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World Making, Critical Pedagogies and the Geographical Imagination: Where Youth Work Meets Participatory Research

Luke Dickens

*Department of Geography, King's College London, Strand Campus, London, WC2R 2LS,
United Kingdom. Telephone: +44 (0)20 7848 1054; Email: luke.dickens@kcl.ac.uk*

Abstract: Renewed interest in the critical geographies of education has raised productive yet under-examined synergies with reflections taking place among radical youth work and participatory research practitioners. In particular, such intersections point to important ways that a geographical imagination might advance a critical yet creative means of learning through the living material forces of everyday worlds. This paper examines this common ground through a collaborative, London-based case study exploring young people's sense of home and belonging in the inner-city. It argues that cross-overs between the praxis of participatory research and youth work offer generative potential to act alongside young people in the production of autonomous geographical knowledges. Specifically, the case is made for prioritising an imaginative, experiential and intersubjective pedagogical process of 'world making', as an alternative to practices that intervene in, act upon and ultimately 'other' the everyday lives of young people.

Keywords: Education, geographical imagination; participatory research; critical pedagogy; subjectivity; youth

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World Making, Critical Pedagogies and the Geographical Imagination: Where Youth Work Meets Participatory Research

Introduction

Renewed interest in the geographies of education has opened a number of avenues for critical scholarship concerned with the everyday lives of children and young people (Holloway et al. 2011, Holloway et al. 2010, McCreary et al. 2013, Thiem 2009). Such work has unsettled the bounded spaces of formal education (Pawson 2016, Waters 2016), expanded interest into the range of informal and alternative spaces through which learning takes place (Kraftl 2013, 2014, Mills and Kraftl 2014), and highlighted how young people's emotions and experiences reframe policy development across a diverse spectrum of concerns (Blazek and Kraftl 2015, Kraftl et al. 2012).

Within these debates, the concept of participation has emerged as an important lens through which to rethink the intersections of geographical research/teaching; both as a point of critical reflection on the potential for academic geographies 'beyond the campus gates' (Castree et al. 2008, Cope 2008); and, methodologically, using 'critical pedagogy' (Freire 1970) to involve children and young people in discursive processes of social transformation (Cahill 2007, Rouhani 2012). More recently, geographers have begun to rethink participation in terms that suggest a more-than-representational development of such critical pedagogy. In particular, interest has grown in the participatory processes that might precede the discursive aspects of 'critical consciousness' and 'structured representation' that characterise Freirean critical pedagogies (Wijnendaele 2014); for example, by addressing the emotional, embodied and intersubjective registers of learning through 'life-itself' (Kraftl 2014), and how such dynamics shape the geographies of pedagogic encounters (e.g. Cheng 2016, Dickens and Lonie 2013).

An important corollary to the maturing of these debates within geography is the growing potential to engage with radical youth work practice (e.g. Blazek et al. 2015, Smith et al. 2016), a field equally concerned with refreshing its own critical positions towards participation and pedagogy in broadly similar terms (Belton 2009, 2010, De St Croix 2016, Skott-Myhre et al. 2016, Skott-Myhre 2006, 2008). Significantly, under-examined synergies are apparent in the rejection of practices that seek to intervene in, act upon and ultimately ‘other’ the everyday lives of young people (e.g. Cahill 2007, Skott-Myhre 2006). Instead such participatory and youth work practitioners appear increasingly aligned to generative practices centred on using the geographical imagination as a tool for advancing the radical potential of becoming other (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016). In particular, the transformative capacities of the geographical imagination are anticipated through a process of ‘world making’, conceived as an ‘enabling’ pedagogical approach centred on an immanent politics of everyday life (Belton 2009, Somerville et al. 2011). The aim of this paper is therefore to trace connections between recent debates within radical youth work, participatory research and spatial theory, in order to articulate the potential for autonomous, imaginative and experiential forms of youth-centred geographical knowledge production. This imaginative potential, I suggest, offers important opportunities for further interdisciplinary dialogue, by approaching the critical yet creative ways young people learn through the living material forces of their everyday worlds.

I begin by discussing how this nascent dialogue concerns forms of intersubjective relationships that situate knowledge production within the distinct contemporary problematics of a globalising world, while proceeding from the basis of enlivened, immanent and creative forms of learning. The ways this dialogue centres on a politics of immanence recasts understandings of the role of place not simply *as* pedagogical (Gruenewald 2003), but through an unfolding process of *becoming* pedagogical (Clarke and McPhie 2014, Gough

2008, Semetsky 2011). Thus, addressing a persistent binary bias in relational critical pedagogies – for example by maintaining distinctions between self-other or individual-world – Clarke and McPhie advocate instead for educational practices centred upon ‘A mode of being (becoming) that embodies both “seeing” and “acting” within a world *ontologically understood* by its inhabitants (animists) to be constituted by immanent materiality; to be *whole, alive and forever becoming*’ (Clarke and McPhie 2014: 199, original emphasis). My interest here are the ways a geographical imagination is implied within such calls for an immanent politics of radical, participatory youth working, where it is conceived as both a discursive tool for critical reflection and an anticipatory, embodied capacity.

