'James always hangs out here': making space for place in studying masculinities at school

DÓNAL O DONOGHUE

All learning is emplaced. It happens somewhere and it involves material things. It is located and situated. This paper focuses on spaces and places outside of the classroom where lessons about ‘self’ and ‘other’ are learnt. Drawing on recent research (‘Space, place and the making of masculinities in primary schools in Ireland’, O Donoghue, Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 2006, volume 3), the paper analyses the stories/narratives of a group of ten and eleven year old boys, stories that tell of how they learn to speak, act and perform masculinities in school spaces and places. These performances, ‘naturalized’ through repetition and regulation, happen in spaces that exert significant effects on boys by opening up/closing off certain behavioural possibilities. The paper makes visible processes of doing and re/presenting research into masculinities and schooling in, with and through art. It argues that a research approach drawing on theories and processes of contemporary art practice offers much for conceptualizing, doing and representing research and provides opportunities that other research methods close off.

All learning is emplaced. It happens somewhere and it involves material things. It is located and situated. In his autobiography Becoming a Man, Half a Life Story, Paul Monette tells of how as a sixth grader he learnt the importance of ‘passing for straight’ (of not to be recognizably Other) in the basement corridor ‘just outside the boys’ lavatory, where sixth grade had its lockers’. It was here, away from the gaze of teachers, that he witnessed the event, a story to live by, which he later describes in his autobiography. ‘Vinnie and a group of three or four others had somebody pinned in a corner’ he writes, ‘Vinnie was snarling and shoving. Yeah, you’re a homo, ain’t ya? Little fairy homo. Ain’t that right? Then he shot out a fist and slammed his victim’s head against the wall’ (1993, 36). Similarly, it was in the school yard as it started to rain that Paula Spencer, the main character in Roddy Doyle’s novel The Woman who Walked into Doors, learnt that she was ‘stupid.’ ‘It was a fright, finding out that I was stupid. Before I even got in the door’ (1996, 28) she recalls, as she tells of how she waited in the yard for her name to be called by the Headmaster as he assigned first year students to classes based on ‘academic ability’ on that first day at secondary school. As William H. Schubert (2005, ix) observes in Pedagogy of Place: Seeing Space as Cultural Education, place is ‘a significant contributor to education, especially to curriculum and teaching’. Both Paul Monette’s and Paula Spencer’s stories, one true and the other fictional, demonstrate that learning happens in places at school which are neither named as learning spaces nor used as ‘official learning places’, and that school experiences are ‘emplaced’. For both Spencer and Monette life limiting lessons that went some way in defining who they were and how they lived (as we later discover) were learnt not in the classroom, but in the basement corridor and school yard, respectively.

This paper focuses on spaces and places outside of the classroom where lessons about ‘self’ and ‘other’ are learnt. Drawing on my recent research Space, Place and the Making of Masculinities in Primary Schools in Ireland (O Donoghue 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2006a), the paper shares and analyses the stories/narratives of a group of 10- and 11-year-old boys, stories about how they learn to speak, act and perform in gender/sex ‘in/appropriate ways’ in particular places at school, including the schoolyard, the entrance hall and corridors, and toilets. I locate the analyses and interpretation of these stories/narratives in social constructivist, feminist informed and poststructuralist theories of masculinity (see Connell 1995, 2000; Kimmel 1994a; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Messner 1997) and in theories of space and place (Hay 1988, 2003a, 2003b; Kitchin and Lysaght 2002; Lippard 1997; Massey 1993, 1994; McGregor 2003, 2004; Relph 1976; Tuan 1974, 1977, 2004). Of particular interest is Tuan’s (1977) concept of space as movement and place as pause, and McGregor’s (2004, 352) argument that place is contested and ‘multiply constructed from relations intersecting (or not) “beyond” the place as it is immediately experienced by individuals, who are placed in different ways to the flows of relations which construct it’. Central to the study is the idea that masculinities are constructed, performed and regulated, but they are not uniform and universally generalizable to all boys/men in our society. Masculinity is
conceptualized as something that is not ‘singularly possessed or something that “is”’ but something that is continually created through a series of repetitive acts. These performances are ‘naturalized’ through repetition and regulation; they are shaped by other dimensions of identity such as race, age, sexuality, disability, together with institutional factors (Renold 2004). Further, the paper considers what a research approach located in theories and processes of contemporary art practice might offer for doing research in and about schools. Such an approach draws on theories of Arts Based Educational Research A/r/tography and arts informed research (see Barone and Eisner 1997; Cole et al. 2003; Eisner 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Irwin and de Cosson 2004; Leggo 2004a, 2004b, 2005; O Donoghue 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2006a; Thomas 2004).

