



**Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University**

---

Ivinson, Gabrielle ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5552-9601>, Renold, Emma, Gareth, Thomas and Elliott, Eva (2020) The 4Ms project: young people, research and arts-activisms in a post-industrial place. In: *Imagining Regulation Differently: Co-creating for Engagement*. Policy Press. ISBN 978-1447348023

---

**Downloaded from:** <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/624707/>

**Version:** Accepted Version

**Publisher:** Policy Press

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>

## <1>Chapter 7

### <1>The 4Ms project: young people, research and arts-activisms in a post-industrial place

Emma Renold, Gabrielle Ivinson, Gareth Thomas, Eva Elliott

#### <2>Introduction

This chapter tells the story of a research-engagement project called Making, Mapping and Mobilising in Merthyr (otherwise known as The 4Ms Project). The project explored young people's sense of place and wellbeing while growing up in Merthyr Tydfil (hereafter referred to as Merthyr) a post-industrial ex-mining and steel-making region of the South Wales Valleys. Merthyr is a small post-industrial town of roughly 58,000 people in the South Wales Valleys (UK). Once a hub of industrial activity and innovation, along with other geographically-close regions, Merthyr has experienced a deep social rupture in recent years owing to deindustrialization and the closure of iron-works, coal mines, and manufacturing industries that had served as cultural links underpinning the rhythms and rituals of Valleys life (Ivinson, 2014; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). Our project took place predominantly in a housing estate based on a design reputed to have been inspired in the 1950s by romantic Italian hilltop villages. The estate expanded in the 1970s and by the 2000s had become dilapidated and a place with high levels of unemployment. In a context of tightening austerity, this housing estate and the people living there have been subject to stigmatising media accounts fuelled by television's 'poverty porn' industry (Tyler, 2015) and, at times, by local residents themselves (Byrne et al, 2015; 2016; Thomas, 2016). The 'realities' of poverty tend

to be portrayed in popular media through no-hope narratives of despair (Thomas, 2016; Thomas et al, 2018).

In contrast to other projects in the Productive Margins programme, The 4Ms Project did not set out to investigate a specific element of regulation. Rather, we approached regulation as it occurred through the everyday experiences of living in a place that is in many ways at the margins, in terms of the explicit as well as the hidden effects and affects of poverty. The initial aim of the project, thus, was to attune to young peoples' knowledge as experts of living in this post-industrial place and to co-create research methods and encounters to find out how a range of regulatory regimes mediate and impact on their everyday lives.

The 4Ms Project took shape across a series of three over-lapping phases. We began by exploring the affective contours of the young people's neighbourhoods (Thomas, 2016). During this first phase, activities were designed to enable young people to speak back to GIS mapping technologies used by police to detect crimes in specific neighbourhoods (Innes, 2015). The following two phases were informed by research-activist scholarship<sup>1</sup> as each had an activist dimension which drew upon arts-based methodologies to source the expertise, experience, and creativity of young people and distinguish how this expertise and knowing can be politically productive. The second phase invited young people to participate in more explicitly activist activities, using arts-based methodologies (see the Zebras and Relationship Matters projects below). The third phase involved co-producing workshops with artists<sup>2</sup> to explore

young people's sense of place. Each of these phases drew upon and extended the research findings from the GIS mapping tool.

In the sections below, we give a sense of the twists and turns of the research-creations and activism which unfolded across each phase. We show how research questions, methods and the process of making research matter (Barad, 2007) evolved in ways which were unplanned and unanticipated. The next section briefly outlines the theories and speculative processes of attuning to dynamic and non-linear processes of pARTicipatory<sup>3</sup> research (Renold, 2018; Renold and Ringrose, 2019)

### **<2>Participating in place: finding our way**

Throughout the project, we became increasingly inspired by Erin Manning's (2016, 47) processual notion of art as a way of learning and acting '...as a bridge toward new processes, new pathways'. Drawing on a medieval notion of art as 'the way', she defines art as a process, not something to behold. Manning argues that to conceive of art as the manner of *how* we engage helps us glimpse 'a feeling forth of new potential (Manning, 2016, 47). Our approach became a 'philosophically informed making and thinking about making which unfolds with a focus on invention and evaluation' (Hickey-Moody, 2016, 169). Inspired by feminist New Materialism methodologies (Barad, 2007), we came to pay attention to the role/s of matter, artefacts and creative methodologies in humanities and social sciences (van der Tuin, 2011; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013; Taylor and Ivinson, 2015, Geerts, 2016; Ringrose, Warfield and Zarabadi, 2018). Moreover, we came to embrace the unpredictable

nature of how ‘chance, change, dissent and disagreement’ are at the core of arts-based research approaches (Hickey-Moody, 2016, 172; see also Chapters 2 and 6, this volume). Indeed, working with Manning’s notion of art as ‘the way,’ has enabled us to take up Barad’s call to take ‘responsibility for the fact that our research practices matter’ (see also Meissner 2014) and allowed us to connect to the iterative opening of responsiveness in our pARTicipatory work with young people — in both school and youth centre settings — and the wider network of teachers, youth workers, artists and community organisers.

