

Väitösikkuna

Tracey Skelton

Hanging out with young people, urban spaces and ideas

Noora Pyry:

Hanging out with young people, urban spaces and ideas: Openings to dwelling, participation and thinking. University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education, Research Report 374, Helsinki, 2015. (Summary 88 p. + 4 articles.)

This is an innovative and experimental thesis that is dedicated to placing young people, and young women in particular, centre stage (to draw upon the metaphor of *on stage* and *back stage* that Pyry uses in her thesis). The author has been committed to making sure that young people are present in the text and the articles she has published. However, she does this through much more than the written text as she utilises a range of visual illustrations of the young people's 'work' about dwelling and participating. It is very clear that the candidate has conducted the research independently and has been very competent in collecting, analysing and re-presenting the data. Her choices of the two cities under examination: Helsinki and San Francisco are well explained and appear logical.

Theoretically the thesis is ambitious and original. The candidate determinedly engages with, critiques, and effectively utilises a range of theoretical approaches: material feminist and posthuman conceptualisations, non-representational theory (NRT) and participatory action research (PAR). Analysis of the latter reflects a careful combination and weaving together of the conceptual with the methodological. Methodologically the thesis is very inventive and this is a key strength of the submission. Pyry used and adapted the following methods in her work: *dérives*, photo-walks, photo-talks, mind and mental mappings. The discussions of the theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools of the thesis are effective, accessible, well-informed and scholarly. The candidate, through her careful combination of the theories, concepts and methodologies has been able to produce a thesis that constitutes more-than could be delive-

red through a more singular approach. This is a thesis of considerable scholarly sophistication and that is of international significance within a range of sub-disciplinary debates. The work is already making important intellectual contributions to debates about methodologies, participation, young people, theoretical frameworks, urban studies, processes of knowledge production and concepts of dwelling.

This thesis engages very effectively with the existing theoretical discussions about non-representational theory (NRT), which is well established within geography and beyond. However through the critiques and the different ways of practicing NRT in this thesis Pyry goes beyond the established NRT work and grounds it very firmly alongside existing feminist materialism debates and the more recent feminist posthuman discussions. Her combination of NRT so carefully with posthuman feminist thinking is a unique aspect of this thesis. The second major element of originality is to draw these two conceptual approaches together with the arguments about participatory action research methodologies. The framing of this combination is very clearly explicated in chapter 2 of the first part of the thesis. We gain insight into how this combination of theoretical and methodological practices work intellectually and in terms of data gathering in Chapters 3 and 4 that focus on 'Hanging out -knowing' and 'Hanging out is participation'.

A real strength of this thesis is the clarity and accessibility of the writing and the explanations. I actually learned a great deal from the arguments put forward in the thesis. At times, drawing on a concept that Pyry develops and uses in her the-

sis, I was enchanted. The abstract of the thesis is excellent and clearly explained the key theoretical and conceptual elements (all of which are effectively examined in closer detail in Chapters 1 to 5). We are introduced to the Situationists and their practices of *dérive*, the traditions of participatory research, posthumanist feminist thinking and NRT. We learn that ‘dwelling with’ links to the formation of new data and the focus on young women’s ‘doings’ links to the performative part of the experimentation. We are advised that the work was conducted with school children, and mostly with young women, in order to examine their practices of *hanging out-knowing* and the possibilities of enchantment. We are told that the girls are active in ‘participation by being’ and so create ‘home spaces’ for themselves in their respective cities. The abstract ends with the recognition that young women experience, know, and dwell in public space at the same time as they contribute to the production of places. The abstract combined with chapter 1 and 2 clearly demonstrates the candidate’s command and competence of the research project and its execution as well as the meaning of this project and its contribution to relevant academic debates. Her knowledge of, and critical engagement with, the academic literature is extremely impressive and shows a very strong commitment to intellectual knowledge development.

The genuinely innovative, independent and original element of this thesis is the development, reworking and innovation of a range of methodologies that are designed to capture ‘data’, meanings, intuitions of dwelling, participation and thinking. The candidate explains that she herself participates in *dérives* and photo-walking in cities – hence she is somewhat of an expert on the methods she then develops to work with her participants in order to capture in complex ways how they dwell

and participate in cities. The candidate has applied, critically engaged with, and reflected upon the range of innovative methods in very effective ways and has thus demonstrated profound competence in a creative use of methodology.

The candidate worked very hard, consistently and successfully to gather her complex data that are used in the thesis and within the published articles that constitute the key presentations of her material. Appropriate research questions were posed and the methodology was designed to enable the candidate to answer those questions. Combined they generated rich and detailed material. The candidate critically engages with the material and also utilises it effectively to interrogate the theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis.

As this is a critical, participatory and qualitative piece of work there are no ‘results’ as defined in a more traditionally scientific way. What is presented however are rich visual and textual findings that provide in-depth exploration and analysis of how young people, and young women especially hang out, come to important and interesting knowings through that hanging out, and develop a kind of street-wise confidence that allows them to actively dwell and participate in spaces and places within their respective cities of Helsinki and San Francisco. The presentation of results is very well written, clearly structured and logical in both the relevant parts of the chapter 1–5 of thesis and in the published articles. The linkages between the findings of the research and the relevant and up to date literature are very well developed. Conclusions are clearly articulated throughout the thesis and presented in Chapter 5 as well as the competent conclusions related to the published/submitted papers. The conclusions are succinctly made and based on good evidence. Arguments and explanations are fluent, fluid, lyrical and logical. It was a pleasure to read this thesis.