

# Subjectivity, affect and place: Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs to explore a young girl's becomings in a post-industrial locale

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**Abstract** This article explores how subjectivities are affectively tied to the histories of space, place and time through ethnographic research on young people's everyday lives in a semi-rural post-industrial locale. Drawing on a longitudinal case study of one teenage girl's inventive practices, we capture moments in time that we arrange as 'enunciating assemblages' (Guattari, 2006) to explore how conscious and unconscious affective relations repeat and rupture sedimented gendered histories of place. We experiment with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the full and empty Body without Organs to trace the 'ontological intensities' of how, when and where newness and change become possible. We argue that making visible young people's nascent becomings by focusing on what young people already do and imagine, we can potentially support young people pursuing new horizons without losing the very sense of place that makes them feel both safe and alive.

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## Introduction

Rowan, a girl aged 13 when we first met her, spoke about her feelings living in Cwm Dyffryn, an ex-mining town in south Wales as follows:

....like we see on the bus some people, and they're like, old age, and they're like, they've been stuck here all their life, they haven't like, gone

to New York, well they might have, but not lived there. So I wanna like, go all over the world, sort of stuff.

We met Rowan during a research project investigating young people's experiences of place and space<sup>1</sup>, which started in 2009. Over the next 4 years, we<sup>2</sup> interviewed young people in schools and youth centres, walked the streets in the town centre, Cwm Dyffryn, and trekked through the wilderness beyond with young people such as Rowan. Mountains and far off cities cropped up repeatedly when Rowan spoke about escape and liberation, while classrooms and streets accompanied her talk of being stuck or trapped. Throughout her first interview, Rowan often talked of her forays into the mountains beyond her front garden. Her accounts of walking, biking and running in the wild were often animated, suggesting a kind of intensity that contrasted with her talk of everyday routines of schooling and her peer groups' rituals at the Friday Night disco and shopping on Saturdays. She associated the town with drugs, drinking, surveillance and monotony. She seemed to manage to avoid being pulled into peer group cultures by escaping into the mountains. She contrasted the open environment of the mountains with her English classroom, by saying, '...it's nicer to be in an environment you like, instead of you're like, concentration camp sort of thing'. Her talk and at times her actions suggested to us that these contrasting places were accompanied by feelings of being liberated or trapped, demonstrating their utter importance as existential territories or imagined possibilities for her survival and well-being. These territories seemed to call her into being, as Christopher Bollas (1993) puts it, in different ways, reinforcing Guattari's (2006) notion that subjective experiences are often tied to places (Walkerdine, forthcoming).

Running through Rowan's first interview was a recurring tension between wanting to be alone and wanting to belong. We became sensitive to the spatial and material features of Rowan's existence and how contrasting territories afforded her different subjective experiences that she seemed unable to reconcile. Indeed, specific places and objects such as mountains and bikes seemed to play important roles in allowing Rowan to manage to live in a town where she felt stifled, unable to leave and trapped in a school where she felt forcibly contained. We have referred to the mountains as 'the wild', following Jane Bennett's (2004) use of the term to suggest that mountainous places were full of affect for Rowan, as we explore below. The wild seemed to act as an alternative space that allowed Rowan to play, literally and imaginatively, with alternative modes of subjectivity to those offered by the town and her local community.

### Aspiration and Proto Possibilities

Although much of the educational literature on the so-called underachievement of working-class young people focuses on a lack of aspiration (Berzin, 2010;

Sinclare et al, 2010; Kintrea et al, 2011), we suggest in contrast that young people experience and invent ingenious ways to creatively survive in the world. Research inspired by new materialist feminisms(s) (for example, Haraway, 1991; Grosz, 1994, 2011; Barad, 2007) is beginning to generate empirical evidence to suggest that not only do working-class young people not lack aspiration, but they engage in a myriad of activities within their everyday lives that give rise to proto possibilities for doing things differently from the way they have been done in the past (Quinn et al, 2005; Ivinson, 2010, 2012a, b; Renold and Ivinson, 2013; Quinn, 2012). Thus, according to this alternative approach, there is no lack of aspiration. Instead, we suggest that there is a problem of recognition.

We wish to argue that young people's proto possibilities go unrecognised for a variety of reasons. First, researching young people's everyday lives is difficult because attention to micro practices often requires creative ethnographic and participatory methods (Hart and Negri, 2000; Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Coleman and Ringrose, 2012). Second, educational research tends to look in the wrong place by focusing on the subjectivities that make it into the classroom ignoring what gets left outside the door, and third because there is a history of emphasising on what working class, young people cannot do, rather than looking for what they can do.

How do we understand the importance of these places in Rowan's life and their significance for thinking about the recognition of the importance of those spaces for her educational journey? In this article, we will use the work of Deleuze and Guattari and the new feminist materialism to understand these issues (Alamo and Hekman, 2008; Braidotti, 2002, 2006, 2013). By paying attention to the ways in which spaces emerged within the fieldwork with Rowan, we argue that by making visible what young people already do and their imagination of different spaces of existence, we can potentially understand how to support young people in pursuing new horizons without losing the very sense of place that makes them feel both safe and alive.

