# Remix this method: a creative approach to young people's everyday lives as political arenas

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# Remix this method: a creative approach to young people's everyday lives as political arenas

Young people's everyday lives are not just social and cultural environments, but also political arenas (Kallio and Häkli, 2011:2). A methodological approach is proposed that emphasizes young people's knowledge, while accepting the power and privilege of the researcher. By way of illustration, this paper demonstrates how an approach to co-creation of the method, inspired by the idea of a remix or a bricolage, can provide creative tasks as stimuli for the discussion of politics but also legitimizing mechanisms for young expertise and co-creation in the research site itself as a political arena. Specifically, this paper examines how young participants responded to a digital photography task by subverting the task itself, a process which allowed them to remix the model, making them simultaneously in control of the task and dependent upon it. This complex outcome was constructive as a way to stimulate participants as they explored their everyday lives as political arenas.

Keywords: young adulthood, politics, citizenship, rural youth, transition.

## Introduction

This paper responds to calls for new concepts and new approaches to the political in our studies of young people's politics (Skelton, 2010, 2013:123; Sloam, 2012). The aim of the research is to explore how a co-creative methodology, based on participant-led photography, maintains a rigorous, meaningful definition of the political while remaining flexible to the ways young participants can adapt, transgress and subvert that definition. In doing so, this paper connects that conceptual issue of the boundaries of what is political, with the need for new methodologies to explore young people's everyday worlds, which are 'typically approached as social and cultural environments, but not as political arenas' (Kallio and Häkli, 2011:21). Young people are not monolithic but diverse, and demonstrate a mosaic of diverse political grammars and activities (Sloam, 2014; O'Toole, 2015). A method is formulated for political scientists

both to recognize and study politics as order, and to provide for young people to adapt, transgress and subvert that order in diverse ways in the research site. In this paper, the term 'research site' is taken to mean the location where fieldwork took place.

This method is termed as a remix approach, i.e. 'a process of re-assembling, recontextualizing and creating new meanings' (Burwell, 2012), to political science with young people. In particular, this method builds on existing approaches across disciplines, in order to develop a methodological opportunity in the study of young people's politics. Two research sites are selected where the remix approach is demonstrated in the United Kingdom as empirical examples, and the findings are contextualized alongside international research concerning young people's politics.

**Caught in the act: defining politics in research with young people**
In 2017, Rainsford encapsulated the struggle of many political scientists who seek to generate knowledge about young people's politics. Even when young people are 'caught' by the researcher (Rainsford, 2017:796) in conspicuously political acts and formal political organizations, young people, generally speaking, will resist discussing politics and reject approaches to themselves as political actors: although not alienated from systemic human relationships that are organized according to power (W. Brown, 2002:569), young people tend to be alienated from political actors, and 'might not see what they do as political' (Rainsford, 2017:803).

This paper proposes that we respond to the trials of talking to young people about politics by changing our concept of politics. In this study, youth is defined as a liminal societal position, subject to hegemonic adult power while also possessing political agency (Wood, 2011). Rancière wrote that one way to look at politics as a regime is as

'an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and that sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task' (Rancière, 1999:29) within which politics as action is 'the mode of acting that perturbs this arrangement' (Rancière, 2004:226). The research aim of this study was to explore how the co-creative methodology supported young people in sharing knowledge of politics as an order, and provided for young people to undertake action to perturb this arrangement in the research site. It is an approach that follows McIntyre, who argues for 'engaging in a process that positions youth as agents of inquiry and as "experts" in their own lives' (2000:126). The approach to should be separated from the vital task of defining political participation in ways that keep young people's political action a meaningful category (van Deth, 2014). Rather, the purpose of defining politics as a regime of order and as action to perturb that order is to operationalize our skills as political scientists to speak with, share with and learn from young people.