Throughout The 4Ms Project, the team expanded across the twelve-month period, and at various times, included young people from a local youth centre and a range of schools, youth workers, teachers, artists, community members and academics from Cardiff University and Manchester Metropolitan University. We worked with digital technologies (GIS mapping) and arts-based methods to enable forms of expression that went beyond seated interviews and the spoken word (Wang et al, 2017; Leavy, 2017; Gallagher, 2018). Our pARTicipative approach, at various times, included the use of still and moving images, walking tours, filmmaking, dance, soundscapes and visual arts — made possible through our long-term collaborations with musicians, a choreographer, visual and sound artists and a professional filmmaker. Our arts-informed approach aimed to connect to the embodied (Ellingson, 2017; Springgay, 2008) and multi-sensory (Pink, 2007) dimensions of being-ness in place and offer up alternate modes of expression to enable young people to express what was important to them. The following sections describe our evolving process, how it

productively regulated *for* engaging with what came to matter and how collectively we responded to what unfolded.

## **<2>Regulating for response-ability with art-ful research-activisms**

The first project phase involved reworking a GIS tool designed for police use.

Research has demonstrated that when adults were interviewed by local police using the GIS tool to identify neighbourhoods and crimes associated with them, young people emerged as antisocial and as the perpetrators of crime. We found that because the survey questions were designed to detect crime, the tool was heavily biased. We attempted to modify the GIS tool to enable young people to speak back to findings that pathologised them and to counteract the regulating effects of the technology (Thomas et al, 2018).

As part of this, we sought help from the technicians who train the police to use the GIS tool<sup>4</sup>. The trainers helped us to address some of our concerns and those of the young people. To mitigate against bias, we used the GIS tool — which included the survey element — within a broader and more open-ended narrative interview approach. As part of this, we included additional questions which enabled young people to identify positive as well as negative features of place, such as where they felt safe (as well as unsafe). Instead of relying only on quantitative data generated by the GIS questionnaire, we audio recorded the broader interviews and transcribed them in full. We used the interview transcripts, together with the GIS mapping data and the quantitative data from the GIS modified questionnaire, in research reports. Even so, the GIS tool regulated what young people felt they could discuss. In the

course of the research, a number young people observed that the tool could further stigmatise their town and distort their everyday experiences, and that it ignored positive perceptions of living in an ex-industrial place (Thomas et al, 2018).

The use of the GIS tool and our broader interview schedule was regulated further by issues of access. Two schools and the youth facility agreed to participate, however teachers controlled which students to put forward. Teachers identified specific students who they believed were representative of both the year group and the school as a whole (ie, a mix of people with a different gender, ethnicity, and educational status). They told us that they also chose students who they considered would benefit from taking part, and/or who they felt 'could cope with missing a class'. Fifty-six young people took part and despite several challenges, including the prevailing inappropriate wording of many of the GIS survey questions, the interviews and more open questions enabled us to identify several new and interesting topics to pursue. These focused on spaces associated with social problems in their town, such as instances of assault, drug/alcohol use, domestic abuse, and environmental issues, such as vandalism, litter and graffiti. All were perceived to impact on their sense of wellbeing or, at least, were cited as irritants or grievances (Thomas, 2016; Thomas et al, 2018). In the next section, we describe how we took these issues forward, through a piece of local and national policy activism and the role of arts-based methodologies and practices in this process.

<3>Zebra-crossings

Following the school-based interviews, we organised a further seven sessions in one school that was willing to continue working with us on an activist research project. The other school was keen to continue, but eventually declined due to fears of young people missing lessons during an ESTYN inspection period<sup>5</sup>. However, this school agreed to a series of lunch-club meetings to address issue of sexual harassment and violence (see below).

The activist project, 'Zebra-crossings', was a collaborative endeavour between the young people, the research team and Citizens UK, an organisation building diverse alliances of communities to 'organise for power, social justice, and the common good' ([see www.citizensuk.org/cymru](http://www.citizensuk.org/cymru)) Eleven young people volunteered to participate. Some had been interviewed in the first phase and others, who were part of a citizenship group in the school, were also invited to participate. As collaborators, Citizens UK worked with the young people and research team to explore issues informed by the earlier interviews.