### Territories of Subjectification and Bodies without Organs

In order to understand what places and experiences produced strong affective charges for Rowan, we found that we needed to address the way subjectivity emerged through the micro intensities of everyday life. In his book, *Chaosmosis*, Guattari proposed the concept of 'ontological intensity' (2006, p. 29). We can think of intensity as affects that accompany embodied practices, for example, Rowan's experience of riding her bike fast down a mountainside created a feeling of liberation. During interviews and walking tours with Rowan, we detected that she had feelings that could only partially be articulated and that, we suspect,

quickly become absorbed into, or articulated by, dominant, already-available discourses and so lost. Indeed, the accounts we give of ourselves can only ever be partial (Henriques et al, 1984; Butler, 2004; Blackman, et al, 2008). Yet addressing exclusions such as these from the realm of being is, for us, a pressing ethico-political priority.

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari alludes to affects and intensities that ‘plunge us into sadness’, or ‘excitement’ (p. 16) without us knowing why. To write about affects that are experienced in less than conscious ways, he turns for inspiration to Bakhtin’s analysis of poetry and how feelings arise through modalities other than words themselves. He draws attention to the way affects are produced through the ‘sonority of the word, its musical aspect’, ‘material significations’, ‘verbal connections’ ‘motor elements of articulation’, ‘gesture’, ‘mime’ and the ‘feeling of movement’ (p. 15). Christoph Wulf (2013) refers to something similar when he observes how babies ‘catch’ meanings from others through bodily gestures as forms of ‘mimetic referencing’. Along with Guattari, Wulf emphasises that corporeality is central to these processes. Guattari refers to repetitions, rhythms and refrains. Here it is useful to make a distinction found in German between Rhythum and Takt (personal communication, Barbara Adam) where the latter is a repetition of the same and the former a repetition of the similar. When musicians improvise they often work with ‘Rhythum’, repeating similar refrains so that new sound patterns emerge, what Guattari (2006, p. 13) refers to as ‘processual creativity’. By using these examples, Guattari was searching to explore new modalities of subjectivity, which he does in his concept of enunciating assemblages comprising elements from different modalities or universes: corporeal, social, semiotic, technological, machinic and virtual. In Rowan’s case study, we tried to detect practices that involved repetitions of the past, as speeds, intensities and refrains, and whether and when they achieved a rupture recognisable as proto possibilities that could lead to nascent becomings. We have tried to elaborate some of this through Guattari’s use of Bakhtin’s concept of a partial enunciator to theorise a ‘psychoanalytical partial object that is adjacent to the body’. We are drawn to the provocative concept of The Body without Organs because it captures this virtual collection of potentiality, making possible connections and couplings with all manner of matter.

The concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) allows us to recognise these becomings as intense affective otherness, such as the way the body screams a longing to be otherwise that cannot be articulated in any other way (Artaud, cited in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 166). When otherness was recognised in the young people we worked with, it was usually absorbed into the available vocabularies of madness and pathologised. Deleuze and Guattari helped us to recognise these intense affects, not as madness, or losing touch with reality, but as something more profound, a way of ‘breaking through to “more reality”’ (Deleuze, 2006, p. 25). This longing for otherness is present in our analysis of Rowan’s experiences. The concept of BwO as a ‘medium of becoming or



transformation' was further developed in nuanced ways to suggest polarities of full and empty (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 559). These figurations allowed us to describe the complex ontological intensities and moments of becoming that we detected in Rowan's talk and movement. Broadly, we have tried to draw upon the full and empty BwO in our analysis of practices that seemed to open Rowan up to the world in new ways (full BwO) and those which seemed to trap her with feelings of being constrained and closed down (empty BwO). Narratives along with our observations and sometimes the gut feelings that arose as we walked, ran or rode with young people have helped us to think about subjectification as multiple, plural and mobile as well as partial. We explore our methodology further in the section below.

### Creative Ethnography: Spatial and Affective Methodologies

Bollas (1993) imagines that as people walk around in the everyday lives, they are literally 'called out' by the places they walk through and the objects they encounter. Foucault reminds us that we do not imagine space as empty, instead we recognise that spaces are 'laden with qualities' that they are 'haunted by fantasies' (Foucault, 1986, p. 176). Sometimes space can feel, light, transparent, clear and at others 'sober, harsh and cluttered'. Foucault imagined that sometimes space can feel like 'running water' and at others 'fixed, solidified like stone or crystal' (1986, p. 177). These textured images provide an embryonic vocabulary for what we might call the affects of space. Places can call us into being.

The Young People and Place project was a methodologically funded research and designed specifically to experiment with different ways of creating research encounters that could capture the more multi-sensory and affective relations of space and place. The research, which began in 2009 (and continues unfunded at the time of writing this article in 2013), became a longitudinal ethnography. The first phase involved over 60 semi-structured interviews using photographs of places in and around the locale with young people aged 13–15 in two secondary schools in Cwm Dyffryn. In parallel to this work in schools, we carried out an ethnographic study in a Youth Facility that we visited every Monday evening from 17:00 to 21:00 for 1 year. In the second phase, we gave young people disposable cameras to take pictures of places in and around the school and these were used as the basis for further semi-structured and ethnographic interviews. We conducted walking tours with a small sample of young people, one of whom was Rowan. Rowan took Emma (second author) on two walking tours in the area around her house, a year apart. In a third phase, we undertook week-long film-making activities with six groups of young people in which they displayed, performed and spoke about favourite activities

and topics such as BMX biking, running, being in a band, designing tattoos, friendship and the closure of the youth facility (Renold and Ivinson, 2013).

