



Industrial Relations Unit (IRRU)

Seminar Speaker Series – Autumn 2025 (Term 1)

Speakers: Daniel Fisher (University of Sussex)

**Research
Team
(alphabetical
order)**

Title: "A job that actually matters": How past occupational echoes and a horrific other sustain meaningful work for train drivers in the present and future

Date: Wednesday 3 December 2025

Venue: WBS, room 3.007 (and online via Zoom)

Time: 14:00 – 15:30 (GMT), light buffet lunch served at 13:15

Abstract: The study of meaningful work has shown how important job satisfaction, health, and workplace culture are in creating meaningful work. However, few studies explore the role of temporality in determining whether work is deemed meaningful or not. In particular, there is a need to understand how links with the past may influence the meaningfulness of the present and future for an occupation. Drawing on interview data with passenger train drivers, this study shows the importance of the past and the role of history, legacy, and heritage in creating meaningful work in what is a very isolating, routine, and monotonous occupation. Drawing on 47 interviews, this article theorizes how an occupation relies on their affinity for the past within the present. This involves out-of-hours heritage work on old steam trains, seeing their day-to-day work as being part of a legacy of the railways, and noticing potential future-oriented threats to the privileged position train drivers enjoy. What binds these temporal affinities, however, is a hitherto unexplored facet of occupational meaning, where train drivers construct an image of the non-ideal train driver – what we refer to as a horrific other. This construction bolsters their sense of meaning in their day-to-day working lives with important implications for tempo-occupational links in mundane and routine work.

Keywords: temporality, meaningful work, heritage, tempo-occupational affinities

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