Over a period of around three months, we ran various sessions both inside and outside the school, including local walking tours, focus group interviews and art-based activities. Although the concerns that emerged in these sessions were similar to those identified in the earlier interviews (eg, worries over drug and alcohol use, litter, and dark spaces without streetlights), several were notably absent (eg, domestic abuse and sexual violence). A range of further issues were identified that centred on unemployment and specific areas of the neighbourhood. One such area was a popular location near the local hospital and youth centre. Young people



expressed concerns over dim/broken street lights on a well-used path connecting different parts of the neighbourhood and an underpass which was clogged up with litter and drug paraphernalia. Another concern was the lack of a safe road crossing outside the youth centre. In the fifth session, some young people decided that they wanted to lead a public campaign around three concerns: poor street-lighting on a path near the hospital; closing the underpass, and; installing a zebra crossing outside the youth centre.

The group decided to involve other young people at a local youth centre in the campaign. In the final session, they invited local politicians and senior police officers to take a tour of the area in which they would outline their three-point plan. During the tour, young people dressed as zebras to draw attention to the request for a zebra crossing. The group explained to their guests how they felt when navigating these spaces, particularly at night. This creative approach attracted press interest, and the positive media coverage in local and national newspapers contributed to further meetings with local politicians, planners and the police. The local council advised the young people that if they obtained matched-funding, they would be able to implement their three-point plan. They did this and, three months later, the underpass was blocked off, a zebra crossing was installed, and repairs to streetlights started.

While some scholars may take the view that the young people's concerns about navigating dark public spaces simply indicates a fear of crime (eg, Nair et al, 1993; Peña-García et al, 2015; Welsh and Farrington, 2008), we found that their activism

enabled them to reclaim *their* space, (re)gaining a sense of connectivity and belonging that had been 'lost in the dark' (Thomas et al, 2018). The campaign represented one effort to recover feelings of sociability and connectivity and strengthen counternarratives of place-based stigma perpetuated by local and national media. In short, their campaign went some way to combat material abandonment and stigmatising narratives through representing *their* town as a place of civility and togetherness (see Thomas et al, 2018).

### <3>The Relationships Matter Lunch-Club and the Ruler heART Activisms

Interviews in the first project phase alerted us to issues around harassment and violence. Young people spoke about forms of verbal, physical and digital experiences of sexual violence in peer group cultures and in the wider community. Girls, in particular, spoke of the beeping of van horns accompanied by verbal or gestural sexual propositions. Domestic violence was signalled through descriptions of hearing sounds of violence through bedroom walls. Interestingly, none of these issues were raised in the semi-public forums of the Citizens UK group sessions.

Early in The 4Ms Project, one deputy-head teacher disclosed fears of how to cope with what he saw as an unprecedented rise in girls' self-harming behaviour and hints of relationship abuse. In response, one of the team, Emma, made a follow-up visit to the schools and offered to work with a group of girls in a lunch club. She invited three of 'the girls' (as they often referred to themselves) who signalled their willingness to 'do something' about the concerns they raised from the first phase.

They had talked at length about witnessing gender-based and sexual violence on the

streets, online and in school. All three of the girls were keen to return to this more participatory activist phase of the research, which they called the 'Relationship Matters' lunch club. This was an unforeseen, unplanned and only partially funded spinoff project from the more formally organised programme of change-making with Citizens UK. The girls were invited to expand the group if they wished, which they did. In the first meetings, they decided to explore the interview 'data' from the first phase of the project on gendered and sexual violence (including their own). Coincidentally, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Bill was progressing through Welsh Government at the time. They started to align ideas about school-based, micro violence with the wider national debate. This became one of those rare moments when research 'findings', change-making desires, national policy developments and researcher expertise coalesced.

Over the following weeks, Emma and the girls experimented with what the interview data on gender-based and sexual violence could do when explored with arts-informed practices (Renold, 2017). At this point, they improvised together rather than working with professional artists. This enabled them to attune to the art-fullness of proto-political possibilities of ideas and feelings as they rolled, flowed and came to matter. They had not planned on 'making' anything. The idea to create a ruler-skirt arose from a throw-away comment by one of the girls who said; "Boys lift up girls' skirts with rulers". As soon as the words were voiced into the space, another girl scribbled in bold black capital letters: 'RULER TOUCHING' and an explosion of ruler-talk erupted about how rulers are used to sexually assault (eg, up-skirting) and shame girls (eg, measuring skirt length), how experiences of sexual violence are

often ruled out (eg, normalised and silenced) and how gender norms are used to regulate who you can be and what you can do ('rule her, RULE HER, rule her with your ruler'). Soon, they had created four d/artafacts: a runway of disrespect; the shame chain; the ruler-skirt; and the tagged heart (Renold, 2017).