This range of creative ethnographic methods, and especially the film-making and walking tours, allowed us to explore affects associated with everyday practices through the multiple activities, rituals and routines that comprised the micro-intensities of everyday life (Coleman and Ringrose, 2012). We were thus occasionally able to put ourselves in the midst of things and could pay attention to the affective and multi-sensory dimensions of place through being there, including our 'gut reactions' when young people chose to show us specific artefacts that were full of meaning and feeling for them (Ivinson and Renold, 2013). This process evolved in ways that included creating strategies for recording while walking, watching, talking, listening, feeling and touching. Over time, we were able to continue to create rich data assemblages comprising fieldnotes, films and photographs as well as audio and visual recordings, all of which allow us to analyse the 'qualitative multiplicity' that Braidotti (2006, p. 50) and others write about when trying to connect to the transcendental 'real' or virtual. Indeed, from a conventional start in phase 1 (for example, seated interviews), we have developed a more rhizomatic approach whereby we follow analytic trails from previous research encounters (Moles et al, 2011), and find ways (and funds) to create research assemblages that enable us not only to sustain our research relationships but capture the thick and affective materiality of young people living in and around Cwm Dyffryn – and the crisscrossing vectors of valleys life.

Our analysis is informed by all three phases of our ethnography and indeed by each subsequent time we return to the sites, as we devise further collaborative methods of enquiry. We have purposefully selected and clustered data from a particularly rich, longitudinal case study of one participant, Rowan. We organise the data generated with Rowan in particular ways so as to capture moments in time that we arrange as assemblages. In the four vignettes below, we explore how Rowan talks of, and experiences within, different places and landscapes afforded subjective experiences that, although seemingly irreconcilable, offered her ways to experience, think and imagine futures differently from those afforded by the community's mining past.

### Being Held in Place

Since the age of 2, Rowan has lived in Cwm Valley, an ex-mining village in south Wales, where her grandfather and great grandfather used to work. She was part of a close-knit extended family, with her mother, father and 10-year-old brother. Her grandparents lived a couple of doors away, her aunt lived across the street, and her cousins, nieces and nephews lived in the adjacent village.

In our first interview with Rowan, she described a conscious feeling of being stuck.

Rowan: I want to get out of here, I don't like it ... it's always the same, like, you see people going to work, coming back, cooking dinner and stuff

ER: mm

Rowan: I don't wanna be just stuck here with like, loads of kids and stuff, I wanna like, go around sort, the world sort of thing.

Rowan's descriptions of daily routines 'cooking dinner and stuff' and her fear of being stuck resonate with broader gendered heterogeneous flows of matter and meaning. Here the past seems to provide a pattern for Rowan's imagined future, a future that she fears will involve a continuous cycle of mundane domestic chores. These domestic rhythms of everyday life provide a viable way of being in the world and are recognised as such by Rowan yet, her talk suggested that she feels this as a limiting and constraining way of being. In order to explore this feeling, the next section takes a rhizomatic detour into a partial historical presentation of women's domestic life in south Wales valleys communities.<sup>3</sup>

In the past, soot-blackened men returning from the shift underground in the mine needed hot water for baths and food on the table. Women undertook domestic practices through necessity. As communities grew, women held life together above the ground, whereas men laboured below the ground. Thus, men and women were channelled into reciprocal and strongly demarcated gendered roles and practices (Penlington, 2010; Bruley). To make the monotony of domestic chores bearable, women often followed parallel patterns of practice; therefore, on washdays, they could be found chatting across the back yards as they hung clothes out to dry (Walkeridine, 2010; Walkeridine and Jimenez, 2012), and on coal delivery days they sang as they scrubbed the coal dust off the front steps of houses aligned in long serried rows (Bruley, 2007). The weekly and daily rhythms of domestic life above the ground bound women together through what Walkeridine (2010) has referred to as 'affective practices'.

The last mine in the Cwm valley closed in 2001. Being transposed from the centre to the periphery of economic activity in a relatively short period of time has been experienced as a painful rupture that still reverberates in these communities across the generations (Walkeridine and Jimenez, 2012). In the post-industrial days, women are no longer bound to daily and weekly rhythms by necessity and many of the older generation bemoan the loss of their way of life (cf. Marshall, 2008; Bruley, 2007; Penlington, 2010; Walkeridine and Jimenez, 2012). The pit closures and the end of mining activities in the area have created a rupture in what Walkeridine (2010) refers to as 'community beingness'. With the work gone, communities cling to the practices that had ensured their survival in the past. Walkeridine and Jimenez (2012) have suggested that maintaining strong gender demarcations forms part of the defensive strategy that shores up

communities faced with the fear of annihilation and past practices are reinforced and become a community's 'second skin'. The cooking and cleaning that Rowan refers to can be viewed as 'affective practices' that carry unconscious associations with the past. Rowan's sense of being stuck seems to carry unconscious affects linked to the past. They foreground her fear of being trapped by the familiar routines of motherhood and domesticity – practices which she feared might trap her into becoming her mother and reliving a past that was no longer productive and meaningful.