Rainsford's work identifies the struggle of the researcher to catch young people in the political act – that is, to constitute political action in a meaningful way that excludes some action as not political – but also to negotiate this process of capture with young people who may be evasive of the definition. Defining politics as a relationship is partly about accommodating the relationship between the researcher and the young participant as a political relationship in itself. It is partly, also, about accommodating the evasiveness of young politics: its transgressions and subversions of the boundaries of the political. One can identify the definition of the political itself as a regime of order, in other words. In so doing, one can study the perturbation of that order (Rancière, 2004:226) in the research site. Doing so permits the researcher to maintain a boundary

around the political while accommodating the permeability of that boundary: for instance, some things the researcher would consider within the realm of the political, young people will not.

Kallio and Häkli's call for new approaches to examine young everyday lives as political arenas (2011:2) is a timely methodological call. It also speaks to a contemporary pressure on young people as transitional citizens in a political moment 'in which young people are denied an effective voice in the political process and are short-changed in the policy process' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2011:26). The concept of the transition to citizenship is often a problematic one, prescribing pro-social and conformist pathways to adult citizenship (Banaji, 2008). Researchers may attempt to capture and taxonomize young people's politics in order to better understand (and, sometimes, to better support) their diverse grammars of political participation or action (Sloam, 2014; O'Toole, 2015). They must do so in the knowledge that young people have been identified 'practicing politics in ways with take advantage of a permeable public/private divide' (Manning, 2012:2). If one considers that young people are marginalized from institutional politics, but are still able to practice politics in ways that take advantage of a permeable public/private divide, then examining their everyday lives as political arenas is a practical way to release some of the pressure to identify young politics as political mostly, or perhaps only, in the terms of the public side of that porous divide.

**Exploring the research site as a political arena: from research aim to method**
This research project is an exploration of a method, termed a remix approach, which is discussed in detail below. The research investigates how young people in the two selected sites responded to a study of their everyday lives as political arenas, when politics was defined as *order* on the one hand, and *actions to perturb that order* on the

other. Seeking knowledge about young people's everyday lives as political arenas drew the researcher towards 'respondent-led' (Marsh et al., 2007:60) research that focuses on the everyday and its 'ways of operating, of doing things' (de Certeau, 1984:XI). Doing so can help the researcher to better understand 'how everyday life can also operate as an arena for the contestations and transformation of dominant, often oppressive modalities of citizenship' (Dickinson et al., 2008:105). In this light, what is here simplified under the term 'everyday' politics could be taken to refer not necessarily to relieving young people of their place in the 'public' sphere but to a 'more nuanced understanding of the relationship between [their] lived experiences and their engagement and interest in politics' (Marsh et al., 2007:212) that locates young people with liminal status and within a liminal space in society, embedded within adult- controlled spaces yet possessing political agency in various resourceful and tactical ways (Wood, 2011).

In this project, photographs were used as stimuli for focus groups. If one considers young people to be competent subjects – that is to say, if they are considered 'as agents of inquiry and as "experts" in their own lives' (McIntyre, 2000:126) – but different to adults, then inviting young participants to provide their own photographs is, fundamentally, about yielding to their competency and expertise concerning their own lives (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010:182). By this, it is proposed that young participants in research be considered 'as agents of inquiry and as "experts" in their own lives' (McIntyre, 2000:126). Photography as a way to share competency between the researcher and participant is well documented as a creative method for working with young people in the social sciences across the world (Newman et al., 2006; Purcell, 2007; Jorgenson and Sullivan, 2010; Trell and Van Hoven, 2010; Wood, 2011; Barker and Smith, 2012; Robinson and Gillies, 2012; Skelton, 2013). Photographs can help put

the participant in the driving seat and enable them to talk about issues of their choice; photographs can be a tangible focus and a prompt for remembering, and the visual aid a photograph provides to a participant is noted by researchers who have used photography as 'leading to a far deeper understanding' and richer descriptions than conversations alone (Newman et al., 2006:301).