Across two further lunchtime sessions, the girls began, as they suggested, "re-writing the rules" through what we called "outing practices" that sexually shame girls by marking comments on paper rulers. These paper rulers were turned into paper "shame chains" to communicate how different aspects of sexual violence are inter-linked and how sexual violence restrains them. They then graffitied comments of shame on over 30 bendy acrylic rulers with similar messages about hurt and abuse. They interspersed these with messages for change (eg, "respect us"). The idea of assembling the rulers to create a wearable piece of fashion activism came into full swing, and the proposal for a ruler-skirt struck a chord. Each graffitied ruler was clipped to a belt, and the skirt took shape.

The ruler-skirt has inspired and informed a piece of direct action to change the school culture. The girls invited 300 students during their school assembly to take-part in a piece of direct political action by completing the sentence, 'we need a healthy relationships education because ...' on paper rulers. This evolved into political action when Emma shared this activity with other secondary schools, in turn collecting over 1000 annotated paper rulers. This evolved into a plan to push the affective buttons of policymakers in a last-ditch attempt to turn around a national bill which was failing to respond to the voices and experiences of young people.

They invited 40 other young people from urban and rural South Wales, with the help of Citizens Cymru, to join their 'Relationship Matters' campaign and Valentine Card HeART Activism (Renold, 2017). Valentine's Day cards were hand delivered to all 60 Assembly members with three ruler-strips pasted inside. This had an overwhelming effect and the MPs, many quite moved to have received a personal Valentine's Day card, united to support the inclusion of young people's needs and a new practitioner guide and mandatory healthy relationships training in the Violence Against Girls and Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Bill (<https://youtu.be/tZ3Jkq8QIF8>).

Since the passing of the Act, the girls have shared their story and d/artifacts in different ways as and when different opportunities have become available. Their ruler skirt continues to be worn at youth-led, practitioner, academic and policy-maker events. Together, we have written up their project as a case study in the new practitioner guidance for Whole Education approaches to 'healthy relationships' (Welsh Government, 2015b) and submitted this case study to the Women and Equalities Select Committee's (2016) Inquiry into Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools as evidence on the importance of creative approaches to sex and relationships education. Some of the girls became key participants in the new bilingual Welsh Government online toolkit *AGENDA: A Young People's Guide for Making Positive Relationships Matter* (Renold, 2016, 2019) and we co-authored their story as a book chapter (Libby et al, 2018) so that they can share their reflections in their own words for an academic and practitioner audience.

At the time of writing, it is three years since the young people's Valentine's Day card research-activism. Some rules were changed (new practitioner guidance and training), but their call for mandatory sex and relationships education was shelved and slotted into future developments for the new Welsh curriculum. However, in March 2017, Emma was invited to chair a panel of experts to examine the current and future status of the Sex and Relationships Education curriculum in Wales. This can be viewed as Impact: the ripple effect of the activist campaign. Our co-produced research-activism informs the report, and the da(r)ta generated in the original ruler heART assemblies is carefully placed alongside other published international research on youth voice, a minor gesture (Manning, 2016) of making young people's voices matter, in a process given limited capacity to meaningfully consult with children and young people. Indeed, the Valentine's Day card activism takes centre stage as the image for the title page of the panel's vision for the future of a new relationships and sexuality education curriculum for Wales (Renold and McGeeney, 2017a). A footnote in the document registers the legacy of a project which started out as a piece of speculative, inventive co-produced research-activism in a small room overlooking the South Wales alleys in a place alive with revolutionary possibility.

The ruler-skirt has been activating and making ripples and waves in and across policy, practice and public spaces in ways that none of us could have predicted three years ago (see ESRC 2018, <https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/transforming-relationships-and-sexuality-education/>). It has been touched, read and its clatter heard by hundreds of people of

all ages from all walks of life: along school corridors, in the street, up escalators, on trains, in teacher conferences, on protests, in the Welsh Government, and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York (see Renold 2019). In addition, the ruler skirt has featured in films we have made with professional artists, such as *Body Swing* and *Graphic Moves* ([www.productivemargins.com](http://www.productivemargins.com)), to which we turn next.