In some respects, living inside and with the materiality of a post-industrial landscape called young people into specific gendered ways of being that pulled life towards the past, rooted in the place. The domestic practices that seemed to plunge Rowan into a feeling of being trapped can be understood as an assemblage comprising modalities of space, place, history, routines and discourses. In this case, the valley towns, women, cooking dinner and traditional femininity carry affects that Rowan was able to articulate and therefore was consciously aware of. The domestic life that Rowan intimated at has its roots in the industrial past. Connections between daily routines, domestic chores and mothering set up patterns of practice, rhythms and routines that constitute, what Jean Lave (1988) identified as the ways of doing things around here. We suggest that the history of place was tied up with Rowan's feelings and in this case, the history of the community's heavy industrial past provided social expectations that carried connotations of the narrow gendered and labouring traditions as legacies (cf. Marshall, 2006, 2007; Bruley, 2007; Penlington, 2010; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012).

The domestic and daily routines of the community that Rowan identifies as limiting and constraining can also be viewed as ways of keeping time, which Guattari, following Bakhtin, refers to as existential refrains or existential territories (2006, p. 15). Domestic chores have to be repeated and repeated: dinners have to be cooked every day. Thus, while cooking dinner creates a sense of the familiar and provides communities with ways of surviving and keeping things going, it also recreates traditional forms of femininity. Thus, when girls cook dinners, they mimetically reference the past and in this case an industrial past steeped in trauma. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) maintain that formal assemblages territorialise such that subjectivities seem to be 'extracted' from persons (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Guattari, 2006; Brown and Stenner, 2009). We might say that the traditional norms of femininity 'extracted' a specific kind of subjectivity from Rowan, because of the strong expectations within the community about what girls should do and become. Thus, cooking signals an assemblage that is relatively formally organised. This gives a sense of the compulsory nature of gender and heterosexual norms.

Indeed, legacies attached to many everyday practices can create tensions for young people who have to live in a changed world (Ivinson, 2012a,b; Ivinson and Renold, 2013). For girls, for example, the expectation is that, when grown

up, they will continue to undertake domestic labour and their future relationship with male partners will reproduce the hetero-gendered patterns and practices of caring and containing that originated through the necessities of industrialisation. Having suggested how Rowan seemed to feel trapped by the past, the following vignette demonstrates her struggles with relationships.

### Being Trapped: Intimacies that Contain, Hold Back and Embrace

Rowan revealed that she was cautious and fearful of entering into personal and intimate relationships with other boys and girls. The need to remain separate and not be engulfed by relationships with boys was evidenced in her accounts of the rituals and routines of teenage life, namely, the 'drinking, sex and drugs' that she talked about (and we observed) as taking place in the town centre. She spoke excitedly about the rush and pull of these peer group activities and her own desire for them, as she put it, 'boys, boys, boys' and 'drinking and clubbing'. Yet, she also explained that these were desires that she felt compelled to delay:

'I must wait ... I've got different things to worry about now ... like my future.. I got time to drink and stuff when I'm older'.

Indeed, she talked about avoiding contact with boys a number of times, 'in case I fancy them' and at the same time talked scornfully about the majority of the girls in her school who invest their energy in relationships that involved pursuing boys as boyfriends. Deleuze (1969) described how sexual relationships bring persons closer to their bodies as 'well-formed wholes' giving access to the world through depth and intensity. Although Rowan seemed to anticipate this intensity, she simultaneously expressed a fear that these practices would entrap her. Practices, such as drinking alcohol, provided ways for young people to manage the inheritance of de-industrialisation. As many young girls explained to us, alcohol can dull the pain of feeling trapped and feeling hopeless. Intoxication as well as other common practices such as joy-riding, setting the forests alight and taking drugs were recognised practices. Although they have destructive elements, they also provide the potential for solidarity with others in the same predicament. Moreover, girls' desire for 'boys, boys, boys' can lead to sex, pregnancy and the normalising stigma of early motherhood. We can also see this played out in the way Rowan talked of her intimate relationships with girls.

Rowan talked about her intense feelings for Ffion, a girl who was in the same class in primary school. This narrative emerged in an interview after Emma asked whether she had always liked spending time on her own. We learned that her desire to be alone began after a passionate and close friendship ended:

ER: So have you always liked being on your own?

Rowan: Erm, well I used to, when I was in junior school I used to, like there was this one person that I used to like, suck up to, sort of, I used to be

like, 'oh, don't go with them, come with me' ... I think I was jealous of her because she was like, really pretty and stuff ... and I wanted to like, be with her and stuff ... it was like, I didn't want... I wanted to be her partner for everything ... like I wanted her, to like, just... be with me. Like, I wasn't nasty or nothing, I just, I just wanted her to like, come to my house all the time and stuff.