Creative methods are no silver bullet: Sarah Pink writes that creative methods must be context-specific, 'creatively developed within individual projects' (Pink, 2001:4). Although the creative method, as Banaji and Burn write, sometimes rests on a 'rhetoric of creativity' that sees the production of photographs, artwork etc. as the free, unencumbered and empowered work of an individual subject (Banaji and Burn, 2006), there is nothing about a creative method that necessarily provides greater opportunities for participation in research, nor do they necessarily allow participants a 'direct or transparent means of 'expressing themselves' or 'having their voices heard'' (Buckingham, 2009:648–649). All the same, there are contexts in which creative methods can help with these goals. A creative method must be sensitive to the characteristics and needs of participants as well as those of the research project, while taking into account its cultural and physical setting (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010:181). With this critical reflection, the various creative methods and techniques – exemplified above – for working with young people can indeed be productive, enlightening, and empowering (Barker and Weller, 2003; Sanders and Munford, 2005; Robinson and Gillies, 2012).

**The bricolage or remix approach**

The point of this method is to put young people in charge of their politics and give them greater control of the research site as a place where politics is not just discussed, but is really happening, between the participants and the researcher.

The proposed method begins with the idea of the remix. A remix is about taking what a person or group has produced and mixing it up into a new production. It is a kind of bricolage: a research approach for accepting the complex ways human perception is linked to material realities (Kincheloe, 2005:326) and the research itself, as Lévi-Strauss wrote, as an interaction between the producer and the world in 'a particular relationship between nature and culture definable in terms of his particular period and civilization and the material means at his disposal' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:19). Reality is complicated, and the way people make sense of it is complicated too, and bricolage could be understood as a co-creative and collaborative approach to the science of studying those relationships, in which the researcher's procedures coexist with the ways participants narrate, explore and themselves interpret the data generated in the research. By using numerous data-gathering strategies (Denzin, 2010), multidimensional interpretation and multiple narratives (Kincheloe, 2005:336) the bricoleur is humble to the implications of science 'as culture' (Morawski, 1997). As multiple narratives intersect in the bricolage (Markham, 2005; Denzin, 2010) it is an approach tailor made for engaging with multiplicities and intersections of life story, context, lived geography, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and so on (Bridges, 1997, 2005; Morawski, 1997; Kincheloe, 2001; Smeyers and Verhesschen, 2001; Staeheli and Kofman, 2004; Denzin, 2010). The term remix emphasizes the co-creation shared between participants and researchers in the idea of bricolage.

Remix, in its everyday usage, refers to editing a piece of music, especially with digital equipment, so that it sounds different. The term has already been appropriated by researchers to mean quilt-like collages and montages of knowledge (cf. Lashua and Fox 2007; Yancey 2009; Cover 2013). 'Remix' is a poetic nod to the aesthetics of bricolage as an attempt to bridge the distance between human subjects (Liu, 2011); the 'remix' may be a more intuitive word in the context of this project and its phases of data generation than 'bricolage', and the literal implications of 'remixing' match the philosophical intention to begin this project from a position of intellectual equality. Shared ownership, shared voice and equality are fundamental to the remix, and the creator of a remix is simultaneously reader and writer, producer and consumer (Burwell, 2012). Although remix remains an expressive term in this article, rather than one that is investigated in great detail as an intellectual approach, it is interpreted within an epistemological framework defined by the concept of politics as a hierarchical arrangement and as 'the mode of acting that perturbs this arrangement' (Rancière, 2004:226). The word remix is intended to evoke a sense of multiple authorship and disruption of hierarchies.

**A practical method for young, remixed politics**

Staying mindful of the advice that creative methods should be 'creatively developed within individual projects' (Pink, 2001:4), the following is proposed as a way to build creative and meaningful conversations with young people about the politics in their everyday lives. Gaps are left in the model for adaptation, and suggestions are made where fellow researchers inside and outside the academy might find it appropriate to tailor the model to their own needs, and the needs and wishes of their participants. In the hope of maximizing its utility, at the same time as explaining the principles of the method, examples are provided from two sites where the method was used in practice.

Site 1, The Cog, is a youth group run by a young people's drop in health clinic in South London. The area is neither deprived nor wealthy, with approximately 35% of children in the area's Parliamentary constituency living in poverty after housing costs, close to the London average (30%) (Hirsch and Valdez, 2014). The area is anonymized in the project with the pseudonym Marksbury.