THE STUDY

The participant-based component of the study Space, Place and the Making of Masculinities in Primary Schools in Ireland, from which this paper comes, involved a group of 17 boys aged between 10 and 11 years of age. The boys who attended a large urban single-sex boys’ primary school performed part of the research, while they too were subjects of the inquiry. The study did not set out to find a representative sample of all single-sex boys’ schools in the Republic of Ireland. I was less concerned with the discovery of truth claims than with the creation of meaning (Eisner 2005). I was interested in gathering in-depth data, and generating questions about the spatialization of male subjectivities and masculine identities in schools. However, in saying that, all single-sex boys’ schools in the Republic of Ireland are similar in size, organizational structure and pedagogical practices. All single-sex schools are denominational and the majority are Catholic. The school in which this research took place was founded by a religious order and it was managed and staffed by religious clergymen for many years; now all teachers including the management are lay people. While it is a Catholic school, it also admits boys with other religious beliefs, or none.

This participant-based component dwelt in particular in the spaces and places outside of the classroom where boys present, and are presented with ways of performing and doing masculinities, where learning about ‘self’ and ‘other’ occurs. Not only are these spaces and places for performance and display, control and surveillance, to be appropriated and reapropriated; but they are also spaces and places that embody specific values, beliefs and traditions constructed, regulated and constituted through various constituting forces. In their own way these spaces and places exert a significant effect on boys by shaping the possibilities of their behaviours. The feeling of being in a physical space, positioned above, below, or on ground level, surrounded or exposed, in darkness or in light because of the structure or form impacts how one experiences that space, and this emplacement cannot always be most gainfully expressed in/through words alone. In coming to understand and re/present that which is often nonverbal, nonlinear, multimodal, and multidimensional, it is important to search for research methods that are non-linear, multimodal and multidimensional (Cole and Knowles 2000) – methods that can best interrogate, capture and re/present that which is being examined.

Contemporary art practice, especially lens based work (for example, the work of Willie Doherty, Sophie Calle, Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Wall), which presupposes an attention to form, medium and representation, offers much for conceptualizing, doing and representing research such as this. Similarly the processes and practices of art making provide ways for inquiring into, coming to know and generating insights into the spatialization of male subjectivities and masculine identities in schools that other research methods close off. As the Vancouver artist Jeff Wall (2005) notes, ‘A different kind of picture is a different way of experiencing the world’. Doing research in and through art offers opportunities to capture and represent which is not always linguistic – that which can be more profitably represented and understood through nonverbal forms of communication. It offers the possibility of creating different kinds of pictures about boys performing, experiencing and negotiating multiple masculinities in school – ones that have the potential to be individually and culturally transformative (Sullivan 2005). Alternate forms of data representation, Eisner (1997b, 8) argues, ‘promise to increase the variety of questions that we can ask about the educational situations we study … we can expect new ways of seeing things, new settings for their display, and new problems to tackle … put another way, our capacity to wonder is stimulated by the possibilities the new forms of representation suggest’.