The desire for intimacy and separateness was apparent when Rowan talked of wanting to be with Ffion all the time and yet at the same time of being jealous of her qualities. Her need for an intense connection seemed satisfied when she and Ffion became 'best friends'. However, Rowan described how they broke up later when Ffion 'went off her way', partying and going out with boys. After this interview account, Rowan described in a walking tour how she found herself repeating this pattern with a girl called Hannah who also became a best friend. In this friendship, Rowan initiated Hannah into the 'wild' where they seemed to enjoy a playfulness, the *délire*, that Deleuze and Guattari associated with the infant's preverbal existence (for example, Guattari, 2006, p. 6). The girls built private dens, shared walks, went on camping trips and talked of future vocational aspirations and of living together:

Yeah, me and Hannah always talk about like our own apartment and stuff, like ... that's like quite exciting to think about it

We detected Rowan's desire for intimacy in the way she spoke about these relationships. Yet, we also detected a pattern in her talk. Again, like her early and intense connection with Ffion, Rowan very quickly broke off this relationship when Hannah extended her social network into the world of boys, partying and drinking, which Rowan again described as a world she was trying hard to resist:

My friend Hannah has gone with a different group' ... 'a clubbing group' ... 'she called us unsociable ... but I don't like going into town and getting drunk and stuff

Reflecting on her close relationships with girls, Rowan explained that, unlike her female peers who all hug when they greet each other, she recoils, stating: 'I'm just like, I'm not like, "I love you" sort of thing, I'm just like, you know not [a] very sickly sort of person'. This desire for intimacy coupled with a seeming revulsion of physical 'closeness', referred to as 'love you' exemplifies the pleasure and the pain of intimacy. She seemed to manage the ambivalence by allowing herself to become intimate with girls, while resisting love with boys, which she feared would engulf her. She perhaps both anticipates sexual desire for boys and girls and pulls away from it at the same time for fear of, in her words, being 'sucked up' (see Renold and Ivinson, 2012). Yet, her relationships with girls

seemed to repeat a pattern of nourishing intimacy followed by deep disappointment. This refrain might signal unconscious affects such as expectation, fear, excitement and anticipation that accompanied her peer group relationships.

Indeed, Rowan seemed at once compelled towards unconstrained being in these moments that vibrate with wider ambivalence around sexual intimacy, which she seemed to experience as a constraining force. Indeed, not being in a (heterosexual) relationship, wanting to leave the valleys and not desiring motherhood were bold ambitions that went against the history of intelligible practices in the community. An impersonal striving to become, to be open to the world, was seemingly in tension with the (hetero)'normalising' desire to be 'in relationship' that we suspect carries unconscious affects including the unspoken expectations within the community carried by women's and young girls' practices mentioned above. These complex affects emerge within assemblages that territorialised Rowan and threatened to anchor and block her ambitions to move out of the community.

Her fear of being overwhelmed by intense relationships recurs again when she talked of encountering boys and girls in the street. First, during a seated interview with Emma, and again during the first walking tour, Rowan spoke of her anxiety of 'being watched' and 'looked at' by her peers. When the feeling of surveillance became too intense, she described physically retreating into nature by diving into bushes, hiding behind trees and sometimes waiting there for up to an hour at a time, emerging only when she knew her peers had moved on and she was no longer the potential object of their gaze. In these moments, it was if the natural landscape provided a sanctuary: a place not just to hide but to be held and recover. Rowan's deep and complicated relationship with 'the wild' (Bennett, 2010) is explored further below.

### Affective Landscapes: Fantasies of Escape

Rowan and her immediate family occupied a small terraced house located at the very edges of the village – a village at the very edges of the valleys where the last rows of houses meld seamlessly into the rural wilderness beyond. Walk to the end of her street and you look up into a vast mountainscape. Streams, forests, trails and lakes provide Rowan's immediate backyard. Her neighbourhood is one of the furthest from Cwm Dyffryn town centre that includes a traditional market, pubs and shops clustered along three principal streets.

Rowan repeatedly spoke about alternative activities through which she imagined ways to escape. In the first interview, she told us about a story she had written when she was 12 years old in which 'a girl gets captured by a magical person' and is 'needed' by and 'helps others' in a 'far-away land'. When we met Rowan again at the age of 14, she was no longer writing magical stories, but related to us fantasies of living in a New York apartment with her best friend.

At times, Rowan's accounts gave a sense of being suffocated and her potential futures being thwarted. During the first walking tour Rowan led her up one of her favourite mountain trails. Emma carried a small hand-held video camera as Rowan led her along mountain trails. During this first walking tour Rowan talked about a memory of getting her bike stuck in an ant mound:

Rowan: Yeah I remember I was trying, it was the first time I'd gone past that barrier like on my own and there was this field, so there was a little path that led to the field. So I went down it and there was no exit in the field and then I had my bike with me and you know like ant mounds ...?

ER: Yeah.

Rowan: ... well I couldn't get my bike over them, I was getting really frustrated because I'd been there for like an hour, trying to like get it all out and I then I got out and I vowed I'd never go up there again unless I'm like walking probably.