After operationalising such concepts in the next section, the empirical body of the paper considers how these debates are advanced through the pedagogical approach developed on the Creating Hackney as Home project (CHAsH). This was a two-year participatory study (2013-2015) seeking to understand how marginalised cohorts of young people experience and enact the imaginative sensibilities of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ in their rapidly transforming neighbourhood (see Butcher 2016, Butcher and Dickens 2016, Under review, Dickens and Butcher 2016). Specifically, I examine the pedagogical conditions and capacities that were sustained between local young people, academic researchers and creative youth work organisations collaborating on the project from two perspectives. First, I reflect on the intersections of creative and participatory praxis from the stance of the different professional positions involved, drawing out examples where emphasis was placed on supporting young participants to cultivate the immanent affordances of a geographical imagination. Second, I consider the ways such affordances were engaged with and acted upon by the young participants; as imaginative tools for enhancing their intersubjective capacities to orientate, observe, discover and learn through a world in becoming. Here, I reflect more precisely how these capacities were gradually inhabited through an imaginative process of becoming other,

and signal how participation on the project supported the foundational conditions for world making by embedding everyday forms of creative inquiry.

To conclude, I discuss how broader debates about pedagogy and participation might contribute to an expanding interest in the critical geographies of education. Specifically, I argue that an emphasis on such imaginative, generative and enabling pedagogical processes opens up research participants to new critical inhabitations, by enhancing their capacities for learning/becoming through the forces of everyday life worlds.

Opening Dialogues, Placing Subjectivities, Making Worlds

A number of precedents exist for emphasising how an immanent spatial politics might shape the critical pedagogical potential of youth work. For example, Moss and Petrie's call for the creation of 'social spaces for childhood, as part of life, not just preparation for life' (2002: 123), sought to challenge the restructuring of youth services in the UK around narrow efforts to reproduce neoliberal subjectivities, characterised by disciplined individuality, rational knowledges and instrumental learning. Similarly, Percy-Smith has argued for policy development to prioritise organic, everyday and creative 'opportunity spaces', 'where new relationships, ways of being and new futures can be nurtured' (2010: 116). In a context where state provision of youth services has become both drastically reduced and seeming all pervasive (Moss and Petrie 2002), such a radically indeterminate spatiality appears increasingly necessary for young people to participate in social worlds of their own making and on their own terms.

More recently, Skott-Mayher (2006, 2008) and others (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016) have critiqued the 'colonial mentality' of an increasingly institutionalised, neoliberal mode of youth work for the ways it positions young people as always 'other' to adults, and in need of disciplined intervention as such. Yet despite concern with neoliberal imperatives directing

interventions towards ‘the full predatory incursions of the worst forms of economic and social exploitation’, they suggest that the present conjuncture is double edged, since recent crises contain the potential to open ‘calcified institutions to new and welcome radical practices’ (Ibid: 1). Central to this progressive potential to work with young people differently in a globalised world, it is argued, depends on two distinct ways of rethinking the geographies of social relations between young people and adults. First, such scholars advocate an appreciation of the intersubjective from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) immanent philosophy; particularly addressing emergent capacities situated between the ‘unfolding’ and ‘rhizomatic’ spaces that:

riddle the striated and controlled space of the home, the school and the urban landscape with hidden geographies. These geographies are brought into being by accidental encounters with unmonitored space that can be reclaimed for the purposes of an evening, a season, or an indeterminate time of occupation.

(Skott-Myhre 2008: 84)

Adults are thus urged to find ways to work *with* young people rather than *on* them by ‘drawing on the pedagogical affordances of liminal approaches founded in immanence’ (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016: 2). This radical potential of youth work is premised on the co-production of knowledgeable subjectivities through a monist rejection of the Cartesian dualisms, which hold apart mind-body and reflect distinctions between adult-child (see Wijnendaele 2014). Crucial to this conception is the urgency for reclaiming immanence as a generative field, since it is the same logic through which ‘Everything, from social relations, to psychological constructions of desire and identity, to pedagogy and learning is being gradually overcoded within the virtual machine of global capital’ (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016: 5). Thus, as Skott-Myhre et al. insist, ‘It is at this level of the struggle, between immanence as a parasitic system of abstract code and immanence as a living material force, that the question

of the relationship between young people and adults is engaged as a contemporary politics' (Ibid. : 5).

Second, reclaiming intersubjective space for youth working is premised on a rejection of the Hegelian dialectic of human progress based on 'lack' (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016). This stance challenges the prevalence of 'deficit' models in both youth work and youth research practices; whereby young people intrinsically lack confidence and self-esteem, or remain 'hard to reach' and 'at risk', without adult intervention (e.g. Barry 2004, Cahill 2007, Jupp 2007, Smith et al. 2005). Skott-Myhre (2006) therefore considers alternative ways youth work might support young people to locate and explore their selves as 'centres' positioned always in relation to otherness, especially regarding adults seeking to intervene in their lives. This stance leads Skott-Myhre (Ibid.) to argue for youth work to focus on the relational spaces through which processual identities are performed, suggesting this would ensure more critical, visible and decentred forms of adult-child relationships. The insights of such practitioner-scholars therefore advocate that young people be recognised as always existing within their own everyday worlds, and already possessing the intrinsic skills, capacities and expertise to inhabit such worlds.

Significantly, such ideas appear to have emerged in ways that seem dependent on anticipatory and even utopian notions of the geographical imagination, thereby posing productive challenges for advancing the critical geographies of education. Indeed, such accounts signal modes of imaginative and creative pedagogical practice that approach intersubjectivity as 'a form of "micropolitics" that [have] recognized the world in the subject and worked to allow new subject-worlds to arise' (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxvi). As Gregory puts it, 'without releasing and realizing our geographical imaginations in this vital sense [...] we will turn forever on the treadmill of somebody else's present' (2009: 285). The focus on social relations here is thus informed by an affective politics centred on enhancing capacities

for becoming other – through the ‘destruction’ of habits, attitudes and stable identities in order to “bring into being that which does not yet exist” (Deleuze 1994: 147) – rather than a normative or moral philosophy advocating enrichment through exposure to difference (c.f. Popke 2003, Semetsky 2011).

