and textures of the allotment can help access the significance of this activity and the extent to which it counters alienation or creates balance. Using photography, video and possibly more non-traditional artefacts based on touch, taste, smell and movement to represent the experience might permit a fuller account of what makes allotment work so compelling.

Designing an approach that neither ignores nor excessively privileges the social or community-oriented aspect of allotment practice is also central to understanding its role as fulfilling work. As mentioned earlier, the social dimension of allotment gardening is often rather difficult to perceive since solitary, unsupervised and uncoordinated labour is the norm. Whereas social interaction would be an obvious presence in most workplace research, a more explicit effort must be made to capture this dimension in a study of allotment work. As well as attending the annual meeting (which is held at each allotment site), the citywide allotment

¹ According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow states are autotelic (i.e. self-motivating) experiences that can be characterized roughly as an intense and focused concentration whereby action and awareness are merged so that temporal awareness is distorted (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) [quoted from Kaiser et al p400]

show, and engaging with allotment officers and committees that coordinate activities and policy, attention to organisational presence should also be captured at the micro level in order to capture how this structure, and the limits or opportunities it imposes is felt as an integral component of allotment work. Such an approach might include interview questions and autoethnographic reflection about members' awareness of each other, attention to the way in which ploholders interact with site rules and regulations, sensitivity to the often brief yet frequent social interaction among gardeners as they come and go from their plots, and the public or performed nature of allotment work as opposed to that done in a private garden.

The rich data available at the allotment provides rich possibilities for writing up the encounter. The 'feel' of working the land is richly captured in literary and biographical accounts. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the landowner Levin enjoys the oblivion of scything in contrast with mental labour, sensing his body as 'full of life and conscious of itself' (Tolstoy, 2000, p. 252); in Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* men devote hours to 'tickling up' the earth on their own vegetable gardens, singing and whistling as they work (Thompson, [1939] 1984, p. 62); Derek Jarman's garden, built in the shadow of Dungeness nuclear power station during his battle with AIDS, allows him to enter 'another time, without past or future, beginning or end' (Jarman, 1994, p. 30); and Monty Don reflects on his 'visceral need to scrape a hollow in the ground' (Don and Don, 2005, p. 25) in order to avoid the creep of restlessness, dissatisfaction, and depression. Organizational ethnography increasingly acknowledges the value of impressionistic and even literary approaches to the writing process. Provided the excesses of purple prose and solipsism are avoided, ethnographic rendering can benefit from 'unusual phrasings, fresh allusions, rich language, cognitive and emotional stimulation, puns and quick jolts to the imagination' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 106). Writing up the data in a way that tries to access the sensual dimension, with emphasis on the rhythm, language, and texture of the experience, can help to delineate

allotment work from wage labour without romanticising what are often mucky and seemingly interminable tasks (allotmentholders must often endure seeing their work undone, whether by gooseberry stealing pigeons or flower-trampling rainstorms). Gardeners' experience of time passing, the interplay between memory and the present, and the complex ever-presence of other places and responsibilities while gardening might be accessed by an approach that is not averse to poetic and sensual reflection. With this in mind, the research might accommodate how allotment work is portrayed via cultural artefacts such as fiction, TV and film (Pink, 2009, p. 48) as a means of accessing its meaning.

In keeping with Pink (Pink, 2009) who advocates use of multimedia to evoke different senses and promote audience identification with research subjects, the output of allotment-based research may usefully incorporate photo, video, or even touchable or smellable artefacts that encourage full use of the senses in portraying the plot as juxtaposed against the office. Research outputs could also include an interactive or performative dimension, respecting ethnography's aim of transforming those who participate in it as well as including research subjects in evaluating the veracity of the 'write-up' (Bourriaud, 2002, Jones, 2007). Using accessible data to give allotmentholders a chance to reflect on their practice and its relation to the idea of work, might add to the research and have a subtle yet potentially broad impact on the way allotments are perceived by policymakers, developing a deeper understanding of the practice.

