Creative Approaches to Research: Reflections on the Learning Journey

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Outline

- Thank you – Dr Chloe Asker
- Visual and creative approaches
- Found, researcher initiated and participatory productions
- Familiarity
- Creative data generation
- Ethical practice
- Dissemination and impact

Discovery and Creation

- Pauwels (2011) offers a framework for grouping, sorting and reflecting on visual approaches

- Found materials – social scientists as image collectors

- Researcher-initiated productions – social scientists as image creators

- Participatory-productions – social scientist as the participatory facilitator
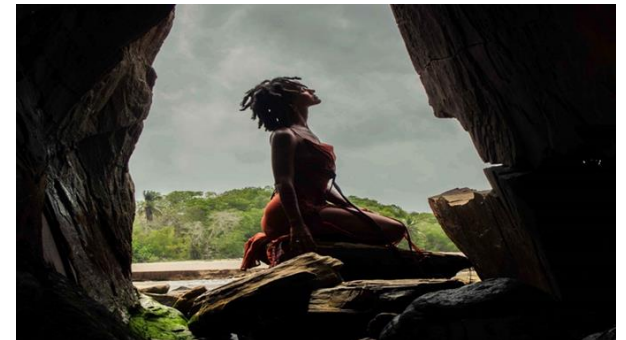
- Blurred lines?

Found Materials

- Print Media (Rose 2010)
- Film
- Everyday cultural artefacts
- Advertisements
- Internet
- Heritage
- Art

Just in the background?

- Unnoticed or influential
- Who is celebrated?
- Who is silenced?
- Edward Colston
- Jen Reid
- Thomas Picton - Governor of Trinidad
- National Museum Wales
- Trinidadian artist Gesiye - The Wound is a Portal

Images in Public Health

- Public Health Campaigns

- Health Magazines

- Advertising

- Representations

- Misrepresentations

- Stigma

- Awareness

- Solutions

Researcher-initiated productions

- Documentary photography (Douglas Harper 2023)

- Art based projects

- Postcards (Rosie Canning 2024)

- Autoethnographic art (Jason Yuk-Fai Lau)

- Maps, Diagrams and Charts

- Comics (Muna Al-Jawad 2015)

- Sandboxing to plan (Mannay and Timperley 2025)

- Dissemination and impact (return to this later)
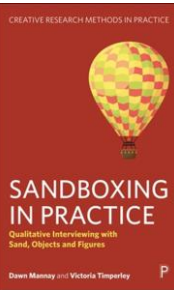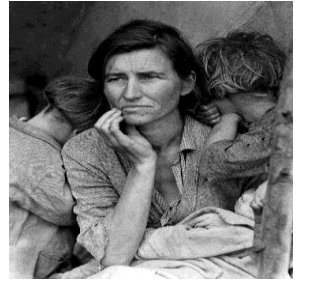
Participatory-productions

- Participatory-productions – social scientist as the participatory facilitator
- Research 'with' not 'on' participants
- Participant led - concerned with working side-by-side - handing back the camera
- Mapping, collages, drawings, sand-play, plasticise, film making, Lego
- Design, data production and dissemination
- Presenting the everyday lived realities rather than the sensationalised
- Engenders a space for empathy
- But often partially participatory – and arts-based does not = participatory

The problem of familiarity

- 'I was bored by the thought of studying undergraduates ... I had memories of my own college days in which I appeared as a child' (Greer 1964)

- 'seeing only the things that are conventionally "there" to be seen' (Becker 1971)

- Desire to make the familiar strange has 'almost the status of a mantra among ethnographers' (Sikes 2006)

Fighting Familiarity

- Delamont and Atkinson (1995)
- Thorne (1993)
- Renold (2005)

Fighting Familiarity Visually

- Introducing a visual element to the process of data collection can potentially provide different ways of knowing and understanding (Gauntlett 2007)
- Defamiliarisation - over time our perceptions of familiar, everyday situations become veiled by a web of taken for granted meanings - art can address this automization by forcing us to slowdown our perception, to linger and to notice
- Art, therefore, may be an element that can overcome the confines of language, open up experience and make the familiar strange
- *Mothers and daughters on the margins*
- 'overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding'

Making the familiar strange – for the researcher and processes of defamiliarization