One proposition for reformulating the geographical imagination in light of such arguments is for youth work to pursue a process of ‘world building’ or ‘world making’. For example, Belton (2009) suggests that,

youth work can be an enterprising and novel facility for ‘world building’ via the implication and embracing of the young as a source – and an inspiration for – social renewal, rather than as a population category that functions as a focal point of professional treatment.

(Belton 2009: 5)

For Belton, world building is an intersubjective project informed by the critical theory of Habermas (1985), and entails building connective, collective and generative exchange of ‘rational accord’ between adults and young people. As Belton explains, ‘Our life-world interacts with and translates other life-worlds [...] and a new life-world is born out of this expansive and expressive dialectic’ (2009: 11). Adopting a post-structural approach to the pedagogies of place (see Nancy 2007, Semetsky 2011), Somerville et al. (2011) develop a similar imaginative process of ‘world making’. Described as an ‘enabling pedagogy’, such world making, they suggest, harnesses forces of discursive critique while simultaneously progressing through immanent socio-spatial transformations. Echoing Deleuze’s (1994) ‘lines of flight’, they demonstrate ways that enabling pedagogies develop imaginative ‘storylines’ through an unfolding intersubjective process of narrative becoming. Thus,

World-making begins with self-in-relation to the other. It requires openness to new directions and possibilities not mandated by governmental imperatives, but emergent

from the specificities of particular places in the world. It focuses on engagement with the other, where the other includes human and non-human, earth others. It focuses on the eruption of the new. It has an unpredictable appearance, maintaining a crucial reference to the world as a space of relationality and as a space for the construction and negotiation of meaning.

(Somerville et al. 2011: 2-3)

Such world making implies a number of synergies between radical youth work and critical pedagogy, and a concern in human geography with multiple, relational forms of geographical imagination. In particular, world making in these terms resonates with geographers' efforts to address the ethical responsibilities that might advance progressive socio-spatial relations of difference in the production of place. For example, Massey poses the question: 'What is, in a relational imagination and in light of the relational construction of identity, the geography of our social and political responsibility? What, in other words, of the question of the stranger *without*?' (2004: 6 original emphasis). Her question appeals to the potential for a critical process of 'resubjectivation', one that seeks 'to challenge and change the hegemonic identity of place and the way in which denizens of a particular locality imagine it and thereby avail themselves of the imaginative ability to reconstruct it' (Ibid: 7). These relational geographical imaginations matter because, as Pile insists (2008), they play a role in mapping subjectivities without becoming reduced to an exercise of plotting simple points on a map, or as a means of fully knowing the subject. Therefore,

[q]uestions about the where of the subject, instead of providing a self-evident ground for thinking about, and mapping, the subject, offer the exact opposite - a variety of different geographical imaginations through which to reconceptualise and provide alternative cartographies and topologies for the subject. By thinking through the spatial metaphors that can so easily become the common sense of how subjectivity is understood (the where you are from), new visions of the predicaments and joys of subjectivity can be produced.

The political implications of mapping relational subjectivities through an unfolding process of world making are suggested in the work of Hung (2011), in her study of young people's geographical imaginations within activist networks in New York City. Developing Harvey's (1973) conception of the geographical imagination – as a critical tool for situating personal biographies within wider social, political and economic geographies – Hung argues that 'the geographical imagination holds value as *both a critical construct* to analyse social and spatial relations and a *critical capacity* that can shape a young person's sense of political agency' (2011: 590 original emphasis). Thus Hung draws attention to the vital ways that a geographical imagination might not only interrogate existing socio-spatial relations through a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald 2003), but can prioritise an immanent politics of social transformation by enhancing capacities for becoming otherwise in an unfolding world.

This emphasis on the geographical imagination as a critical affordance for world making is therefore important to the kinds of emergent praxis at the intersection of participatory research and radical youth work. This paper aims to develop these leads by reflecting on the ways such fields engage in a critical but also generative process of world making, particularly where emphasis is placed on the geographical imagination as simultaneously embodied, sensed *and* discursively constructed. Relevant here are the subjectivities and spatialities that pivot on notions of centre/margin or the strange/familiar when addressing sensibilities of home and belonging (e.g. Blunt and Dowling 2006, Butcher 2016, Butcher and Dickens Under review). Specifically, the participatory pedagogical approach developed through the CHAsH project offers insights into these intersubjective dynamics, demonstrating ways that young people might learn through an opening up to everyday sensibilities and relations. As I argue, such expressive and inquisitive forms of

imagining, are important for the ways they might enhance young people's critical capacities to affect and be affected through their everyday lives.

Intersections of Participatory Research and Youth Work: Creating, Exploring, Imagining, Learning

The CHAsH project occurred in the context of a diverse, rapidly changing London borough, where sensibilities of home and belonging were becoming destabilised by Olympic-led gentrification, and black and ethnic minority young people were the subjects of a problematic popular imaginary, following their assumed role in the worst urban riots for many generations (Addley et al. 2011). Seeking to respond to such conditions, the project was an opportunity to develop a participatory research process through which young people bound up in these imaginaries could foreground their own experiences of, and feelings about, their borough.