Site 2, Greenmont School, is a mixed comprehensive academy located in the anonymized rural town of Greenmont in South West England. As an indicator of the nature of the school, the proportion of students for which the school receives a pupil premium – that is, public funding for the support of disadvantaged pupils through the provision of learning materials, breakfast clubs and lunches, increased staffing, after school activities and so on – is near to 30%, compared to a county average of 7% and a national average 15%. Although located in the town of Greenmont, Greenmont School provides for many children who live in a wider, economically disadvantaged, rural catchment area. These research sites were chosen as comparative sites as part of the researcher's PhD thesis fieldwork (Bowman, 2016) with the aim of comparing young people of similar ages and in this methodological study, the sites are selected without a strict rationale for their choice beyond the availability of the data.

The research aims of the original thesis, for which this method was developed, were to explore young people's political subjectivities during transitions to adulthood. This research aim directed the researcher to explore participant-led conversations, diverse concepts of politics and varied, complex ideas of what they mean. Political concepts are likely to take on various context-specific meanings (McLeod and Yates, 2006) and so the context the research takes place in is vital. In an ideal world, the researcher should

stay flexible to suit the context, and keep adapting the method to the site and in response to the participants as they, themselves, adapt and subvert the method. [Figure 1 here]

At every site a background information card was provided (Figure 1), leaving open spaces rather than tick boxes and making the reasons for doing so explicit to participants: the researcher said 'This card is just for you to tell me more about yourself, if you want to. I have left spaces open for things like "background" because I want to let you speak for yourself rather than tick a box. You can write anything you want, or not write anything. It's up to you'. In table 1, the reader can see an example of the results. In this site the reporting of school year arose after participants talked together about how they identified their status and although they went ahead and picked the first suggestion on the list (school year), their shared deliberation helped begin the discussion process. In this research, participants have self-identified with complex patchwork identities like Andrew's 'Disabled British Mancunian', and otherwise used the background information card to elaborate on the self beyond ticking boxes. Participants were also asked to choose a pseudonym, as in similar projects (McLeod and Yates, 2006; Weller, 2007; Gallagher, 2008; Wood, 2012), using Wood's term 'code name' (Wood, 2009:5) – as a way to protect their identities.

In this method, the first contact between participants and the researcher is a task-based meeting. In this project, the meeting stage was based on the 'World Café' model (Brown, 2002; Brown and Isaacs, 2005), a focus group method using a card-sorting exercise to introduce and co-define the research topic. The selection of the World Café method was based on the familiarity of the researcher with the method from previous research experience, as well as the merits of the World Café approach in itself as a

relatively flexible activity. Once this task is completed, the participants are offered the opportunity to either define the terms of the photography project themselves, or to discuss the researcher's questions. In this example of this method, three tasks were presented for the photography project and discussed with participants. Participants were offered the tasks as a starting point and given the opportunity to add to or change them if they wished. The tasks were:

- Take a picture of something you are proud of;
- Take a picture of something you think could be improved, and;
- If you could take one picture and show it to the Prime Minister, what would you take a picture of and what would you say?

Care was taken to be explicit about the modes of talking that were acceptable, and the following phrases are examples of those scripted for the focus group:

- I am interested in your pictures, and I am most interested in what you have to say, so you can let the picture start you off and you can take the discussion where you wish.
- I am really interested in your lives, and you are the expert in your own life. I am grateful for you sharing that expertise with me for my research.

These tasks were selected in order to align this research method as a development of Wood's similar approach to photography-based focus groups with young people to generate data on their everyday places (Wood, 2011, 2012) in which participants at both sites took on the tasks 'take a picture of something you are proud of' and 'take a picture of something you think can be improved'. At neither site did the third task 'if you could take one picture and show it to the Prime Minister…' attract interest from participants. This task was designed as a way for participants to frame their answers in terms of institutional politics if they wished, but as no participant at the two sites took a photograph in response to the third task, it is considered to have been rejected by participants. The participants were provided with cameras and given a week to take their own photographs for the discussion.

