

PAUL HURLEY Walk Like A Man: Choreographing public encounters with participant voices

Man Food was a 12-month participatory research impact and engagement project (2017-18) about masculinity, protein and the environment, exploring how men might prepare for the changes (bodily, social, ecological) that lie ahead of them. Alongside a series of cooking workshops with groups of men, exploring how subjects could perform different masculinities through food, the project hosted a collective of three artists-in-residence (Joanna Young, a choreographer, Kip Johnson, a dancer, and Jamie McCarthy, a sound artist) who created an audio walk. Processes of collaboration between academics (two cultural geographers), artists, community partners (Windmill Hill City Farm and The Matthew Tree Project) and participants (25 individuals identifying as men) raised issues pertinent to the question of how art regulates the collaborative research in which it participates. Of these, one concerns the impact of an artistic approach on the research design and process of engagement with participants, and another the regulation of the participant voice by artistic process.

A creative and performative approach has been an integral element of Man Food – in its development as well as delivery. The project was funded through an ‘impact and engagement’ grant building on earlier related Connected Communities projects (*Foodscapes* and *Protein Pressures*, 2014 and 2016) on which I had worked as an artist. In Man Food I was the researcher alongside PI Emma Roe in Geography and Environment at University of Southampton. With my own background as an artist, and my and Emma’s interests in using creative methods in participatory research, our approach was by no means a classic social science one. Our research questions were often shaped by questions of materiality and performativity, of finding opportunities for exploring sensorial engagements, such as through the workshops and the artistic output. Through this aspect of design, as well as through the presence of the artists (and their audio recorders and cameras) in the workshops, we became very aware of our own presence as researchers and as subjects. The visibility of our roles was regulated by the performance of participation – with the presence of the artists-in-residence, operating as uninstitutionalised / free agents, we were aware of our own performances as researchers and gendered individuals. We started to understand the encounters taking place not only through the language of geography, but through those of choreography and performance.

Participant voices took on a significant role in the project, in both the workshops and resulting art work. This immersive recording, sited in an area of south Bristol, combines excerpts of research interviews with expanded choreographies of space, as listeners observe the movement of other bodies on streets, in a city farm, and through a supermarket. The work is clearly authored, and while responding to (and regulated by) some of the research questions of Man Food, it also works with material arising in the project (participants’ and researchers’ voices, conceptual ideas around the research questions) on its own terms. The self-defined rather than institutional regulatory frameworks of the artistic elements of the project, create a more direct accountability and response-ability (following Haraway, 2008) for all involved. Moreover, the artistic logic of the audio walk (re)presented the voices of the participants through multiple modes of sensory engagement – touch, taste, smell – in ways that researchers’ transcriptions would not have done. Here, the interpretation of research material was regulated by aesthetic considerations rather than academic conventions. This allowed for an exploration of complexity that was intuited more heavily by a ‘sense’ of the participants (their personality, histories, interactions within other workshop members, ways of being in the world), and that communicated across project partners and wider audiences.