As I have argued elsewhere (O Donoghue 2006b, forthcoming) in conceptualizing, conducting, and reporting educational research, researchers are trained to look towards the practices, processes and understandings generated by other educational researchers, scholars and theoreticians in the field. Rarely do they look towards art practice or at the work of artists, especially their artmaking processes and their
methods of representing and giving visual form to concepts and ideas. There is much that can be learnt from paying close attention to the way artists work and represent. Much like research, artistic creation is a collective process within which the individual artist is but one of many persons who brings a work to fruition (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1996; Crane 1989). A piece of work is not only produced by the artist, but is endlessly produced and reproduced by all those who come in contact with it for different purposes. As Bourdieu (1996, 171) observes, an artwork is 'in fact made not twice, but hundreds of times, thousands of times by all those who have an interest in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, decoding it, commenting on it, reproducing it, criticizing it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it'.

Much like art, how we do and represent research is inseparable from what gets communicated, and the opportunity for understanding and meaning making that is made possible. In much contemporary art practice the rendering of the representation is itself part of the subject of the work. In this study then I use a combination of collaborative research methods including art making and writing. Participants, boys aged between 10 and 11 years of age, write and produce art to make visible how certain masculinities are shaped, played out, and performed in particular places in school. I locate this mixed method approach in arts based educational research (including narrative inquiry and autoethnography) more generally, and the theory and practice of a/r/tography specifically (see Irwin 2004; Irwin and de Cosson 2004; Springgay, Irwin, and Wilson Kind 2005). In both the study and the methodology attention is paid to the particular rather than the general for I believe that the general can be located in the particular.

For two mornings every week over a three-week period I worked with this group of 17 boys in the school. Together we began to explore how ideas can be communicated and stories told in a visual form in and through the work of documentary photographers and contemporary artists; how medium and message work together in this communicative and meaning making process. We explored how meaning is constructed initially in the making of visual work and subsequently in the reading of these works, as it is located in different interpretative traditions. We explored how representation of meaning is bound up in the means of representation (the materials and processes involved). Using the work of documentary photographer Dorothea Lange, and the more recent work of Irish artist Willie Doherty, French artist Sophie Calle, and Canadian artist Jeff Wall, we unpacked the content embedded and represented in their photographic and auto/biographical images. We analysed how the work connected to, reflected, and was a product of the social, political and cultural contexts within which it was made. We explored design elements such as colour, form, texture, placement, balance, contrast, composition and lighting, not from a technical perspective but from a communicative perspective. We explored these elements as a means through which artists represent and convey meaning in visual form. The boys were introduced to cameras and methods of picture taking and printing.

Following these workshops each participant received a disposable camera and a notebook and set out selecting, recording and representing spaces and places in their school environment, thus making documentary accounts of how they experienced and appropriated these spaces and places and invested them with meaning for particular purposes at particular times. The gaze of the boys’ cameras was systematic, not random.
FIGURE 2. ‘Spaces where you learn to act in certain ways’; Places where I like to be; Places where you never really want to be; ‘places that are out of bounds’; ‘places where we play’; ‘spaces we control’; ‘performance spaces’.

FIGURE 3. ‘My bag is my only private space in school’.
sought to use photography as way to ‘discover and demonstrate relationships that may be subtle and easily overlooked’. They were encouraged to consider how the viewpoint, composition, lighting etc., impacted on the visual statements and representations that they were making.