A study that purports to be able to engage with and possibly expand the remit of labour process theory or contribute to theoretical understanding of work-life boundaries necessarily faces questions of generalisability and risks becoming heavy-handed, deterministic or prescriptive. Coming to the project with an intentionally narrow interest in allotment gardening's relationship to the idea of work might result in heavy-handed interpretation that either idealises the garden as the site of blissful self-fulfilment while

demonising wage labour as pure drudgery that is, in Marx's terms, 'shunned like the plague' ([1844] 2001, p. 111) whenever the external impetus to do it is removed. Recognising with Geertz ([1973] 2000, p. 10) the 'knotted' and 'superimposed' nature of conceptual structures as encountered in the field, and the interpretive rather than objective nature of ethnographic practice, the goal is to understand allotment work through a densely textured account that is aware of its own *made-up-ness*. The value of such an account might be measured by the extent to which it seems true to life, in terms of conveying the fragmented and irreducible nature of lived experience (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 116), its efficacy in explaining the import of behaviours in a given cultural context (Geertz, [1973] 2000, p. 10), or the extent to which it endures (Geertz, [1973] 2000, p. 27). As Geertz notes of ethnography, 'what generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions' ([1973] 2000, p. 25). Engagement with theory might thus be sought by attending to the rich sensory detail of the allotment, as it is interwoven with memory, and experienced in tension with the world outside the garden.

References

- Armstrong, M., Raper, H. & Whewell, P. (2010) *The Newcastle Allotments Strategy*. Newcastle: Newcastle Allotments Working Group.
- Aronowitz, S. & DiFazio, W. (1995) *Jobless Future: Sci-Tech and the Dogma of Work*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Birchall, J., Groom, B. & Milne, R. (2009) 'Time will tell'. *Financial Times*.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon, France: Les Presses du Reel.
- Committee, E. (2006) *A lot to lose: London's disappearing allotments* London: London Assembly.
- Crouch, D. (1989) 'Patterns of Co-Operation in the Cultures of Outdoor Leisure -- The Case of the Allotment'. *Leisure Studies* 8(2): 189-99.
- Crouch, D. & Ward, C. (1988) *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Don, M. & Don, S. (2005) *The Jewel Garden: A Story of Despair and Redemption*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.
- Geertz, C. (2000) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hope, N. & Ellis, V. (2009) *Can You Dig It? Meeting Community Demand for Allotments*. London.
- Ingold, T. (2008) 'Bindings against boundaries: entanglements of life in an open world'. *Environment and Planning* 40(1796-1810).

- Initiative, A. R. (2007) *Allotments: a plotholder's guide*.
- Jarman, D. (1994) *Modern Nature*. Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press.
- Jones, K. (2007) 'How Did I Get To Princess Margaret? (And How Did I Get Her To The World Wide Web)'. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 8(3).
- Jones, R. (2009) 'Allotment demand leads to 40-year waiting lists'. *The Guardian*, June 2.
- Kaiser, S., Muller-Seitz, G., Lopes, M. & Cunha, M. (2007) 'Weblog-technology as a trigger to elicit passion for knowledge'. *Organization* 14(3): 391-412.
- Leivers, C. (2009) 'The Provision of Allotments in Derbyshire Industrial Communities'. *Family & Community History* 12(1): 51-64.
- Marx, K. (1992) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy: Volume I*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Marx, K. (2001) *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. New York: International Publishers.
- Murray, S. (2007) *Finding Scotland's Allotments*. Musselburgh: Scottish Allotments & Gardens Society.
- Parliament, S. 2009. Official report: Allotments, community gardens and grow-your-own projects *In: Parliament, S. (ed.)*. Edinburgh.
- Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
- Poole, S. (2006) *The Allotment Chronicles: A social history of allotment gardening*. Kettering: Silver Link Publishing.
- Ross, A. (2002) *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*. New York: Basic Books.
- Thompson, F. (1984) *Lark Rise to Candleford*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Thompson, P. & Smith, C. (eds.) 2010. *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tilley, C. (2006) 'The Sensory Dimensions of Gardening'. *The Senses & Society* 1(3): 311-30.
- Tolstoy, L. (2000) *Anna Karenina*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988) *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Warhurst, C., Eikhof, D. R. & Haunschild, A. (eds.) 2008. *Work Less, Live More?*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Webb, J. (2006) *Organisations, Identities and the Self*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.