Night time

Applying Auteur theory

- The audience, then, actively make their own meanings from an image. Yet, if the research is interested in the ways in which people assign meanings to pictures the study of images alone as, as data whose meaning is intrinsic, is a mistaken method (Banks 2001)

- To gain an understanding of the internal narrative of the image

- Imperative to acknowledge the role of the image-maker

- The notion that the most salient aspect in understanding a visual image is what the maker intended to show is often referred to *auteur* theory (Rose 2001)

- Elicitation interviews with the images

Negotiating closed doors and constraining deadlines

- Artefacts can tell how a particular aspect of material culture is entangled in our everyday lives (Chapman 2000)
- 'Narratives and objects inhabit the intersection of the personal and the social' (Hurdley 2006, p. 717)
- *Visual Artefacts* (Grant, Mannay and Marzella 2017)
- Unseen elements - introduced to mundane (but important artefacts) located in areas beyond the space selected for the interview
- Less time and commitment from participants
- Objects are containers of meanings
- Led research in different directions
- But – need to be prepared that not all participants will bring objects

Media messages
## Stigma, class and motherhood

- Moral maze motherhood – experienced by many BUT...
- Figure of chav mum circulates within a wide range of media...Through the figure of chav a new publicly sanctioned wave of middle-class contempt for the lower classes is bodied forth (Tyler 2008)
- Class not a protected characteristic - impacts on public perceptions and social policy – '*otherhood*' (Mannay et al 2018)
- Photoelicitation
- Analysis of 167 online images
- Failed maternal subject - photographs that attempted to classify mothers 'like them'
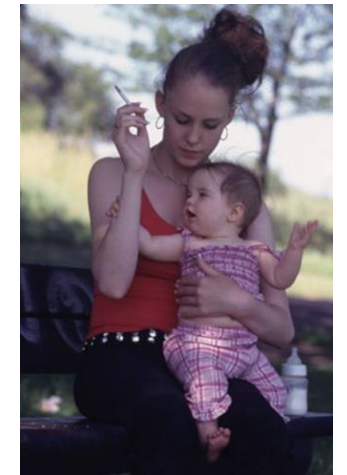
Temporality – past, present, future

- Possible selves
- *Mothers and daughters* (Mannay 2014)
- Timelines (Adriansen 2012; Berends 2011; Mannay and Creaghan 2016)
- Emotion stickers (Gabb and Fink 2015)
- Bubble activity
- Collage (Culshaw 2019; Mannay 2010)
- Sandboxing (Mannay and Timperley 2025)
- *Motherhood* (Mannay et al 2017)
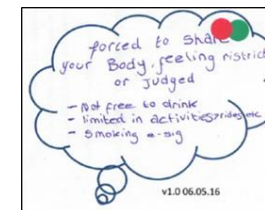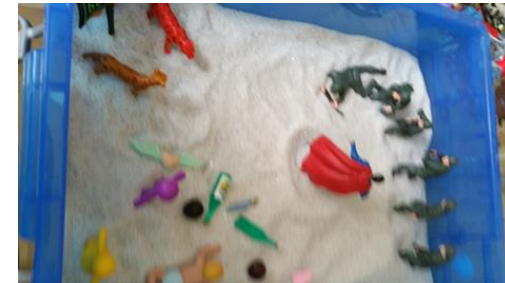
Different ways of asking

- 'Effective ways to address increasingly complex questions in social science' (Kara 2015, p. 3)

- Moving away from the 'social work interview'

- Embedded event days and activities - choice

- Empowering young people to lead and direct the conversations (Lomax et al. 2011)

- Peer led (Lushey and Monroe 2014)

- *Care experienced children and young people* (Mannay et al. 2017)
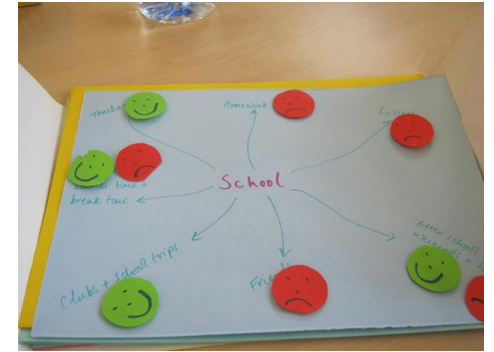
Remote Methods

- Covid Realities - https://covidrealities.org/
- Roberts et al 2020, 2021a, 2021b
- Working creatively with children and their foster carers (Mannay et al 2024)

Bricolage

- Suitability and 'childishness'

- Artistic ability

- You will do my 'participatory' method!