**BOYS’ VISUAL AND TEXTUAL STATEMENTS**

Their visual statements and representations – their photographs together with their text-based descriptions – provide powerful documentary accounts of how these boys see, name and interpret the school spaces that they encounter daily – the spaces that are constructed and presented to them and remade, interpreted and invested with meaning by these boys as students, as boys, and as individuals. Their photographs tell of what they want others to see and think about. They draw attention and direct attention. They open up spaces where we can engage meaningfully with issues of power, surveillance, segregation, isolation, dominance and subordination; places where we can situate these issues. Their photographs tell of what they want presented to them and remade, interpreted and invested from the narratives of these boys, ‘Places are made as certain ways’; Places where I like to be; Places where you never really want to be; ‘places that are out of bounds’; ‘places where we play’; ‘spaces we control; “performance spaces”’ (Figure 2). Their photographs categorize: ‘open spaces’; ‘public spaces’; ‘private spaces’ (Figure 3); ‘welcoming spaces’; ‘spaces where you feel safe’; ‘spaces where you feel valued or devalued’; ‘forbidden spaces and places’; unhappy spaces. Their photographs make space into place: ‘places where you are watched over’; ‘spaces where you learn’; ‘places where you feel uncomfortable’; spaces where you get picked on; spaces where teachers talk about you and where you get a reputation; spaces that ‘feel intimidating and kind of don’t like being there even though the paintings are on the wall and they are bright and colourful it has that damp and dark feeling’ (Peter, aged 10). Places where you can hide ‘I took it here because it’s a place where if 1st class are playing a game they always hide there and some 6th class always hang out there and its kind of a place to hang out and hide and it’s a very good hiding place’ (Michael, aged 10).

As Gieryn (1999, 471) observes and as it becomes clear from the narratives of these boys, ‘Places are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly, new or old; accessible or not’. ‘Is there anything sociological not touched by place’ Gieryn (1999, 482) asks, and replies ‘Probably not’. Most sociological inquires, he argues, have a place dimension to them, even if not overtly recognized or acknowledged. Yet, studies that have examined and analysed how masculinities are shaped in schools through the schools’ social, material and discursive practices (see for example Heward 1988, Kehler 2004, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 1996, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003, O Donoghue 2005a, Skelton 2001) have not considered the role space and place plays (if any) in supporting, furthering, shaping or disrupting certain constructs and performances of masculinities. The actual school spaces and places where masculinities are performed, negotiated and shaped tend to be viewed as mere settings, a backdrop or stage for where masculinities are played out. Such spaces and places are neither viewed nor considered as constituting factors in the masculinizing processes and practices that occur in schools. Yet work on masculinities conducted in other fields such as that of Betsky (1997), Chauncey (1994), Desert (1997), Edelman (1996), Lindell and Sanders (1996) and others demonstrate how physical spaces are deeply politicized, and actively participate in the production of male subjectivities and masculine identities. Their works show how particular conceptions of men and masculine identity, which inform and regulate practice and performativity, are embedded in the design, structure and methods of construction, and organization of physical spaces.

Both Jonathan’s and Daniel’s visual and textual statements (Figures 4 and 5) draw attention to ways in which performing masculinities in school constitute and are constituted by place itself. They make visible the relation between space, place and the construction and regulation of masculinities in school. In their narratives both text and image need to be read, and read together, as each in their own way provide particular insights and understandings and rendering, and each reveal and uncover things that the other cannot always do. Images are not used to illustrate the student’s narrative. Neither is text provided to make clear the meaning of each boy’s image. These are two different structures of expression and communication, graphic and linguistic (Barthes 1978). In summary, ‘image and text do not duplicate one another but rather teach something different yet similar, allowing us to inquire more deeply’ (Irwin 2004, 31).

Studies such as Lieberg (1995), Cressida (1997) and Tucker and Matthews (2001) suggest that while playing
FIGURE 4. I took this photo because sometimes when people are messing and playing rough, they normally stick them in the corner and start pushing them into it. It’s kind of an uncomfortable space. Like James hangs out and he is really rough and he always hangs out here … It’s a hidden space kind of because it’s in a corner. None of the teachers walk around in the corners (Jonathan, aged 10).