A central component of the research involved the production of a series of short films, intended as counter-imaginaries to those prevailing at the time (Butcher 2016). These films were hosted on the project's website (www.hackneyashome.co.uk), and used to foster a participatory process of public engagement around the issues that they raised (Dickens and Butcher 2016). As such, the project supported young people to create geographical knowledges, rather than seeking to uncover pre-existing truths from an external, apparently 'real' world. Following recent work on the participatory, transformative and imaginative capacities of creative geographies (Hawkins 2013, Macpherson et al. 2016, Straughan and Hawkins 2016), our approach concerned 'the political work [that] creative expressions do in the world, but also how they partake of and critique the politics of the production of knowledge' (Marston and De Leeuw 2013: xx).

This generative process was dependent on sustained professional collaboration – comprising myself and Melissa Butcher as academics from the Open University, and two

creative youth work organisations in Hackney – which supported the young participants to develop their films and associated research. The estate-based youth theatre company, Immediate Theatre, led by founder and director Jo Carter, played a central role recruiting and supporting the young participants via their existing youth theatre cohort and peer mentoring programme.ⁱ Four young men and two young women from Hackney, aged between 16 and 19 years old, thus took up roles as ‘Peer Research Assistants’ (PRAs) in early 2013, and comprised the core research team for the duration of the project. The specialist community organisation, Mouth That Roars (MTR), led by director Denise Rose, supported the film production process through their established outreach youth working approach.ⁱⁱ Practically, as detailed elsewhere (Butcher Forthcoming), our work together involved creative training workshops exploring visual research methodologies and film production, regular team and individual meetings, and equipping the young participants with audio-visual recording technology to document their personal experiences throughout the project.ⁱⁱⁱ

Participation on the project was approached both as a means of recognising the emotional and intellectual capacities of the PRAs to contribute relevant experiences, ideas and expertise; and a practical, rights-based sense of ensuring that young people – and the precarious arts organisations who seek to support them – were prioritised access to resources made available by a UK research council. With the many critical limits to research participation notwithstanding (cf. Cooke and Kothari 2001, Hickey and Mohan 2004, Kesby 2005), the PRAs were supported to work alongside adults from the centre of the project, following practices of ‘deep participation’ (Cahill 2007) and an ethics of recognition (Dickens and Butcher 2016). Being employed and recognised as colleagues on a diverse research team, the PRAs played a pivotal role designing research questions, conducting empirical research, and leading analytical and reflective discussions about findings. Working as a team comprised of those who shared pre-existing social bonds and experiences was

crucial, being both emotionally supportive, and practically geared towards the collective exchange of ideas, while sharing the labour of research production.

Nurturing Geographical Imaginations

The working practices of Immediate Theatre brought foundational creative conditions through which the research process was able to develop. The six PRAs were recruited on the basis of their long-term involvement with the theatre, and experience of a ‘process where we kind of open them up to new ways of thinking about the world’ (Jo, interview, 27/11/13).

Delivering what Immediate termed ‘Estate-Based Theatre’ involved a distinct mode of ‘Applied Theatre’ rooted in the work of Augusto Boal (1979). This was a critical process of supporting young people to orientate themselves within their everyday environments, in relation to others, and in temporal relation to their pasts, presents and futures (Janetou 2015).

As Jo described:

you bring young people in, and engage them in having the confidence to express themselves, and then you set them questions and challenges to go and play with... You have to be able to imagine being different... So in order to imagine being different you’ve got to try things out... you get people to explore what actually is happening, and the fact that it could be different. ...we have been brought up with story, and to make stories up, and to pretend. And actually being able to pretend is *vital* for social mobility.

(Jo, interview, 19/07/16)

Imagination in these terms was treated as a sensibility to be nurtured through a supportive, experimental environment in which participants explored questions of difference counterpoised with their present lives and surroundings. Dramatic techniques of characterisation, storytelling and ‘make things up’ were therefore considered vital tools for raising the potential for alternative worlds to emerge as material realities. As Jo explained, such experimentations with difference equipped young people with ‘the power to affirm each

other, and therefore that gives you the skills to affirm yourself', a point she contrasted with formal education whereby 'Kids write their essays and then the teacher tells them what they think' (Jo, interview, 19/07/16). Instead, each participant was encouraged to mentor their peers and, by working alongside adult creative practitioners and youth workers, collectively nurtured these sensibilities towards more structured forms of expression:

[It] really is about making up little scenes, and then someone goes 'oh yeah, I get that' and they bring the shape to it. Because they can't do that shape and structure on their own yet. But if someone listens to them and says, 'you know what you just said then, you said *this*. Here you are'. So the process of moving from general ideas into structured personal stories – we need structured stories because we need to see the pattern and we need to see the journey - we need to be able to repeat things so they kind of get them.

(Jo, interview, 19/07/16)

For Jo, a central outcome of working through this process was for the young participants to begin 'seeing yourself as other. Not other than everybody, but that we are all other' (interview, 19/07/16). Significantly, Jo articulated how her approach might nurture the foundational stages of intersubjective becoming in the Deleuzian sense advocated by radical youth practitioners (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016, Skott-Myhre 2008); as instances whereby the imagination can serve as a critical means for reflecting on the self as processual, and in a way that otherness remains an immanent vital force.

Nonetheless, given the kinds of challenging circumstances that many of the young people were experiencing, Jo equally acknowledged that as a result of this process, 'in [some cases] it was kind of like, "ooh maybe it was a little bit too much"' (interview, 27/11/13). Here, Immediate drew on the personal support offered by a key worker allocated to each young person to help pace participation around individual propensity; offering PRAs a consistent, committed relationship with an independent and non-judgemental adult professional. Yet even in these instances Immediate's approach was informed by generative

practices, rather than conventions of challenging behaviour. Thus creative techniques and vocabularies became productive in the context of personal and social development work. For example, Jo adapted expressive dance choreographies based on Laban technique, whereby:

You describe things as either being heavy or light, direct or indirect, sustained or unsustained... thinking about it in those terms, sometimes it's like, 'ah, so... you haven't got any weight to this, you're always using light, you're not committing to it'. And it's a really useful terminology to use with acting... but it's also really useful to look at how people are developing as individuals.