**In the photograph but not quite: remixed politics in the focus group**

The focus group is often used in research with young people (as in Michell, 1997; Lyon and Great Britain, 2000; MacPhail and Campbell, 2001; Hillier and Harrison, 2007; Ahmed, 2009; Lawy, Quinn and Diment, 2009; Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). In this paper, the focus group serves as a space where young people can co-create meanings in the research site (Barbour, 2005:68). In particular, it is intended that young participants can subvert the politics of the research site through the process of the focus group as a minimally structured method for qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006:311) that aims for data generation alongside a positive experience for young participants (Gibson, 2007). As a method, the focus group was not a fully participatory approach, and maintained a relationship between the researcher and participants that was explicitly one of study and observation as opposed to, for instance, a youth participatory action research (or YPAR) approach (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). The focus group was selected as an available and well-studied method but further research could employ different approaches in order to build on, or develop comparators for, this study.

In this study, subversion of the politics of the research site was encountered with remarkable frequency in the form of participants talking about things that are not quite in the photograph. The assignment to take photographs and discuss what is in them, in other words, is subverted by participants who identify the topic for discussion as being just out of shot, or obscured, or otherwise separated from the researcher's direct consumption so that the young participant has complied with the task given, but retains a claim of knowledge over the topic of discussion. [Figure 2 here]

Figure 2 depicts a park local to The Cog. Although the prompt is to talk about the park, attention is drawn to the process of the claiming of expertise and legitimacy by depicting what is 'in the photograph, but not quite':

| | |
|---|---|
| B | I climbed up it once... |
| Xylem | And there's graffiti, up the top it has swear words |
| Group | [laughter] |
| B | Yeah, graffiti, swear words |
| Xylem | Yeah like, and it's not good for like, little kids because they're gonna go to school and they're going to start swearing at the teachers… |
| B | I wish it was far cleaner, that I could just pull a bucket and sponge out of nowhere and clean it off |
| Assassins Creed | It's annoying |

Xylem's photograph does not show the graffiti that the participants are discussing. She subverts the research process by pointing out the photo as proof that something is there, then talking about something outside of the frame. At The Cog, the graffiti was in the photograph but simultaneously absent, and participants used it to begin a discussion about their everyday experiences. The process of taking a picture and then discussing what was outside of it came as a surprise to the researcher and future work could develop further investigations of this process. It is possible that to some extent, the photos simply facilitated talk about related issues like graffiti – above – or, later in this paper, the provision of park facilities.

At The Cog, the discussion of graffiti developed into an examination of
intergenerational relations:

| | |
|---|---|
| Assassins Creed | It's kind of a reflection on our generation because people like that do stupid things like that people stereotype all teenagers because like, when you go out -  firstly, I don't like wearing skirts and stuff and when I go out in a tracksuit and trainers people tend to stare. And you can tell that they're, they have their... I don't know if I can use 'stigmatizing' but they stigmatize teenagers as loud, like, no manners, and stuff like that. And it's rude, because not everybody's like that. |
| B | Especially black teenagers |
| Xylem | I… when they… swearing... |
| Assassins Creed | Because yesterday I went to look for halls for my birthday and the woman said, you're going to be 16? and I said, yeah! and she was like, well, you can't hire it because all 16-year-olds are rude... Like, you can't say that, because not all teenagers are like that. |

B and Xylem joined in:

| | |
|---|---|
| B | It's just those... stereotypical people like um |
| Xylem | It's worse when you're on the bus. Because, I was on the bus with my friend and then - um, because the seat was there, and she was sitting there and then this old lady |

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | came on and she said like, 'oh, you're a disgrace to Oakfield' |
| Teddy Bear | Oakfield School |
| Xylem | We didn't do anything, we just got off the bus and like- |
| Assassins Creed | It's the way you conduct yourself in public. Because, if you give them a reason to talk then obviously they're going to say something. So, you have to… you have to be careful what you say around certain people because they're, you're giving them reason to say, oh, 'teenagers are this'. In a way you have to code-switch because when you're with your friends you can talk any way you want. But when you're in public, you have to talk as formal as possible so people don't get the wrong impression of you. So. |