FIGURE 5. Well I took it because over there is a happy spot [Daniel points to the space right of the black pole] because I don’t mind being over there … and I split it in two. Sad spot one side and happy spot the other side: The side with the door is the happy side and the side with the pencil is the sad side … well that’s because, that side I get teased at a lot of the time, and the other side I don’t get teased at … Its actually I don’t like that side because I do get pushed around there still, and the other side I don’t get pushed around there (Daniel, aged 11).
or ‘hanging out’ boys tend to dominate public space and inscribe it with masculinist intentions. In Jonathan’s statement above, place is significant for the performance of a masculinity that is confrontational, physical and forceful, which rests on image and reputation, and is enacted in a public space (albeit a somewhat hidden space where teachers do not tend to frequent or monitor). In this instance, place plays a role in shaping the behaviour of James at least. His behaviour is threatening to other students, and considered deviant by teachers, as Jonathan’s statement would suggest. In this performative space, with its dirty white walls and views from above, behind the railing, masculinities are being shaped and played out from that of the pusher to the pushed to the onlooker to the knower and the knowing. This space, which becomes a confrontational and uncomfortable place in Jonathan’s experience at least, both constrains and enables certain masculinities. The space here, and the interpretation of that space that transforms it into a place, stabilities and gives form to difference and hierarchy; much like Paul Monette’s account, the space recorded here by Jonathan provides a space where certain ideas of masculinity and proper ways of acting man are performed, enacted and displayed, and out of sight of teachers which is most interesting.

Interestingly corners are spaces of collision, walls meet and converge and create something new by the fact that they meet. Corners hide, they conceal, block off, and reveal all at once. Corners are a stopping point and a receiving point as Jonathan’s statement suggests. Interestingly, through his chosen view together with the framing of the image, (the ground level acting almost like an inward-facing arrow and the wall to the left of the image almost as tall as the photograph itself but decreasing in size as it retreats back), Jonathan’s photograph leads the viewers eye to the actual corner of this recorded and re/presented space. The corner is the furthest space from the viewer visually, and yet, because of the composition it is to this place that the eye is first drawn. The corner becomes the all-important part of this image.

Daniel’s text is a testament to what can, and does happen in schoolyards. It is a testament to how space is emplaced in experience. It tells of how a space created for particular purposes takes on a range of additional (and likely unintentional) purposes and set of associations when inhabited, appropriated and experienced. The yard offers differing experiential possibilities depending on who inhabits it when, where and for what purpose. Different masculinities are being played out and performed in this place – dominant, dominating and dominated masculinities. As with the text, the photograph tells of a divided place, a zoned place, two different places to inhabit: one wide-open enclosed only by the walls of the school, and visually sparse, a site for bullying, harassment and exclusion, the other a more familiar place, enclosed by a number of surrounding wall, a site for friendship and belonging. The composition suggests an ongoing narrative outside and beyond the moment of the photograph.

The large expansive open space that the viewer looks into, divided roughly into two equal parts by the black pole plays a key role in shaping the type of behaviour that Daniel reports. Here, each day during break time over 170 boys come together, and the vast majority play football. The senior and junior pupils alternate between the upper and lower parts of this yard to play football; a line painted on the surface splits the yard. In Daniel’s photograph the lower end is nearest to the viewer, but the upper end is also visible. The management and routinizing of space in this way segregates categories of boys not only in terms of age (and class level, junior and senior), but in several other ways also. A designated space is provided for boys who play football. For those who do not play football, they play and exchange cards in the shed and hang out on the steps and chat, but these are not designated for such purposes. Boys who don’t play football have appropriated existing spaces for their recreational use, which were designed for other purposes, the school shed to shelter from rain and steps to enable easy access to the school building. Encoded in the designation and provision of space for particular activities and interests is the belief that ‘real boys’ like to do particular things – obviously football in this instance. What does it say about boys who do not do what is expected, like play/exchange cards and hang around and chat? Daniel is a member of this latter group. The management of space in this instance sustains difference and hierarchy. Moreover certain spaces legitimate certain activities, while the lack of designated spaces for other activities stigmatize those in turn. On a related but different note, the provision of a space where certain play can be enacted (football in this case) provides opportunities for shoving and pushing, as boys run, jog, duck, turn, trip tumble and fall.