On the second walking tour, a year later, Rowan again led Emma along a trail. Just as they turn a corner, a grassy knoll came into view and Rowan related a very similar story (perhaps the same) as on the first walking tour. This time, she spoke more about being 'stuck' yet expressed it as 'panic' rather than frustration:

I come up here on my bike for the first time and I went in there and I got stuck and it took me an hour to pull my bike up ... it was horrible ... I turned and thought it was a short cut and went down there and I was stuck in there for like about an hour ... I went all the way down on my bike and then it was like, you know like when you have lots of grass mounds, and I couldn't push it up and I was getting all scared and panicky ... I'm just like that ... I panic about everything

Indeed, Emma detected Rowan's more visceral reaction to finding herself being directly confronted with the knoll (or ant mound), a reaction that contrasted to her earlier 'remembering' a year before. The sight of the knoll while walking in that particular terrain can be seen as an assemblage in which the affective practice of walking up the trail, this time, evoked a memory of being 'scared' and 'panicky'. While the assemblage of the grassy knoll, the bike and the recalled feeling of panic can be seen as an assemblage – the unconscious affect seem to create further connections as Rowan, said 'I panic about everything'. Entering the wild seemed to have multiple and often contradictory associations for Rowan. In order to explore these, we take another rhizomatic detour that focuses on the landscape.

Cwm Valley is one of the many villages where, historically, coal was highly accessible. The specificity of the landscape, such as steep mountainsides and deep



valleys, initially allowed coal to be extracted efficiently and cheaply from just below the ground's surface. This, together with the quality of the coal, ensured that the valley became one of the most important centres of industrialisation in the United Kingdom. As increasing numbers of mine shafts were sunk and tunnels burrowed further, deeper underground mining became increasingly technical, dangerous and expensive. The men that grew up in the valley communities were destined to follow in the footstep of their forefathers and become miners. Like many of the young people in our study, Rowan was losing close connections with the industry, as it had been her grandfather and great grandfather who had been miners. Even so, the social imaginary of people who live in the valleys was forged when they were at the centre of industrial revolution and coal was exported all over the world, as far even as India and China.

We speculate that possibly the memory of getting stuck was part of an assemblage – an unconscious affect – in which shadows of the previous activities, Rowan's and others, linger. The grassy knoll seemed to have called Rowan in both walking tours into remembering an earlier frustration, which she later articulated as panic. An assemblage created by walking through a specific place, a place where she had been stuck in the past, might have held unconscious affects of a wild in which trails had been wrought by masculine activities such as scavenging for coal, trail biking and motorcycling (Ivinson, 2013). Indeed, during the first walking tour, Emma and Rowan hear the noise of the dirt bikes on the trails in the distance, which led Rowan to announce 'the boy racers' are ruining the trails and scaring people in the village below. From previous conversations we knew that Rowan would have loved her own motorbike ('I want my first car to be a motorbike ... I love speed'). Her reference to boy racers might have hinted of unconscious affects of the wild, danger and 'speed' (boy-racer) as a masculine place where women and girls were trespassers. Rowan seemed to have had to steal herself to learn how to walk, climb and ride the mountain trails on her own.

Desire moves through bodies and other matter as intensities that gather energies by transforming all they come in contact with (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 166). In the next section, we continue to explore Rowan's affective relationship with the 'the wild'. Below we provide glimpses of Rowan's entanglement with nature and the liberatory force she expresses a sense of freedom.

## Wild Intensities

Rowan spoke often of her longing to be outside and to spend her waking time (when not in school) building dens, speeding on her bike, physically forging new pathways in the mountains and creating special enclosed zones where she could feel happy and where 'no one is watching'. She described these as places where

she could ‘be herself’ and where she felt alive and ‘free’. The textual representation fails to capture the multi-sensoriness of the audio and visual data generated through the walking tour. Suffice to say her narration was animated and at moments she vividly described the speed, thrill and excitement of whizzing down the mountain trails on her bike. In the extract below, we glimpse Rowan experiencing feelings of liberation with all its energies, intensities and forward movement. The timing of her account seems to be significant because it came directly after she had described her disappointment when another ‘great friend’ transitioned into the world of boys, sex and sleepovers:

Rowan: There’s this girl I used to bother with, Amy her name is and she was a great friend but then she started going, like boys slept in her bed and stuff and I thought it was a bit creepy.

ER: Yeah ...

Rowan: I come down there on my bike really fast, on that mountain/ down that hill ... then I come up and I peddle, this is like where I try to go like REALLY hard on the gears ... and then I go on like gear six and then I go up and then I just come down REALLY fast and go down to the, that’s the end then but then I go over the trail, scavenger trail, down there and stuff ... (long pause) yeah I like the breeze and whatever, I like FAST.

From the ‘creepy’ desire, the spectre of heavy territorialised affects of young heterosexual acts emerges as an assemblage in which the intensity of the moving body-with-bike seems to roam free across the mountainous valley trails. She described going fast, racking up the gears, darting through trees and shrubs and feeling the rushing air on her skin. Rowan’s description is suggestive of an assemblage of multiple elements of varying speed and intensities from different universes (mechanical, natural, corporeal and discursive) crossing. These moments on her bike and on her mountain walks climbing untrodden paths can be viewed as ‘lines of flight’, as moments of becoming something or someone else (cf. Probyn, 1996).