## **<2>Making Graphic Moves with art as our way**

In parallel with the GIS mapping research, we designed a series of arts-based workshops to facilitate other ways to express feelings of belonging, place and safety. The sections below dwell on some of the details of the art-making processes to provide insights into the ‘feeling-forth’, when intuition in acts of making opened the future to new imaginaries (Manning, 2016).

The workshops generated artworks which grew into the film and exhibition *Graphic Moves*. We worked closely with artists, Seth Oliver, Rowan Talbot and Heloise Godfrey-Talbot to co-produce the workshops which drew upon expertise, techniques and resources that we, as academics, do not have. We built on our already existing working relationships of trust and met often to bounce ideas off each other. This process of collective co-creation set the ground for the artists to design their specific workshops. Workshops were designed to enable a wide range of expression and enable ‘anything’ to happen. We were aware that details are important, such as the affordances of the rooms where the workshops took place, how many people could fit into a room, the amount of light, the furniture and equipment such as ink, paint, water and even the size of the paint-brushes all create potentials and curtail

possibilities. These materialities both regulated and facilitated what might emerge. All these elements, and how the areas are taken up in the process of making, have some agency (Bennett, 2010) which become part of the creative process. The workshops were titled: *Mashing up the land*, *The projection workshop* and *Found sounds and community beats*.

We advertised the workshops giving details of dates when the artists would be in the youth centre with brief descriptions of the activities. As a date arrived and an artist prepared their equipment, we could only hope that something generative would happen. We planned so that at least one of the academics from the research team participated in each workshop. Some workshops worked well and some worked less well. Some worked first time and others had to be changed and adjusted throughout. In some, the peer group dynamics suggested that everyone was having fun. In others, the peer group dynamics became unproductive and worked *against* rather than *for* inclusion, and we had to intervene or ask for support from the youth workers. We had to be vigilant, flexible and use our knowledge of working with vulnerable young people to support them and the artists. The following sections describe incidents from the workshops to give a taste of the importance of the process of making. It was in the making that micro-political moments of possibility emerged.

Shortly after we offered the workshops, the third season of the Channel 4 reality television series *Skint* — a ‘poverty porn’ (Tyler, 2015) series claiming to tell ‘intimate stories of people living with the devastating effects of long-term



unemployment' — focused on Merthyr (Season 1 looked at Scunthorpe and Season 2 at Grimsby) and was broadcast on three consecutive Mondays in April 2015. The young people's reactions to the pathologising representations of their place was more than we could have imagined. In workshops, they wrote: 'I feel betrayed'; 'I am dreading seeing the next episode'; 'I really regret taking part'; 'I am not a bum'. Suddenly, the workshops took on a new urgency and became spaces where young people experimented with ways to speak back to *Skint*. The local morning papers were full of stories reporting interpretations of *Skint* from many angles, although many reinforced negative stereotypes of the place perpetuating a long running media trope which describes the town as 'a desperate place' of 'confusion' and 'bleak nihilism' which was 'full of crime' and 'where hard work has been replaced by hard drugs and crime' (see Thomas, 2016). We used such newspaper reports as part of the workshop.

### <3>Mashing up the land workshop

As part of the Mashing Up the Land workshop, artist Seth Oliver brought newspapers, such as the ones described above to the workshops. He invited participants to rip the newspapers to shreds as the first stage of a creative paper-making activity. The activity involved soaking the ripped-up newspaper reporting the *Skint* documentary in buckets of water overnight to create mulch. A range of beautiful ink colours was provided and used to colour the water and to dye the mulch. A few days later, the mulch was removed from the buckets and passed through a wire sieve, rolled onto boards and left to dry. The results were new paper parchments. Negative media images of place, dissipated widely through Twitter

feeds and encoded in newspapers, were physically ripped to shreds, destroying the very words and pictures that illuminated the place as a bad place.

<Insert Figure 7.1 here>

Figure 7.1 Mashing Post-industrialisation

In the collage depicted above, a juxtaposition of images provides some ironic insights into post-industrialisation (Figure 7.1). The collage includes multiple references, such as The Smiths album cover that reads 'Barbarism begins at Home'. The workshops ignited corporeal acts of annihilation which generated intelligent, witty and contradicting images on new paper. The collages hold affective traces of the pride, a 'feeling-forth' sensitive to the past of mining traditions, tinged in the present with the pain and shame of stigma, as well as a forward-looking gaze of future potentiality. For example, the young woman in the image above is much taller than the pithead wheels, and rainbow colours hint of multiple possibilities. Young people literally burst into song as they ripped, plunged and stuck materials together. The singing both evoked and recreated a deep-seated sense of communal belonging that has coursed through so many of our experiences with young people in South Wales Valleys communities.