Daniel’s photograph speaks of the structured, sterile nature of this place – hard edges and right angles. There are no soft surfaces here rather hard concrete unforgiving and unyielding surfaces – characteristic of what Sommer’s (1974) refers to as ‘hard architecture’. Hard architecture, most typically found in prisons,
detention centres and mental hospitals, resists any form of human imprint, apart from the aerosol can. The sense of solidity, strength, permanence, detachment is generated and transmitted here through the depiction of, and because of, the wall surfaces and play spaces.

This is a carefully constructed image. The careful construction and composition denotes narrative conventions. Although the viewer is positioned just inside the image, not outside but not beyond the pole either which separates the foreground from the middle ground and background, the viewer meets some resistance, just as the image tells a story of resistance. While the eye of the viewer is now in the very same position as Daniel’s was when he took this image with the viewer now seeing exactly what Daniel saw, the relationship of the viewer to the image is somewhat different. Daniel is selecting and setting up an image to communicate; the viewer is reading the image. This viewpoint prohibits us from entering the schoolyard and inhabiting it. The emphasizes on surface qualities and detail in the foreground of the image (the black pole) and the blurring of the middle ground and background further prohibits easeful entry beyond this point. The clarity of the black painted pole retains the eye and keeps it from wandering into the image. Is this to communicate Daniel’s fear of entering this space, his preference to hover outside while still being part of this space, which he is making into place? What does it say of his relationship with the hegemonic model of masculinity in this site?

The framing and emphasis on the word ‘FUCK’ scratched out of the paint on the pole, an act of resistance in itself, speaks of resistance, or of experiencing it and re/presenting it. The word ‘FUCK’ was found, framed and positioned as the main focal point to communicate what? Resistance? Colonization? Association? Frustration? Is it about provoking or being provoked? The very act of scratching ‘fuck’, a provocative word within this context, from a hard surface requires effort and involvement and a desire to alter to change, to subvert, to take control, to resist, to leave one’s mark, to re/shape. Together with the text can we say that this image speaks to us of disconnectivity, and outsidedness? Does it speak about silences? What is made invisible in this image? On the one hand, it is an evocative and deeply disturbing account of segregation exclusion, and displacement, On the other hand, it is a powerful image of resilience and empowerment: The making of the image and the writing about it and subsequent sharing of its meaning and intention provides Daniel with a medium through which he can articulate and reason his relationship with his school, his peers and himself, and make meaning of these relationships and interrelationships.

In his work on schooling and masculinities Connell (1995, 1996, 2000) uses the notion of ‘site’ as a structuring and analytical framework in his theory of masculinities. He conceptualizes ‘site’ as either ‘an institutional agent of the process’ (and this is the manner in which it has been most commonly employed in the vast majority of masculinity studies in the past where the focus has been on the structures and practices by which the schools shape masculinities among its students), or as a ‘setting in which other agencies are in play, especially the agency of the pupils themselves’. However helpful this theory might be in enlarging conceptual and analytical frameworks for studying the schooling and masculinizing of boys, the theory/argument fails to recognize that school sites, school spaces and places, too are agents in the masculinization processes in their own right. While, as Venkatesh’s (1997, 90) puts it, ‘individuals produce their space by investing their surroundings with qualitative attributes and specific meaning the formal qualities of a built environment exert a powerful effect on individuals by shaping the possibilities of their behaviors’.

School spaces and places more generally stabilize and support difference. They sustain dominance, hierarchy, surveillance and segregation. For example, the unequal power relations between teachers and students in schools is given visible form in the provision and layout of space and place. The staffroom segregates teachers from students at break times and ensures that teachers have time away from students during the school day. Teachers safeguard their territory with specific rules and procedures. In some primary schools in Ireland it is not unusual to find teacher-only corridors on which the staffroom, staff toilets and cloakrooms are located. Students are not allowed access to such a corridor. Moreover, students do not have a designated space free from the watchful eyes of teachers. All student places are accessible to pupils in the school; even pupil lavatories are subject/open to inspection and surveillance by teachers, including the principal teacher and the deputy principal teacher. Difference in academic ability is institutionalized and legitimated in part by the provision and maintenance of a separate space and place where students go to receive additional support and resources (the classrooms of learning support and resource teachers). During the teaching day students are grouped and segregated from older and younger students (where applicable) in and through classrooms, where teachers...
generally exercise most of the control of the available space. Teachers generally tend to decide on who gets to move around when, why and how, in addition to deciding what gets put on walls, where and why and so on. Schools and places that are made within them are invested with complex contradictory and often competing meanings.