We speculate that Rowan’s force for freedom was like a drive. Guattari (2006, pp. 13–14) suggests that Bakhtin’s concept of a partial enunciator can help to theorise a ‘psychoanalytical partial object that is adjacent to the body and that captures something of the gaze and the voice in Lacan’s object “a”’. He gave an example of this process by alluding to a work of art and the spectator. Bakhtin described a transference of subjectification between the author and the contemplator of the work of art as follows.

In this movement the ‘consumer’ becomes in some way the co-creator. The content of the work of art detaches itself from its connotations that are as much cognitive as aesthetic. The detachment relates to the ‘significance’ of

the art. The content of the art is separated from necessary connections with the unity of nature and the unity of the ethical nature of being. (2006, p. 14)

Creative subjectivity will seize upon, for example, the sonority of the word in poetry. In these moments, the usual flattened time-space perceptions are experienced as intensities: intensities that do not involve existential universes, but incorporeal domains, 'the renewal of contact with long lost refrains' (Guattari, 2006, p. 18). The rush and thrill of speeding down mountains on her bike seemed to have launched Rowan into a detached, intense way of being. Disconnected from the mundane flows of existential territories (family domestic life, the community expectations) allowed her to experience proto possibilities for becoming other.

In contrast to the thrill and rush of speeding down mountains Rowan also talked about how she enjoyed the stillness of nature and how she would slow down and almost stop as she noticed and sometimes photographed 'the smallest things' from insects to individual leaves or flowers.

When I am just walking out I just spot little things on the floor ... yesterday I came up and em here was a little snail thing on the floor and out of all the bushes I spotted that thing.. so I don't know why I look so closely at all the little things that everyone sees, the snail is not really like the best thing, a thing you'd take lots of pictures of of.... yeah... I try to take lots picture of it cos it might be gone one day, it could be overgrown, or it could be houses, hopefully not...

In these micro practices, Rowan created and sustained a relational intimacy that she intimated were precious, sensuous moments, which she captured, treasured and returned to again and again. She spoke animatedly of how she preserved particular places (for example, a hollow, a cluster of wildlife) in photographs, in case they 'might be gone one day' but also how she avoided returning too often to the same self-made paths, to ensure that when she did she would experience the excitement anew. It was as if she was trying to retain memories of these moments of detachment, of *délire*, to savour them and by not returning to the places too often, retain their capacity to cross a threshold. Creating these connections with nature seemed to allow her to come into being with new vectors of intensity that afforded her a sense of amplification. Creative subjectivity latched onto the significance afforded by the 'tiny objects' and through detachment afforded by contemplating these objects, we can glimpse again a striving to be other. The wild, for Rowan, was a place where she could be free and where she could feel alive.

However, although we can detect the exuberance in Rowan's lines of flight, we can also detect cruelties and oppressions. As we have published elsewhere (Ivinson and Renold, 2013), the majority of girls we interviewed spoke of giving

up practices such as swimming, rugby, football, biking, skating, dancing and horse-riding around the age of 13 because they clashed with the expected feminine roles in the local community. Girls who (dared to) enter into practices such as biking and climbing mountains may have experienced forms of liberation, which are often identified with historical legacies of masculinity. Indeed, given that valleys communities have historical legacies of strong gender demarcations, we might say that some of Rowan's activities were deterritorialising the community strata and involved 'subversive energies'. Thus, although girls like Rowan may at times have felt a sense of liberation, there was often a cost for rupturing gendered historical legacies, which may have been why these activities were also frightening and beyond what the community seemed able to tolerate.

We found traces of these subversive tendencies in the way Rowan spoke about her grandmothers. Although many of Rowan's allusions to her mother and her mother's generation were negative, she looked up to the previous generations of women. She told of her great grandmother's migration to London at the age of 14 to work as a 'servant' to support the family when her father died and her return to the valley in later life. Rowan talked with pride that the way her grandmother had built a loft conversion and a new garage. Rowan also had ambitions to become a scientist, partly so that she could find a cure for her cousin who was confined to a wheel chair. She imagined a future that involved going to university, having jobs in other countries and afterwards of buying a plot of land so that she could return home and build her own house. For Rowan, building and shoring up the community seemed to be associated with women and not men. She told us, 'the men are wimps, my grandmother built the house and they sat there and did nothing'. These affective practices hinted at strength of character that Rowan associated with independence of capable women such as her grandmother and great grandmother, who travelled beyond the confines of valley. It seems that the burden of responsibility shouldered by women in the industrial era had created resilience. Although Rowan did not say that she wanted to live the life of her great grandmother, her allusions to the future, her desire to travel and be independent seem to express intensities and affects of freedom that gestured towards a more expansive life. Rowan seemed impelled to become other, as her great grandmother had, to escape and forge new and different connections within and beyond the contours of the valleys.

