

Creating Hackney as Home: young people as participatory researchers and as publics

a. research methods

The research draws on the collective experience of youth work of the PI (Butcher 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008), *Immediate Theatre (IT)*, (www.immediate-theatre.com) and the film production company *Mouth That Roars (MTR)*, (www.mouththatroars.com/production). **Theoretically** the project will draw specifically on urban affective geographies, the growing body of research describing the embodied experience of cities (see, e.g., Rose et. al. 2010; Jiron 2008; Montserrat Degen 2008; Wise 2005). Despite the difficult task of finding consensus on terminology and definition, and the philosophical density of debates (see Pile 2010, Anderson 2009, Amin 2008, Gunew 2007, Terada 2001), this work is further elaborating how residents embody belonging, spaces of familiarity and avoidance, comfort and exclusion. This study specifically applies this body of work to the experience of young people in the city.

There are three components to the research design: 1. film production; 2. the use of video diaries; 3. and incorporation of online broadcast media to widen participation in the study. The **field work** will begin with a period of consultation with *Immediate Theatre* to identify six **Peer Research Assistants (PRAs)**, 16-20 years old. Working with PRAs to gather data is a model used by the PI in the *Generate* project (see CV), which was successful in developing credibility and support at community and local government levels. The PRAs will form the core of the participatory research component, responsible for film and video diary production, and supported by continuous mentoring from the research team. An initial week long workshop will be held including the research team (PRAs, PI, RA, *Immediate Theatre*) and *MTR*, to discuss the study's objectives and refine research questions. These will become the basis for the thematic structure of the six short films created by PRAs to reflect their experience of home in Hackney, to incorporate questions such as: what home means to them; how home makes them feel; describing their favourite and least favourite places; and exploring what they do to maintain home.

Film production: the aim is to produce a documentary account of Hackney based on the PRA's own experiences of their locality. Themes relating to the representation of home and belonging will be elaborated in the initial workshop but will in general stem from discussions centred on Research Questions 1-3. Previous workshops with this youth cohort have identified common affective responses to attributes of Hackney as both a space of comfort and conflict, some describing its 'gritty' inner city ambience as something they enjoy, and for almost all, whether in comfort or unease, it is a space with which they strongly identify. *MTR* will work with the young people over a 60 day period (situated within a six month frame to enable the necessary flexibility required when working with young people) to produce individual films that reflect their affective understanding of this space. This time frame also includes preparation and post-production. The production process itself will be documented by the PRAs and the RA, and the films will be analysed in conjunction with the PRAs and used to elicit discussion with a wider audience via online social networking.

The strengths of using film in this project is that it is a medium that these young people are excited about and familiar with (based on prior knowledge of *Immediate Theatre's* youth cohort), creating a more engaging project for them. It allows for the creation of counter portraits of Hackney and Hackney youth in the same medium as that used by 'official' representations that depict it as a site of gentrification or fetishised dysfunction (e.g. *Top Boy*, Channel 4, 2011). Media and government representation of Hackney will be analysed in conjunction with the 'informal' representations and narratives of home and belonging produced by the PRAs. Within the participatory research framework the filmmakers become the 'experts' in creating and explaining their images. The process also entails capacity building in the arts, with ASDAN accreditation for the PRAs offered by *MTR*. This phase of film production is designed to address in particular RQ 1-3.

Video diaries will be used for their capacity to enable reflexivity, both for participants, and for extending the understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the research process. Each PRA will be given a flip-camera by *MTR* for them to use throughout the life of the project. As part of the debriefing after each stage of the project the RA will view video diaries with individual PRAs, having established boundaries of confidentiality. Material will be discussed in light of theories of learning, as part of the capacity building objective of the project, and to inform analysis of their film content and participation in project workshops. The strength of using video diaries is their potential to capture emotions and complexity that text may not, particularly when participants are not skilled in writing reflexively (Roberts 2011). The need for reflexivity is a particular methodological challenge in research incorporating understanding processes of racialisation, culture and power as in this study (see Clayton 2011; Ganesh & Holmes 2011; Lavanchy et al 2011). Based on the work of Askins & Pain (2011), Roberts (2011), Clayton (2009), Bagnoli (2007) and Inkle (2007), who have elaborated on the reflexive use of creative methodologies, the aim is to allow for self-expression, and the ‘full participation of young people as authors of their auto-biographies’ (Bagnoli 2007: 27), evoking not only their social lives but their contribution to theoretical understanding as the study progresses. The method elicits material focused on experience and learning processes, and appears particularly appropriate for use with young people, given their capacity to embody unstable spaces such as ‘being in-between’ (Butcher & Thomas 2003). There is an immediacy to video diaries but also the possibility for replay and reflection. The use of video diaries can also illuminate contradictions between what people may say in public, in this case in PRA’s individual film productions, and in private, a distinction that can mark diversity research (Valentine 2008). The reflexivity engendered in participants, including shifting attitudes and perceptions to others and themselves, is a crucial criteria for a critical visual methodology according to Rose (2011), and part of the ethical practice of using visual methodologies. Video diaries will address RQ1-4.

Online broadcasting: films will be posted on the project’s website which will be linked to the PRA’s online social networks using their preferred format (e.g. Facebook and/or Twitter). Over a period of three months an interactive discussion board will be open for public comments on the content of the film and its related themes of home and belonging. This is a similar format to familiar YouTube comment threads. The discussion, designed to widen participation in the project among young people, will be moderated by the PRAs and RA, and responses collated as part of project data. Participants in the discussion will register, recording basic personal data, and ‘sign’ a consent form that their discussion can be used in future publications. Collecting data in this way also provides a degree of triangulation in the analysis of findings, as the reflection on home in the films is challenged or reversioned in their viewing by others. Analysing material from this interactive component will address RQ1-3. Responses to the films will also feed into the evaluation of the project, particularly the question of how well visual mediums can capture affective spatial experiences (RQ4).

While the strengths of using visual methods has been noted above, it is a specific objective of this study to **evaluate** its effectiveness, focusing in particular on the question of how well film enables an exploration of embodied engagement with place and the sensory richness of cities. Analysis will focus on the strengths of visual methods in gaining different insight than from spoken interviews, such as enabling an exploration of the sensory experience of Hackney. It will be assessed if the theatricality of urban life and its performative nature, of self and others, can also be captured in the performative nature of visual methods. The evaluation of the effectiveness of using youth-oriented online broadcast media is particularly crucial given the increasing use of these tools as part of data collection. Critical debriefing will occur at the end of each stage, involving the full research team in discussion (PRAs, PI, RA, Immediate Theatre), following protocols established in the initial workshop for managing evaluation and disagreement. A full two day evaluation workshop will be held on completion of the online broadcasting component. This process will primarily inform RQ4, but may also elicit analysis of data for RQ1-3.

Plan of work: Months	1-3	4-9	10-12	13-16	17-20	21-24
Review and design						

Phase 1: film production						
Phase 2: Online interaction						
Phase 3: Evaluation						
Analysis, Writing, Dissemination						

b. the data, materials or information to be collected:

The resulting research data consisted of: material collected in the process of making five short films, the films themselves, and responses to the films, which were screened online, to three groups of young people within Hackney and to other groups including youth workers and older residents of Hackney; material collected as part of the PRA's critical reflections made throughout the project, both video and written diaries; interviews and material collected by the PRAs as part of their ongoing research on Hackney (e.g. archives); material collected by the PI and RA including debriefing interviews with PRAs, meetings with stakeholders; participant observation, and thick description of particular sites within Hackney such as Dalston Junction and Broadway Market (recurring sites in the research).