In research into schooling more generally space and place needs to be problematized and interrogated more meaningfully. Questions as to what spaces are produced and presented to students in single-sex schools and co-educational schools need to be posed. What do these spaces say about learning and where it occurs and how it occurs? And what gets put on walls, where and why and by who ought to be asked. Apart from some work on school playgrounds and children’s use of them (Thorne 2002; see also articles by Prosser and Gharahbeiglu in this volume), the manner in which students take control of certain spaces and occupy and alter theses spaces for particular purposes and means has not been a topic of inquiry for researchers in the past. Places always reflect and embody particular beliefs and attitudes and are ‘permeated with social relations’ and cultural meanings (Lefebvre 1991; Hicks and King 1999). As with other institutional spaces, school space is not merely a ‘container’ for what happens in schools (Lefebvre 1991).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper focused on spaces and places outside of the classroom where learning about ‘self’ and ‘other’ happens. It attended in particular to how places come to be constructed, named, classified re-made and after that how place matters for social interaction. Drawing on visual and textual narratives made by this group of boys, the paper considered how certain masculinities are shaped, played out, and performed in particular places. The formations and enactment of masculine identities as it relates to constructed, organized and presented school spaces is a complex and multidimensional subject, one that has gone largely unexamined and under theorized to date. Many factors impact on how space is appropriated and presented to students and how space is interpreted by students and reappropriated by them for purposes of interaction, control surveillance and performance.

The places that these boys recorded, represented and talked about were imagined and experienced, altered and appropriated at different times for different purposes and by different individuals. As Reid (2004, 104) argues, “It may be said that place, like subjectivity, is neither unified nor singular, having as many permutations as there are people for whom it exists”. The boys’ narratives suggest that these practices and processes are embedded in and related to the material arrangements of the spaces and buildings themselves (Bourdieu 1990).

This inquiry makes visible the importance of considering space and place in sociological inquiries into schooling and masculinities. In his call for the reinsertion of place into sociological inquiries, Gieryn (2000, 483) argues for a ‘place-sensitive sociology’, which he adds might not be ‘a set of empirical findings at all or even a distinctive kind of explanatory model, but rather a way to do sociology in a different key – a visual key’. Doing and re/presenting research in a visual mode which draws on theories and processes of contemporary art practice provides opportunities that other research methods close off; it ‘defamiliarizes’ the ‘familiar’ and reconstitutes it in ways that speak revealingly; it provides real openings and spaces for engaging individually, collectively and politically in matters that effect individuals. In this study, inquiring in, with and through art provided Daniel and Jonathan and the other 15 boys with a medium through which they could think about, reflect, articulate and reason their relationship with their school, their peers and themselves, and make meaning of these relationships and interrelationships. The visual and textual statements produced by these boys are a process, evidence of a process, and outcomes of a process, and a new text to be interrogated and understood. They re/present outcomes of a coming to know in a multimodal manner, outcomes of a questing and a searching for meaning and meaning making, as well as outcomes for un/doing meaning and complexifying meaning. They attend to absences, to the things that are not said. They make visible the many things that are said but in ways that are revealing. The visual and textual statements and re/presentations made by the participants in this study have the potential to invoke, evoke, provoke and unsettle.

NOTES

[1] Both parental and individual consent was sought and received for participation in this component of the research study. The project plan was agreed with students, staff and management in the school before commencement. Their comments on its design and implementation were sought at this early stage. Consent was also secured for the reproductions of visual and textual narratives used in this paper. For purposes of anonymity boys names have been changed and replaced with pseudonyms.