<3>The projection workshop

A group of girls we had worked with previously in the youth centre unexpectedly turned up to the projection workshop in the school. Up until then they had distanced themselves from the school-based workshops. They were driven by a desire to 'do

something' after watching the first Merthyr episode of *Skint*. Visual artist Heloise Godfrey Talbot instructed the girls on how to compose a camera shot, how to adjust the focus and how to produce minute images, such as the way the wind rippled through a patch of daffodils on a grass verge in the playground. The girls told us that they wanted to photograph Morlais Mountain, which is sometimes visible from the school grounds. It was only years later that we came to understand the significance of the mountain to the local community and to them (Renold and Ivinson, forthcoming). The girls moved around the school grounds, taking panoramic shots of the valleys spread out beneath. They took some intimate shots of back gardens where clothes lines hung, adorned with fluttering garments. These shots became sections of the film *Graphic Moves*, which turned into the vehicle for speaking back to *Skint*.

While the girls were filming, the camera pointed outward to the horizon, capturing the lush, green valley moorland and distant rolling mountains that surround their housing estate. A group of boys came towards us up the steps near the school entrance which was just behind us. The girls had to stop filming to avoid getting the boys in shot. We suddenly decided to ask the boys for their responses to *Skint*. Leanne (pseudonym) tentatively approached one boy, Barry (pseudonym).

Leanne: So what did you make of *Skint*?

Barry: My street was in it.

Leanne: What street was that?

Barry: Orchid Street<sup>6</sup>. It's not a bad street at all, I really like it, everyone is really friendly.

(We knew from the GIS mapping tool findings that this street had a particularly bad reputation even on the estate, so we wanted to get his positive feelings on record).

Gabrielle: Hang on a minute. Would you say that again so we can audio record it?

[We grab an audio recorder and direct it towards Barry]

Gabrielle: So what did you say about Orchard Street?

Barry: It's crap.

Barry ran off and we were left bemused. It seemed that while Barry spontaneously counteracted the representation of his street that had appeared on *Skint*, when he was given a chance to 'go on record', a more dominant representation territorialised the occasion and Barry reproduced the dominant representation 'crap' for a potentially public audience.

### <3>Reframing Skint with Graphic Moves

When we (the research team) watched *Skint*, we noted it did not include many shots of the mountains, greenery and valleys that can be seen from the estate. Instead, shots usually pointed downward to tarmac roads in need of repair, concrete walls, boarded up windows and drab shop fronts. The shots actively created desolate images of the estate. When the countryside was filmed, it was through wide-angle scenes which created the backdrop mainly when people were being filmed as drunk,

as if to exacerbate a sense of wildness. Below are two screenshots from *Skint* (Figure 7.2).

<Insert Figure 7.2 here>

Figure 7.2 Screenshots from *Skint* (SE03E01, 2015)

*Skint* composed pathologising representations by combining elements such as a young man, flesh, wine bottle, water and the wild to create a message of the unruly.

Below is an image of the same water hole (at Pontsticill reservoir) we used to advertise one of the workshops and which also appears in sequences in *Graphic Moves* depicting the water flowing into the hole (Figure 7.3).

<Insert Figure 7.3 here>

Figure 7.3 'The Tankies'. Screenshot from *Graphic Moves*.

In contrast to *Skint*, we created shots that would disrupt and confound the building of 'a' message (see Figure 7.4). For example, *Graphic Moves* includes these images of a girl's head which could be read as absurd yet also beautiful.

<Insert Figure 7.4 here>

Figure 7.4 'Landscape-girl. Screenshot from *Graphic Moves*.

The idea for the image above was created when young people projected video footage of outdoor shots taken from around the school onto a wall in a dark school

corridor. The pictures emerged as part of a session when one girl's best (boy)friend lay on the floor and projected video footage upwards onto her body, feet, legs and face. Her composure and his creative use of images of the place where they are growing up and forging a relationship with each other. Only later we found out that in this relationship the boy was supporting her struggle with mental well-being and she supported his emerging gay identity. These aspects of their relationship cannot be fully known to the audience yet somehow the images capture an ineffable trace of a union, that could be read as belonging to a place and was borne of trust, intimacy, feelings of belonging and reciprocal support. Furthermore, juxtaposing a tree, a head and a young girl does not easily build into 'a' message and instead the projection technique animates a multiplicity of discordant images. This is just one of the many images that made it into the film. The apparatus/camera created a 'cut' in the flow of movement-time which resonated back to create potentially new experiences, meanings, insights and possibilities.