(Jo, interview, 27/11/13)

The PRAs were thus supported through a balance between creative arts practices and the consistency of caring relations offered by professional youth workers. Indeed, the PRAs maintained relationships with key workers and participated in youth theatre activities throughout the project, establishing foundational conditions from which the participatory research work emerged. Moreover, CHAsH was based at Immediate's offices in central Hackney – an accessible and familiar location – where both the informal one-to-one and research team meetings were conducted.

Building participatory research from such foundational relations, Melissa and I focused on supporting the PRAs to develop their own skills in qualitative visual methodologies, while 'seeding' the core themes home, belonging, cultural difference and urban change through our collective discussions. Both our working relations and the conceptual ideas emerging through them were sustained through regular meetings throughout the project, and were documented by the PRAs' ongoing video diaries, which offered personal insights alongside our collective discussions (Butcher Forthcoming).

Pedagogically we were guided by an iterative process broadly aligned with experiential learning (after Kolb 1984) and participatory cycles of planning, acting, observing

and reflecting (see Kemmis and McTaggart 1988). In practice, such 'stages' were entangled and shaped profoundly by the latent personal and cultural experiences of each PRA. Yet, as a loose framework capable of sustaining the indeterminacy essential for our participatory approach, was useful for creating what Monét described as a 'space to think' within the PRAs everyday lives. Alluding to a provisional form of 'conscientisation' (Freire 1970) she explained,

I liked the way that you flung something in there to get our brains going. Because my brain was all over the place, so much going on that I didn't even have the space to think about it. But because you put something in there... you wouldn't just give us the task and say 'go about your business', you'd kind of lead us or bring us to that place to start thinking about it.

(Monét, interview, 22/07/14)

While Melissa and I sought to develop ideas about home and belonging through such discursive spaces, what remained critical was for each PRA to formulate individual perspectives through the immanent affordances of their everyday lives. Regularly discussing ideas together as a research collective, while being supported through an open and unfolding process of reflecting on these ideas via tacit, lived experience was therefore pivotal. Alluding to the ways that place might become pedagogical through this approach, Matthew explained:

it did work well because... if you were to just go straight into 'how do you guys live your lives', you wouldn't really get far with that, in my opinion... Because when you say something like that... you don't really think about what you do in the area. You just are in the area. But when you actually take time to think about it, observe the area, and talk about it with people that are in the same area then you're generating more ideas with people, and you become more accustomed to thinking about what Hackney brings in your life.

(Matthew, interview, 16/09/14)

One particularly formative instance of this approach was a field trip that I had taken the PRAs on at the start of the project. Following a longstanding disciplinary tradition of experiential learning – reinvigorated through sensorial, affective turns (e.g. Phillips 2015) – the idea was to leave Hackney for the day in order that the PRAs might reflect on the limits of their sense of home, belonging and comfort associated with their familiar neighbourhoods. To begin we climbed Parliament Hill in north London, using the landscape as an imaginative conceit, while taking in the view across London (Figure 1). Doing so opened up discussion about ‘perspective’ as both visual concept and relational metaphor:

We spotted Crystal Palace in the south and talked about Alexandra Palace, and famous central buildings such as the Houses of Parliament, the BT tower, St Pauls. I explained about the protected views and the Shard. This prompted discussion about tall buildings and power.

The group noticed two big clusters – one in the city and one on the Isle of Dogs – and I asked them to think about the shape of the Shard and what else it looked like. Matthew realised that the shape of nearby churches were echoed in its shape. We talked about who gets to build tall buildings and why. Matthew talked about being closer to God.

We also talked a lot about tall tower blocks we could see, some of which were in Hackney. Monét mentioned again how much she liked the views from her Mum’s flat in Hoxton, and that this was an aspect of such buildings that she thought was really good.

(Luke, fieldnote, 21/04/13)

Figure 1 – Michael’s photograph of the view from Parliament Hill.

Later on we walked into Camden Town to explore the market and shops. During our lunch break, Matthew and Michael went to buy food from a nearby kiosk:

They said the man (Chinese?) working there was called the ‘Bang Bang Chicken man’ [and] called the others over to ‘come a listen to this guy’s accent’ that was ‘hilarious’. They weren’t taking the piss but the guy was definitely playing up his own stereotype and the group were hooked in by it...

I took this as opportunity to open out discussion about complexities here. Got them to each talk through their own backgrounds and their parent's families... They were more sensitive to these than I had perhaps felt their earlier joking had suggested.

(Luke, fieldnote, 21/04/13)

This encounter was a chance for me to examine stereotypes with the group using a mode of youth working that addresses 'issues' as they arise organically. Yet in the context of a participatory research process, it was equally an opportunity to initiate a more intimate capacity for further personal inquiry about the instabilities of identity, place and difference. Thus, on his return home, Michael recorded a video-diary entry discussing how he was affected by differences in the way people dress in Camden, while also acknowledging my role in providing cultural context. Importantly, Michael's experience of an unfolding world stretching beyond his familiar surroundings seemed to have prompted this emergent sense of inquiry:

The fieldtrip helped me to get a better understanding of different people, different cultures, and stuff like that, that I haven't really been around... being in that situation... shows me what people think of us, how we dress, how we react to things, our culture and stuff like that... Luke really helped me as well, like, telling me about different people, what they do, places, events... so yeah... that actually helps me to want to learn and find out things

(Michael, video-diary, 22/04/13)

While these accounts demonstrate the blending of pedagogical praxis across youth theatre and participatory research, their intersection with the often overlooked processes of participatory film production were also significant on the project (Blazek 2017, Marston and De Leeuw 2013). Indeed, this was a key stage through which the PRAs were to realise their emerging personal visions of home technically and imaginatively, and as such, entailed

professional support in creating anticipatory ‘storylines’ in similar ways to their youth theatre work (after Somerville et al. 2011).