- Suite of methods - flexibility

- Drawing or collaging or photo-elicitation or narratives or film or objects or sandboxing or just interviews?

- Trying and testing

'Alone' or together

- In own home – researcher absent
- But who steps in when the researcher steps out? (Mannay 2013)
- Researcher present – 'observing'
- Researcher present – joint activity

I like nice cars
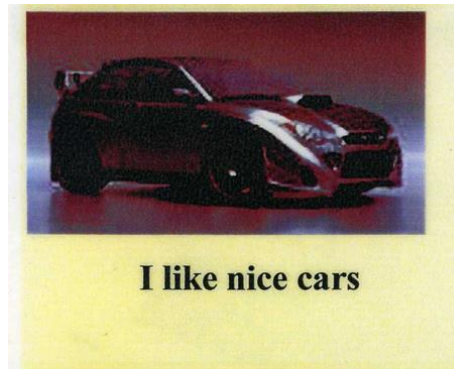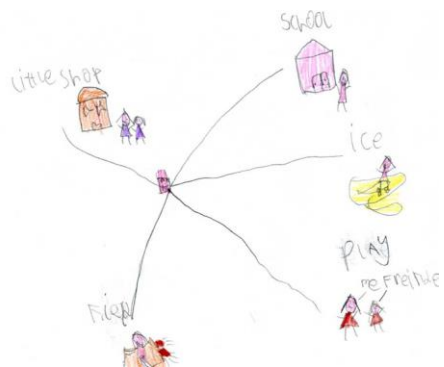
Ethical Principles in Research

- Anonymisation of respondents

- Informed consent

- Confidentiality

- Avoidance of harm

- 'central issue raised by participants concerned the vexed issues of anonymity and identification of visual materials' (Wiles et al 2008, p. 4)

Do we need to look?

- Payne (1996, p. 19) argues that 'humans *see* as well as hear and think. If the locality is relevant, then it is even more important than in other walks of sociology to see what it looks like'

- BUT Crow and Wiles (2008, p.9) contend, although research that only includes 'safe' photographs can be accused of losing 'something of the discipline's edge' once research data are placed in the public domain and re-worked in the media the impact and interpretation of visual images become extremely difficult to control

Images beyond control?

Who decides?

- The concept of anonymity is complicated further by the fact that individuals, particularly young children, appear commonly to want to be identified in their visual images (Wiles et al. 2008)

- One answer to this situation could be to follow an approach now favoured by some researchers, such as Back (2004), who present visual data and text in its entirety with consent based on the premise that data will not be anonymised
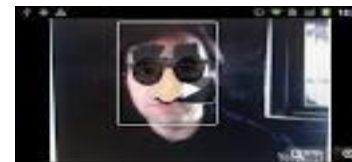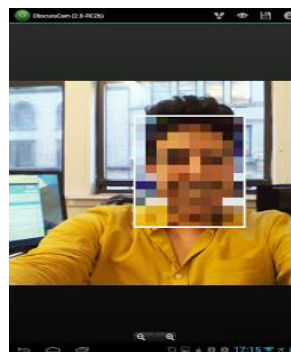
'Ethics of Recognition' - Sweetman

- Preoccupation with anonymity acts as resistance to discourses of participant visibility
- Engenders a potential for advantage
- Act of being seen was regarded by many participants as a transforming process; which provided pleasure in seeing the photograph, a new perception of self, the seizing of opportunities and the affirmation of greater ownership of Southampton
- Belonging and community involvement

'Ethics of recognition'?

- This approach though, is not suitable to all types of research data, especially in a study such as this where the majority of the participants want some level of anonymity

- Sensitive topics

- Images cannot speak – whose voice?

- How can images be disguised ethically?