As well as sharing her own story and breaking the ice for Xylem, B and Teddy Bear to talk too, Assassins Creed brought the discussion, in many ways, back around to its beginning. Two explorations of everyday life as a political arena, in the words of Kallio and Häkli (2011:22), in which Assassins Creed and Xylem have faced rather arbitrary control by adults, are elicited by the photograph. It is also clear in this example as was frequently the case in the project, that participants began by – as Assassins Creed teaches us – code-switching, and talking as formally as possible, not just to begin the discussion but to claim legitimacy in their participation in the research site. In the participants' shared talk about code-switching the group articulated, together, experiences of young lives lived at the intersections of 'a system of interlocking

oppressions' (Roberts, 2012:240) to use an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1990). Code-switching, after all, 'is nothing if it ain't about race!' (Young, 2009:51) and the navigation and negotiation of different intersecting categories of marginalization by, as B says, black teenagers, developed from discussions of experiences in everyday places.

During childhood, autonomy in public spaces has been called the freedom to play and 'mess around' (Bourke, 2014). For young adults in the UK, for instance, spaces can end up divided between adult controlled youth centres – 'safe, useful place[s] that reasonable young people will want to attend' – and public spaces – 'like the forest of fairy tales, a place where feckless mobs roam' (Davies, 2012:86). The consequence of the boundaries enforced is that use of public spaces by young people is restricted according subjective definitions of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour: in one area ball games will be allowed, but not in another; a 'no loitering' sign will warn young people their very presence is considered disruptive or even threatening to other people.

In a similar way, the focus group can prepare ground for the legitimacy of young people's political talk. By using the photographs as a catalyst for the focus group's talk, but not as a product of the focus group in themselves, the photograph becomes a powerful tool for the young participant seeking to negotiate their own expertise in the research site. The photograph of the park is proof that the park is there. It is proof that the participants have conformed to the expectations of the researcher and completed the task. Having proved both their first-hand expertise and their task-based engagement, B, Assassins Creed and Xylem all then embark on the discussion of a topic that is in the photograph but not quite – the obscured graffiti in the climbing frame – which brings them round to the weighty discussion of their everyday lives as political arenas.

**'They could actually put up a fence': legitimizing subversion in the research process**

At The Cog, it was B who called up the photograph of the park in figure 2, and identified the graffiti that was in the photograph, but not quite, as what he wanted to talk about. At Greenmont School the same process was followed with Ken as the instigator, referring to Barbie's photograph of the park (figure 3): 'That's Greenmont Park, there's more of it behind but it's not very clear'. [Figure 3 here]

Greenmont Park provided, the participants explained, two sets of equipment. The photograph shows the portion of the park for younger children, while in the background, obscured by the trees, there is another area set aside for older users. Again, participants made a distinction between younger kids playing under parental supervision and themselves as older visitors to the park. Participants valued their autonomy over the older one's space. They explained the younger section was in need of an upgrade, and that they were concerned that as the younger kids' section deteriorated, younger children and their parents were coming across to compete for the better equipment. This encroached on an important space to them for spending time outside school:

Ken          That's where we normally all stay on Saturday and Sunday and after school, which is just like… there will be little kids there and… you've got to watch it but because it's quite far from the actual other park bit, you don't have to be, but you still have to be careful what you say, but it's… you have to be less, you don't have to be as careful. You don't…

Barbie       You don't have to be as careful, it's so far away that, yeah, they won't be able to hear you unless you shout

| | |
|---|---|
| Bob | Obviously the equipment is very nearly always… I think you said, it was the fact that there's some swings about over here and they're actually getting really bad. |
| Barbie | They improve the big bit but they didn't do anything to the kids' bit. |
| Bob | Yeah, they just left it. |
| Researcher | Could you tell me who they are? Who improved it? |
| Barbie | I don't know, the Council. |
| Bob | The Council. |
| Ken | The Council, I think. |