For Denise, director at MTR, productive tensions between interventionist modes of challenging behaviour or addressing ‘issues’ and supporting personal expression were central to her practice. As she explained: ‘I’m not a film maker, I’m a facilitator and film making is part of personal and social development, that’s where I come from’ (interview, 21/10/13). Pedagogically, Denise used the serendipity of street-based filming, aided by the affordances of using professional audio-visual recording equipment, to produce a kind of ‘opportunity space’ (Percy-Smith 2010) through which experiential learning could unfold. As she explained: ‘I’m always saying “Walk into places”... “Go out there, go to that, you’ll meet other people” (21/10/13). As an example, Michael recalled how a key interview in Matthew’s film came to be recorded on the streets of Hackney:

I overheard [a woman] speaking about her childhood... how the bank used to be there, and I was like, ‘well, Matthew’s film is about changes in Hackney’, so I had to basically like... force him to go, and eventually he went and she explained about her life and basically made Matthews’s film really good... I felt pleased with myself that she helped [him]

(Michael, video-diary, 25/07/13)

Nonetheless, there was a fine balance to be struck between the immersive learning afforded by the use of video equipment on the streets, the creative ownership of emerging personal stories, and the necessity to negotiate technical expertise towards producing a broadcast-quality film. For Denise this involved addressing issues as they emerged, while building trust between participants to enable a collaborative negotiation, rather than imposing her own expertise or imaginative vision. As she outlined,

once they had the kit they were all fairly confident... I don't really plan anything [laughing]. I do, but... I know what we need to get, I think that's the skill... getting them to go on that journey and do as much of it as possible. The only slight problem with that is that when you do step in sometimes that can be a bit like, 'I know what I'm doing now'... but it's that fine line. I hate it when you've got to say that say stuff like 'You have to trust me on this'.

(Denise, interview, 21/10/13)

From the perspective of the PRAs, this negotiation was experienced as challenging but also productive. For Matthew, Denise's probing mode of youth working raised issues and behaviours as explicit points of learning, yet he also felt they reflected a genuine level of care in their working relationship:

have you ever felt like somebody's right but you still want it to go your way? ...it is a clash. But at the same time it does show the level of care behind what I was doing... if there was no confrontation throughout the whole of the video process, I would have been a bit worried because... I've never made my own video before.

(Matthew, interview, 16/09/14)

The creative, intuitive research process of the project thus raised contrasts with an instrumental approach to being 'youth worked', and instead progressed through a distinct form of participatory praxis where process and product were held in generative inter-relation:

That's how you know that it's been participatory... If they're happy with what they've produced and they're proud of what they've produced and they understand what they've produced my job is done. I think that's the difference when we're letting go of some of that [personal and social] stuff actually, they're not there to be youth worked on, they were there to produce some films

(Denise, interview, 21/10/13)

Thus, during a debriefing session between Denise, Melissa, and myself, we reflected on the indeterminate ways the final films from the project had gradually come together:

Denise: you guys come from a much more fluid background [as academics]... when we were talking to them I was thinking 'do they, you know, get it' [laughing]. 'I'll stop them', and I wasn't sure. But they did... without that...

Melissa: it's good to hear because it's starting to make me feel more confident about the process that we used... we kept saying to them: 'it's okay', because they were saying 'we are feeling a bit confused, how is this all going to work?' ...it's about having all these intense one-on-ones that Luke was having with them every week... team meetings, being with them during filming. It's very intensive... There was a very organised process of trying to get them to that point of creating for themselves...

(interview, 21/10/13)

While the lack of a structured or instrumental approach was felt to be confusing at times for the PRAs, the intersections of creative youth working and participatory research belied the intensive efforts to support such indeterminate conditions as a vital basis from which their personal geographical imaginations of home and belonging might develop.

Foundations for World Making: Imaginations and Inhabitations

In this section I consider some of the ways these pedagogical conditions were taken up, engaged with and acted upon by the young participants on the project. In particular, I demonstrate how the geographical imagination was used as a vital tool for enhancing and embedding the creative capacities of the participants to become other within their everyday lives. If their backgrounds in youth theatre had initiated a process of imagining themselves as always other-wise, the later stages of the project required these experimental sensibilities to be further extended into the production of the PRAs' own films. This increasingly entailed

negotiating intersubjective encounters and experimenting with the affordances of urban space on their own terms, providing the basis upon which they might make worlds through their own personal storylines of home and belonging.

One way this process can be illustrated is through a mode of ‘orientation’, which involved experimenting with the limits of place knowledge to re-imagine a more relational sense of self. For example, during a period of intense precarity in her own housing circumstances, Shekeila recorded a number of video diary entries while exploring unfamiliar places. In the first, she had hired a bicycle and travelled the length of the Regent’s Canal, documenting her reflections on the way (Figure 2). As she explained, her intention was to travel beyond the point on the canal that she was familiar with:

So, as you can see I’m at the Tower Hamlets end of the Regent’s Canal... I think it’s a bit different, as in the journey, and it’s still everlasting... didn’t actually know the Canal was as far as this... I thought it just went to Victoria Park and ended, but obviously not... I think down here looks different... you see more warehouses than Hackney, and yeah, it’s just a different place...