### <3>Impromptu body-forming workshops

The next example from a body-forming workshop emerged unexpectedly. We return to the girl who was struck by The Smiths album cover that appeared in one of the local newspapers and mentioned earlier. It is an iconic image of a 1960s woman, hands on hips, legs wide, standing tall, and back grounded by an active/inactive post-industrial landscape. As Figure 7.1 shows, this album cover picture was pasted into the newly coloured purple pulped *Skint* headlines. In a further workshop, her body forming became a queer Peter Pan figure, with aspirational slogans of adventure and freedom, located in the body. Other images seem flow out into the surrounding

space. The feet were rooted firmly in grass made from cuttings of local maps of the area. The collage seems to capture an adventurous spirit rooted in place, becoming-place — becoming more than place (Figure 7.5). This figure was made by a friendship group who referred to themselves as ‘outsiders’ to the normative cultures of their school. Once again, the process was accompanied by an outburst of collective singing. Lyrics from their favourite, non-mainstream band, were sung loudly and joyously as they cut paper and ground their spoons round and round in an orange bucket of paper mulch and ink. We speculate that this is a proto-politics of paper-making, belonging and resistance. They selected a single line each and collectively co-create with Emma what later becomes, *Metal Mash-Up* poem, by the ‘angry 12 year olds’ (Figure 7.6).

<Insert Figure 7.5 here>

Figure 7.5 Queering Peter Pan

<Insert Figure 7.6 here>

Figure 7.6 *Metal Mash-up*

<3>Cutting place together and apart

These examples capture the complexity of how place came into view anew. Media representations and the *Skint* series feed a voyeuristic tendency to project difficult emotions, such as loss and abandonment, onto some places. These places become symbolic dumping grounds for general fears of, for example, worklessness, poverty and decline. Some estates become places where these projections come to stick,

they become dark attractors. The young people were fully aware of the stigma attached to the place they call home. For example, Barry's personal, spontaneous, affectionate view of his street was superseded by the dominant representation of his street as 'crap'. In some ways, *Graphic Moves* takes the more intimate and fragile representations of the place, such as the one that Barry gave when he was taken by surprise, and made them visible. These examples point to the multiple strata of place buried beneath the more dominant discourses and representations. The art activities seemed to unearth other layers, perhaps revealing more intimate connections and more hidden makings of place and gave them creative form. Dominant and pathologising images proliferate through the well-resourced machinery of public media, and are in danger of constantly regulating what can be thought about a place. This is how stigma of place is perpetuated. Our film, *Graphic Moves*, was an attempt to 'speak back' to the *Skint* series by capturing the place through layers of projected images in different ways, ways that spontaneously emerged as young people, cut, ripped, soaked, stuck and coloured their way into a 'feeling-forth' of place.

We suggest that the workshops created spaces where counter images of the estate were able to emerge. The material affordances of paper, ink, water, film and projection as well as the techniques used to composed sections of the film and set them to music hint at hidden, precarious and affective ties to place. The images created by young people did not simply counter one flat image of place with another. Instead, they created counter-folds of juxtaposing images that both amplified nascent expressions as well as creating channels: passages for feelings of



belonging to be reaffirmed. In processes of making, art worked as *a way* for sedimented layers of the history and future potentialities of place to find expression.

The arts-based, film-making processes reflected back a place stigmatised in the media, especially by the Channel 4 series *Skint*, to reveal a place where deep feelings of belonging exist, some joyous and some painful. Multiple layers of visual and auditory sensorial architecture became the film *Graphic Moves* that cuts real life footage of streets, parks and buildings of Merthyr together and apart, with art works, colour and visual projected in layers and soundscapes (see also Ivinson and Renold, 2016). The effect has been to diffract the place through multiple assemblages that defy verbal articulation. The sequences of *Graphic Moves* work through aesthetic and affect intensities that created a multiplicity of rippling effects and affects in audiences.

The processes and micro dynamics that emerged in workshops are retained as traces in the images, sounds and artefacts in *Graphic Moves* (see <https://vimeo.com/233439593>). The film and the young people's artefacts are forms of resistance to the multiple systems of everyday regulation and stigma which come with poverty (Massumi, 2015). It contains the residues, fluxes and affects of creative workshop encounters which are the micropolitical effects, random movements and paint splashes that counter power and control (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 216). *Graphic Moves* created a generative proliferation of layers of hybrid representation which cannot be condensed into one counter image. Instead, it proliferates a multiplicity of diffractions that have an aesthetic and affective power to move.