Do these disguises work?
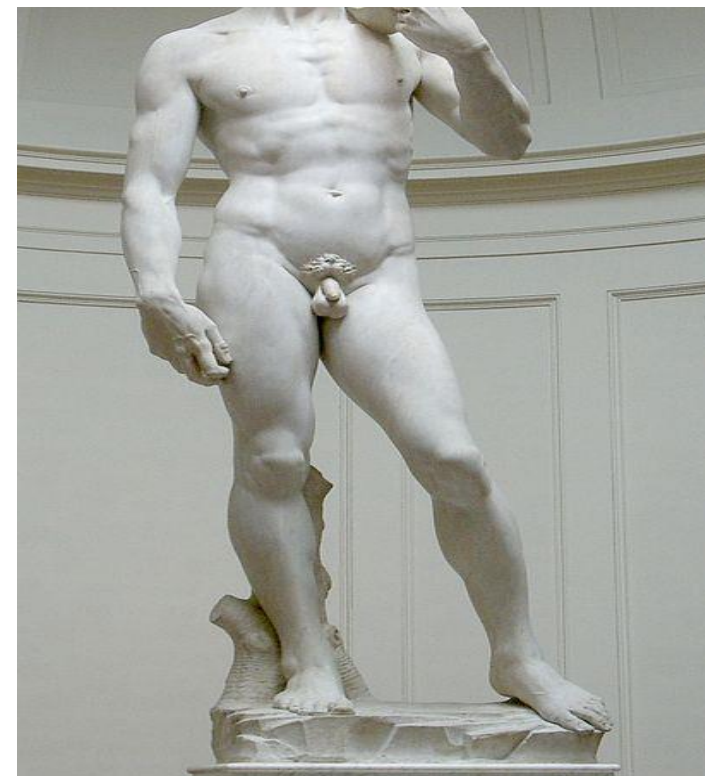
'Unknowing others' (Mannay 2011)
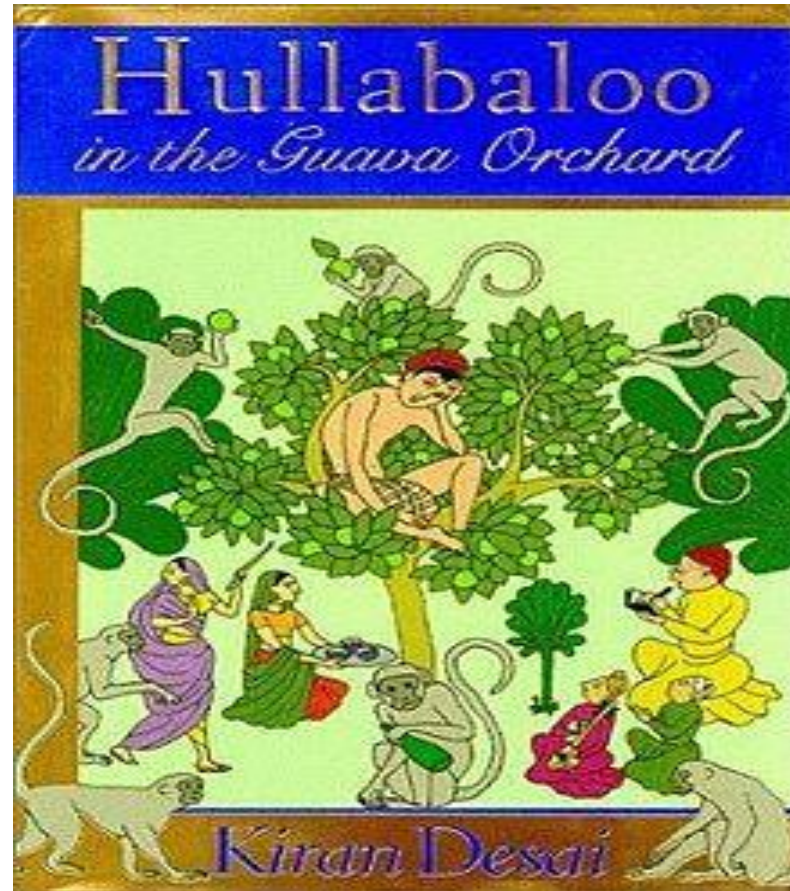
Being seen?

- Creative research engenders ethical dilemmas

- Consider the ethics of recognition

- Rethink informed consent as ongoing and negotiated rather than fixed

- 'Appropriate thoughtful practice can be more ethical than an ethical code' (Loewenthal 2023, p. 134)

'Informed' Consent

- Participants can only consent for themselves

- Is the consent informed?