(Shekeila, video-diary, 11/05/13)

In a later entry, Shekeila recounted another attempt to push the boundaries of her known world, this time by exploring central London:

Today I went to the London Eye... it really made me think of London as a place... I was trying to point out where Hackney was and I couldn’t do it, cause... I couldn’t tell which way North, East or South it was, so... I really didn’t realize how big London was

(Shekeila, video-diary, 25/05/13)

In a subsequent film editing session with Denise, Shekeila explained that her experimental forays had helped to reflect on the imaginative boundaries that shaped both her sense of who she was, and her place in the world. As we discussed:

Shekeila: Talking about the boundaries, that's from my trip down the canal
Luke: And when you're saying you didn't know where the end of the canal was, that's a sort of boundary isn't it, like where you're familiar and where you feel like you don't know?
Shekeila: Yeah, because I never had the opportunity to go past a certain point so it's good that I get to do that

(Editorial meeting, 29/05/13)

These ideas became central to Shekeila's film 'Hackney, Space and Me'^{iv} in which she articulated a sense of self that was centred in Hackney, but moreover, suggestive of world making for the ways her own processual sense of self was 'emergent from the specificities of particular places in the world' (Somerville et al. 2011: 2). Thus in the opening dialogue for her film she asserts: 'Born in east, raised in north, working west, studying south. People ask what does Hackney mean to me. Well, it's not just my home, it's a part of me' ('Hackney, Space and Me' 2013).

Figure 2 – Stills from Shekeila's video diary footage of her canal trip

Another way the PRAs drew upon geographical imaginations was through visual relations of surface/depth and perspective. These were often articulated as a shift in capacities from passive 'looking' to active 'seeing', and highlighted the pedagogical necessity of being immersed in the world in order to appreciate different points of view. Monét, for example, was struck by the affordances that attentive observation had brought to her ongoing reflections, noting that 'I've learned a lot being in this group... like when someone says something to you and you don't think anything of it until there's evidence there, or you're just like on a bus one day and you see something' (team meeting, 09/05/13).

For Monét, this mode of seeing with 'fresh eyes' was a generative process akin to world building by serving as a way of visualising both past experiences and future ambitions. As such, during our fieldtrip, Monét had told me about a dream she had about her film. In it

she was a small child again, ‘but each time she went somewhere she was getting bigger and older, like growing up in fast forward’ (Luke, fieldnote, 21/04/13). As a young mother, pregnant with her second child at the age of nineteen, Monét had approached this dream as a means of reflecting on her own childhood growing up in Hackney. A particularly important place for her was the adventure playground she had attended as a child, which she later depicted in her film, entitled ‘Growing Up and Out of Space’ (2013).^v The process of filming – climbing the play equipment and experimenting with a first-person perspective by holding the camera at waist height to give a girl’s-eye-view – generated evocative memories of her childhood:

it was really good, walking up the jungle gym thingy, seeing the view and stuff. That wasn’t there when I was young - it was like that, but it was wood, splinters, a little bit of metal. There wasn’t steps, there was this thing you had to climb up on a rope. It was so fun. It still felt high, it still felt the same.

(Monét, video diary, 24/07/13)

Looking back at her time on the project, Monét reflected that such imaginative experiments, which also involved developing her own poetic narratives, had helped nurture a more inquiring approach towards her everyday experiences as young adult. She felt that becoming attuned to her surroundings through the practices of visual and imaginative inquiry had thus raised her propensity to ‘talk about things’:

I’ve got the keys, like what to look out for... you guys definitely made me a researcher because I wasn’t a researcher before. I was just an observer, I would just look... I want to be able to process things so that I can talk about things; ‘I saw this,’ or ‘I saw this person,’ do you know what I mean?

(Monét, interview, 22/07/14)

As the PRAs began to negotiate such intimate encounters with the unfolding limits of their known worlds, both spatially and temporally, they began to further explore their imaginative potential. For example, the affordances of eating unfamiliar foods had opened up an expanded sensory horizon for the two young cousins, Matthew and Michael, who had begun to explore the ‘taste of home’ among the increasing number of food outlets in their gentrifying neighbourhood. As young British-Ghanaians growing up on a council estate in the shadow of some of the most rampant redevelopment in the borough, the pair raised a number of critical questions about the ways such changes might impact their sense of belonging. Yet, being ‘broke with expensive tastes’ (video diary, 28/04/13), Matthew felt ambivalent about such changes, and approached his research through questions that had no easy answers. Thus, he pursued a direct form of exploration and discovery, introducing his film ‘Dalston Changes’ (2013) as a roving reporter asking people to summarise their perspectives on neighbourhood changes in one word.^{vi}

In this context the two young men had telephoned me unexpectedly one evening during the project to ask if I could recommend somewhere to eat in Hackney that they might not have tried before. Explaining his reasoning, Matthew recalled:

it’s not that I don’t like the same things but it’s more of like me being bored of ... what I have day-to-day and wanna be more spontaneous in trying new things and that’s why I ended up calling Luke [chuckling]... we thought since he does geography, he knows his places... I don’t know what it has to do with food, but... yeah, we asked him where to go

(Matthew, video-diary, 20/07/13)

For Matthew, such attempts to re-discover his familiar neighbourhood, to render it strange and sensuous, was as much about ‘finding out about *yourself*... what you do like, what you don’t like, what you find interesting and what you just have no care in the world about’ (video-diary, 20/07/13). As such, my pedagogical role as a participatory researcher

could be seen as an intermediary, supporting the capacity to transgress imaginative boundaries around geographical knowledge in order that the PRAs might enhance such sensibilities for themselves. Indeed, explaining that the project had ‘given me a much bigger chance to explore’ (video-diary, 03/04/14), Matthew gave a further example of the ways that stretching his imaginative boundaries was critical to the production of his own autonomous geographical knowledge:

I had always wanted to go to Hackney Archives to see what it’s like, but I never really had the courage to do it because I didn’t know what I was supposed to do in there, and I always thought you needed some exclusive pass to go there. But all I really needed was just to go there, then I could research what I wanted.