The experience of being young at Greenmont Park had many similarities to being young in Marksbury:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ken | Like, also, right at the back there's like, is it two houses? Three houses? |
| Barbie | What, like the massive… |
| Ken | With the grass area. There's like massive houses and then it leads onto a grass area, but then I think they get annoyed because it's like, all the kids go there, and we play football with other people's… |
| Barbie | I was sat on the wall the other day and someone told me off because it was on their house but it was like, part of the park as well. |
| Bob | It's quite confusing. |

| Ken | Yeah. Also like, you're doing something or, and also when you play football if it goes like, on their actual garden bit, because they have loads of flowers if you damage one and they come out and have a go at you, you be like, 'yeah but it's not our fault', it's like, the way they've done it. |
|---|---|
| Bob | They could actually put up a fence. |
| Ken | Yeah |
| Barbie | Yeah |

Ken and Barbie's tone of voice speaking about the massive houses seemed to reflect an imbalance of power and social status. Ken made big imposing hand gestures for the 'massive houses'. Both Ken and Barbie used a tone of frustrated entreaty: 'it's like, all the kids go there', 'it was on their house but it was like, part of the park as well', 'they come out and have a go at you, you be like, 'yeah but it's not our fault'. One benefit of growing up outside the city is the availability of space to roam, with the drawback that such spaces are typically 'not formally controlled by by-laws or other means of legally restricting access, but… clearly coded by adults as spaces in which young people are out of place and in which their activities are unwelcome or inappropriate', especially when such adults can take advantage of their control, possibly legitimized by a class divide (Leyshon and Bull, 2011:169):

| Researcher | How do you feel about it, how does that make you feel? |
|---|---|
| Ken | It's not very nice because it's a park, there's obviously going to be people there messing around and playing football and stuff, and if someone kicks a football over there then it's like, it's not really a non-normal sort of thing, obviously you didn't mean to. |

> Barbie    And also, they're taking advantage of being able to have a go at
>           us and stuff.

Ken, again, employs a humble complaining tone: 'like, it's not really a non-normal sort of thing, obviously you didn't mean to'. The paradox of living in a small community is feeling safe and secure in familiar environments on the one hand, while experiencing isolation, exclusion and surveillance on the other (Tyrrell and Harmer, 2015:2). It was intriguing to hear participants explaining the boundary between the park – a public space for messing around and playing football – and the massive houses with grass areas and flower beds, as sharing a blurry and liminal boundary area. The area between the park and the massive houses was just this kind of space, and it was precisely the lack of formal control or boundary restriction ('they could actually put up a fence') that allowed powerful adults to take total control over which activities are unwelcome or inappropriate ('they're taking advantage of being able to have a go at us'). A sense of alienation and lack of autonomy under the gaze of powerful adults and arbitrary adult control over young people's behaviour in public space was not unique to the rural site, though: these two examples are an illustrative juxtaposition of the way very different young people, from very different parts of the country, experienced the same politics of control. Like Xylem and her friend, who reported being driven off a city bus for doing nothing – except, as it is interpreted in this study, taking up a space coded by adults as one where young people are to be considered inappropriate – the participants at Greenmont felt their use of the public park was contingent at all times on the whim of nearby adults.

There is a vital methodological lesson to be learned from the young people in Markham and Greenmont. As a powerful adult with control over participants' talk and an exclusive veto over the propriety of their activities – the researcher could have said 'this is not relevant' at any time, and indeed did so, albeit in friendlier terms, when Assassins Creed offered to lead the topic of conversation at the Markham site with 'our favourite brands' – it would have made a lot of sense for participants to judge that '[you] have to be careful what you say' (Ken) and to 'code-switch' and 'talk as formal as possible' (Assassins Creed) in the research site. It is somewhat counter-intuitive, but in this paper it is argued that young people can gain the freedom to say and to say it the way they like from clear rules that make the power of the researcher explicit, while preparing for young reclamation of power through subversion of those rules. The task of taking photographs was not just a stimulus for the talk in the focus group. It was also a process of 'putting up a fence' that made it clear where participants could play ball without the researcher having a go, stepping in to take control, or judging their propriety. In the focus group, as at the park or on the bus, young participants were keen in their awareness of the political order of things in the Rancièreian sense (1999:29) and of the adult's role as arbiter over what sayings and doings are legitimate within that order. To give the task 'take a photograph and talk about it' provoked talk but also legitimized the subversion of the task as young people pushed the boundary and perturbed the relationships of power and expertise in the research site.