## **<2>The more-than of regulation and resistance**

The Productive Margins programme set out explicitly to work with people on ‘the margins’ of society to enable alternative voices to be brought to current political debate about the regulatory aspects of democracy and participation in times of austerity in the UK. Furthermore, it started from the premise that ‘citizens can and do exercise agency within mainstream political spheres through obstruction, challenge, exit, ignoring or bending the “rules”’ ([www.productivemargins.co.uk](http://www.productivemargins.co.uk)). The groups at the margins in The 4Ms Project were the young people living with legacies of an industrial past which no longer provided a *raison d’être* for community beingness (Walkerdine, 2010) and we were interested in how it is possible to make sense of a place, its ‘matters of concern’ (Latour, 2004) and its utopian imaginings with and for young people. Our chapter, we hope, has offered a glimpse at how the 4Ms team attuned to, and worked with, the experiences of some of the young people living in Merthyr who have inherited and must navigate multiple, contradictory and imperceptible forms of regulation that come with living in this post-industrial place.

This was not a project that held onto pre-defined research questions, methods or outcomes with a vice-like grip, leaving little wiggle room to re-route when events and experiences emerged which required a change of approach. Rather, our project specifically drew upon arts-based, co-produced practices and activist politics to open up new ways of attuning to, understanding and responding to place-based concerns and how what comes to matter gathers significance in unpredictable ways. What we are beginning to understand from our multi-phased project is that resistance as well

as regulation are not stable states of being, but processes that are dynamic and transitory. Our arts-based practices and 'runaway methodologies' (see Renold and Ivinson, forthcoming) followed a rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) rather than a linear and systematic approach, and are based on openness, invention and creativity. By offering opportunities to subvert GIS technologies of surveillance and by gifting experimental arts-based workshops, we hoped to enable young people at the margins to communicate anew and to release their capacities to 'use this energy to co-produce new ways of envisioning and engaging regulation' ([www.productivemargins.ac.uk](http://www.productivemargins.ac.uk)). While we did not know in advance what would emerge from many of the workshops and activities that we orchestrated with artists, teachers, youth workers and Citizens Cymru, we had a strong sense from our previous work using inventive and speculative methodologies (Lury and Wakeford, 2012) that, as new ways to express feelings and moments emerged, we might begin to find out which and how 'regulative frameworks' come to traverse young people's lives. Indeed, the experimental arts-based practices seemed to offer multiple possibilities to disrupt repressive regimes and enable the communication of a wide range of expressions, such as hope, frustration, anger, fear, hurt, belonging and desire.

Mapping the mobilising processes of making in our activist-research confronted us with navigational, ethical and pragmatic issues and practices which we are only now beginning to explore and theorise, with others, in forums and exhibitions ([www.productivemargins.co.uk](http://www.productivemargins.co.uk)), papers (cited throughout this chapter) and performances (eg, Ivinson, Renold, Angharad, 2017a; 2017b; Ivinson, Renold,

Angharad and Oliver, 2018a; 2018b). The young people's films, poems and artefacts from The 4Ms Project continue to act back on us and wider publics as they are shared and infect forums, festivals, meetings and policy agendas with affects which 'cut' their place and their experience, apart and together differently (Barad, 2007). We continue to share these practices and artefacts as we work to create conducive contexts with and for other young people in Merthyr and further afield so that we/they might continue to find new ways to obstruct, challenge, bend and re-write the rules in macro (the Zebras and the Relationship Matters project) and micro-political ways (*Graphic Moves*). We continue to source and assemble, where possible, creative reservoirs that might regulate for and make productive, marginalised and minority ways of knowing and being visible.

## <2>Endnotes

1 For further reading on participatory research-activist scholarship see Fine and Vanderslice, 1992; Hale, 2008; Wardrop and Withers, 2014; Kara, 2017; Huckaby 2018; Sandwick et al, 2018; Fine et al, 2018.

2 The artists for The 4Ms Project included Jên Angharad, Seth Oliver, Rowan Talbot and Heloise Talbot-Godfrey.

3 The 'art' in pARTicipatory is emphasised to illustrate how arts-based methodologies (see Leavy, 2018 for overview) are embedded in participatory research practices (see Renold et al, 2008; Bradbury, 2015).

4 To read more about the qualitative GIS method, see Innes, 2015 and Thomas, 2016.

5 Estyn is the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. The purpose of Estyn is to inspect and regulate the quality and standards in education and training in Wales.

6 Orchard Street is a fictional name.