(Matthew, video-diary, 03/04/14)

Here, then, was a more explicit process of world making in evidence, signalling ways that the PRAs were gradually inhabiting forms of everyday inquiry, reflecting on their own immanent encounters with difference, and questioning their own sensibilities of home and belonging as they unfolded. Significantly, what these insights seem to suggest, are the ways that various forms of imaginative inquiry – afforded by working on a project where the young PRAs were encouraged to explore their everyday environments, and attempting to articulate audio-visual storylines about their place within them – might enhance broader capacities for social transformation. Indeed, by cultivating attunements to personal experience and imagination, and by exploring and experimenting with such sensibilities, these immanent forces might be turned towards a participatory politics of ‘lived’ geographical knowledge.

Conclusions

This article has argued that the geographical imagination offers an increasingly productive point of intersection between radical youth work and participatory research praxis.

Articulated within a process of ‘world making’ (Belton 2009, Somerville et al. 2011), the geographical imagination appears central to the ways a shared commitment to progressive, inclusive forms of social transformation might be advanced through a critical pedagogy of place. Such ideas have emerged in the context of a growing appreciation that young people are always-already a source for emergent knowledges and autonomous futures; alongside a pressing sense that radical participatory and pedagogical work is needed to resist interventionist, deficit-driven modes of youth working and the reproduction of neoliberal subjects. As such, my reflections from the CHAsH project have sought to highlight how creative, generative and enabling pedagogical practices – focused around radical modes of youth working and participatory praxis – might contribute to a renewed and expanding critical interest in the geographies of education. Two broad concluding points might therefore be drawn from these nascent interdisciplinary exchanges.

First, closer attention to the more-than-representational dynamics of participatory engagements with young people would seem to offer potential for socially-just transformations to take more radically indeterminate directions. Indeed, while participatory research has been significantly influenced by the Freirean (1970) deployment of ‘structured representation’ to establish participants’ ‘critical consciousness’, recent geographical scholarship has become increasingly interested in the affective conditions that might precede and exceed such processes (Dickens and Lonie 2013, Hung 2011, Wijnendaele 2014). At the same time, radical youth workers increasingly insist that critical pedagogical practices support learning through the living material forces of intersubjective experience (Skott-Myhre et al. 2016, Skott-Myhre 2006, 2008). These practitioner-scholars draw on a Deleuzian politics of immanence, where learning/knowing about the world must always remain immanent to learning/knowing with the world, and where radical change is anticipated through nurturing a sensed, imaginative and unfolding process of becoming-other.

Inasmuch as these synergies between youth work and participatory research are only partly articulated, they are nonetheless suggestive of broader efforts to develop critical pedagogies beyond critique *per se*, and move towards nurturing the transformational yet inherently indeterminate potential of geographical knowledges that emerge through the forces of ‘life itself’ (Kraftl 2014) and the ‘eruption of the new’ (see also Gibson-Graham 2006, Somerville et al. 2011). Working at this intersection, the CHAsH project therefore approached the latent feelings, emotions, and embodied experiences of the young PRAs as the pedagogical basis for building transformative critical capacities, as much as it sought to resist hegemonic discourses through the coproduction of critical knowledges and actions.

Second, and relatedly, a reclaimed politics of immanence among radical youth workers, participatory researchers, educational and spatial theorists has recast critical understandings of the role of place not just *as* pedagogical, but for the ways it might *become* pedagogical (c.f. Clarke and McPhie 2014, Gough 2008, Gruenewald 2003, Semetsky 2011). In this light, the CHAsH project developed from a collaborative relationship between specialist youth work organisations and participatory research practitioners in order to support the PRAs through a creative, yet caring, process of gradually opening up to the pleasures and pains of their everyday worlds. Nurturing the potential to imagine becoming otherwise – through storytelling, characterisation and immersive everyday encounters – therefore established foundational conditions upon which the PRAs could enfold a processual sense of self through their experiences of the changes taking place in the city where they had grown up. As the research progressed, the PRAs increasingly inhabited such imaginative sensibilities, which appeared to enhance their capacities to orientate, explore, discover and, ultimately, *make* worlds through their own storylines. The geographical imagination can therefore be understood as a creative yet critical pedagogical tool for approaching the

‘resubjectification’ (Massey 2004) of place, where otherness and difference emerge through a vital, animated and immanent politics of multiple becomings.

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Notes

ⁱ <http://www.immediate-theatre.com/>

ⁱⁱ <http://mouththatroars.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ For details of our research approach see: <http://www.hackneyashome.co.uk/about> and
<http://www.hackneyashome.co.uk/collective/photos>

^{iv} <http://www.hackneyashome.co.uk/shekeila/film>

^v <http://www.hackneyashome.co.uk/monet/film>

^{vi} <http://www.hackneyashome.co.uk/matthew/film>