**Conclusion: why remix?**

The introduction of this paper referred to Kallio and Häkli's call for more methods for exploring about young people's everyday lives 'as political arenas', and not just as 'social and cultural environments' (2011:2). One method for doing this is provided here. One can construct research sites as spaces where young people can craft, explore and

narrate their everyday lives as political arenas through the subversion of the rules of the research site itself. In doing so, the researcher can provide for a complex form of co-creation in which young people are recognized as inhabiting a liminal space, both independent political agents and simultaneously subject to the control of the researcher as a powerful adult.

Further experimentation with the method will be required to test the proclivity of young participants to give 'the right answer'. At both Marksbury and Greenmont there were hopeful signs this is not the case. Despite an explicit interest in politics on the part of the researcher, at neither site did participants talk about elections or voting. This is surprising given the obsession in British political discourse for talking about young electoral engagement (Banaji, 2008:543) and the near constant public questioning of why young people don't vote. If participants were trying to give the right answer, this would have been an easy win. Two factors temper this assessment: first, the young age of the participants, who were too young to vote; second, that there was no ongoing electoral campaign at the time of study (Summer 2016). Future research could consider repeating the study at election times and with an older group of participants.

In any case, as the illustrations above show, the participants took the photography project as an opportunity to remix the task, to share not only in its results but in its co-creation as a method. The contestation of power, legitimacy, provision of park facilities and so on in everyday spaces – particularly with respect to unfair adult dominance (as in Dickinson et al., 2008:105) – was transferred to the research site and the liminal status of young people allowed for creative and subversive acts of claiming power and legitimacy. One of these, emphasized above, was the simultaneous obedience to the method (taking photographs) and subversion (talking about something that was just

outside the frame in order to maximize the power thereby granted by expertise). The process of liminal co-creation, in which young people are simultaneously under the control of the research project and controlling the research project, allowed participants to mix up multiple narratives and experiences in order to craft political talk and share experiences of the politics of the everyday from a position of expertise. In this case, explicit tasks and restrictions were provided in the hope that young people would adapt and subvert them. Doing so can help build a relationship of co-creation into our research designs, as we explore young people's politics alongside the young experts as co-creators as they share their experience.

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Figure 1. Background information card

**Current status**

This section is so I know a bit more about you.
It is all optional – you can fill it in or not.
You can also fill some parts in and leave others.

| Age | Gender |
|-----|--------|
| **Background / ethnicity** | |
| **Optional: current status (e.g. school year, employment, college course?)** | |

Table 1. Participants at The Cog, Markham, London

| Code name | Age | Gender | Background/ Ethnicity | Optional |
|-----------|-----|--------|----------------------|----------|
| Assassins Creed | 16 | Female | Black British | |
| B | 12 | Male | Black British | Year 8 |
| Bean | 14 | Female | | |
| Teddy Bear | 14 | Female | | Year 10 |
| Xylem | 11 | Female | Jamaican | Year 10 |

Table 2. Participants at Greenmont School, Greenmont, South West England

| Code name | Age | Gender | Background/ Ethnicity | Optional |
|-----------|-----|--------|----------------------|----------|
| Andrew | 15 | Male | Disabled British Mancunian | Year 10 |
| Barbie | 14 | Female | | Year 10 |
| Bob | 14 | Male | | Year 10 |
| Ken | 14 | Female | | Year 10 |

Figure 2. Park nearby The Cog, Markham, London. Photographer: Xylem.

Figure 3. Greenmont Park, Greenmont, South West England. Photographer: Barbie.