- Simon Hammond - Participant information clips (PICS)

- Do they understand how their data will be used – what is a conference, journal article?

- Time immemorial (Brady and Brown 2013)

Materialising ethics

- Victoria Timperley – Case of Ethics https://www.exchangewales.org/how-might-we-work-more-ethically-with-children-and-young-people-the-case-of-ethics/

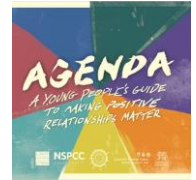- Research Ethics Tree (Lucy Robinson)

Enabling ethical engagement, impact and change?

- Reports, books, journal articles

- Informing policy

- Academic conferences

- How much impact do they have? Can they negotiate change?

- What other options do we have?

- What are the issues of ethics, representation, time immemorial (Brady and Brown 2013), voice and visibility?

- What opportunities can be gained from the impact agenda?

- Useful to consider the ways in which creative narrative forms can replace visual images and detailed, identifying, biographical accounts, yet still retain impact; and ethically, yet powerfully, communicate the stories that participants have shared in the research process (Mannay 2016)

Communicating stories

- Digital Archive - Dear Diary Project (Kate Carruthers Thomas) www.deardiaryresearch.co.uk
- Dialogic epistolary form – letter writing (Katherine Carroll 2018)
- Play – Under us All (Michael Richardson)
- Agenda (EJ Renold)
- "I survive on people": (Mis)recognising the value of social learning for mothers seeking sanctuary in Wales (Laura Shobiye 2023)
- How models can translate the lived experience of rheumatoid arthritis into material and form (Peter Marsh 2023)

Revisualisation - Anonymising, reframing and re-representing accounts

https://www.exchangewales.org/lace/

https://youtu.be/QSInkxguhvE ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQLwQmdT8GE&feature=youtu.be
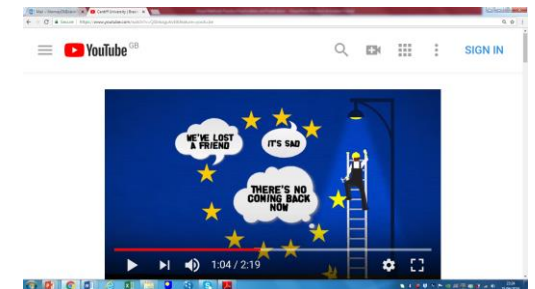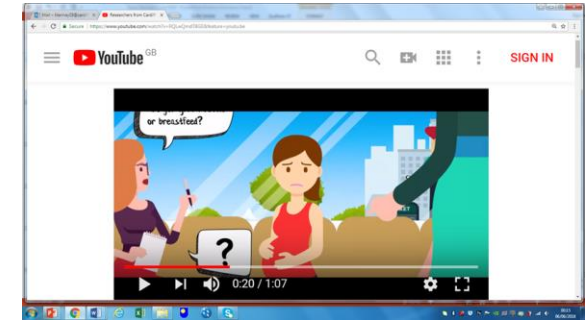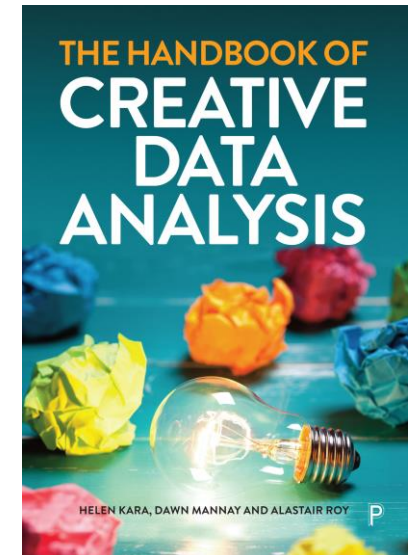
We didn't have time for Analysis

- Analysis of creative data
- Creative analysis of all data
- Edited collection - Kara, H., Mannay, D. and Roy, A. eds. 2024. *The handbook of creative data analysis*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Poetic forms, making an evidence wall, using the lenses of both discourse analysis and content analysis, creating word clouds...

Q & A

Thank you
for
listening!

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