### Discussion: Surviving, Thriving and Becoming Otherwise

The concept is what opens up the thing, object, process, or event – the real – to becoming other, to indeterminate becomings. (Grosz, 2011, p. 81)

It is the BwO that is stratified. It swings between two poles, the surface of the stratification into which it is recoiled ... and the plane of consistency in which it unfurls and opens to experimentation. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2004, p. 176)

The vignettes we have presented in this article, each goes some way towards illustrating complex subjectivity through what Guattari referred to as ‘ontological intensities’ (p. 29). We have attempted to show how our ethnographic practices allowed us to explore assemblages over time to reveal some of the complexities of subjectification. This article in many ways perhaps contributes to the ‘radical challenge’ (Hollway, 2010) of how to create research encounters that can capture the complex affective dynamic assemblages that Deleuze and Guattari theorise about, by the way we were able to see, hear and feel in our data.

Through the vignettes, we have glimpsed that Rowan felt trapped by history as she dreaded a life of traditional domesticity, that she struggled to create satisfying relationships with her peers, that she tried to resist the subcultural practices of drinking and drugs, and that her female ancestors offered her a sense of hope and that the wild set her free. All of these are part of Rowan’s life. That she was able to articulate clearly in interviews how she felt trapped by the place where she was growing up, altering us to conscious affects. Other affects were only detected, we believe, because Emma was able to walk with or beside her through landscapes that carried so much significance for her. It was by being in the landscape and in specific places that Emma was able to detect how Rowan was called into being (Bollas, 1993). We had to enter into activities with young people in order to be able to detect and speculate about unconscious affects. Even then, we had to learn a great deal about the history of the place before we could recognise that some practices were part of larger scale refrains and rifts, and thus how the past became present either as repeated rhythms of sameness or of similarity.

We can think of the enunciating assemblages depicted in the vignettes above as complex and variable in their intensities, as if Rowan swung between two poles of ‘stratification’ and ‘experimentation’, pulled by many competing and at times contradictory impulses. At moments she expressed a desire to be part of the community, and at other times of wanting to be free and autonomous. At times she yearned for intimacy yet expressed reluctance to enter into relationships with others, at times she talked as if she wanted to become her grandmother or merge with nature. Significantly, given the highly stratified *socius* of life in the valleys, it was when she was alone in the ‘wild’ that she improvised with movement, nature and artefacts to feel differently and escape local community expectations that were constantly in danger of binding her back into repeating the gendered patterns of the past – patterns that provide viable ways of being and carrying on in communities wracked by the trauma of industrial closures. Patterns of practices such as cooking, cleaning and having babies are ‘existential territories’ that both make life viable and that potentially trap persons into constraining ways of being. Some of these practices, such as those associated with domesticity and with schooling, made Rowan feel deadened and trapped. She conveyed feelings of being alive and elated when she spoke of, and took Emma, into the ‘wild’. Guattari (2006) reminds us that, although such moments of freedom and

intensity open people up to new ways of being in the world, they are not sustainable and if practiced repeatedly can become destructive and addictive.

The provocative concept of the BwO captures a sense of the infinite potential of being that echoes a mythical, proto or primeval world that existed before matter was organised. The concept BwO allowed us to explore partial object, of temporality and intensity, operating in diverse domains (biological, ethological, socio-cultural, machinic, cosmic) where Rowan seemed to swing between being stuck and feeling liberated. The BwO enabled us to consider how assemblages capture Rowan in a variety of ways. Assemblages that were formally structured, through sensory organs that make perception possible as well as through movement and language, seemed to colonise her and hold her captive. Rowan feared of being stuck in Cwm Dyffryn and by the history of its past. The empty BwO is so saturated by the criss-crossing vectors from other Universes that it remains dispersed, cannot achieve singularity and therefore is 'stuck'. We see glimpses of this stuckness in Rowan's talk about panic, as the landscape during the second walking tour rekindled a memory that connected to a wider assemblage of feeling trapped and 'panicky about everything'. In these moments she seemed overwhelmed by the wild, or by fear, fear that she could not do what she wished to do, could not grasp the moment and act in ways that allowed her to move beyond herself to experience her more positive future imaginaries. We identify these as proto possibilities that cannot be realised. When Rowan dived into the bushes to avoid others, she seemed to be overwhelmed by complex unconscious affects from a multiplicity of existential territories, possibly tied up with her attempts to have relationships, wanting and yet avoiding intimacy including sexual intensities, needing to be wanted and to belong within the community, yet yearning to escape and become someone different.

The full BwO is associated with pure or unadulterated desire. Here connections allow persons to free themselves from the usual ways of being and expand in positive ways through 'lines of flight'. Assemblages that involved the wild were minimally 'organised' allowing Rowan to grasp her desire for freedom and to release 'the body screaming within'. By fusing with bikes and experiencing the intensity of speed, Rowan seemed to detach from the territorialising influences of the *socius* to become other and truly alive. We identify these as proto possibilities that are momentarily realised and experienced in positive ways. While she described the liberation she felt, for example, through an intimate friendship, when riding her bike fast down a mountainside or when she glimpsed the women scientist or explorer she might become, she simultaneously expressed an anticipated social rejection and became 'panicky'.

If we imagine the full and empty BwO as two possible states within an ongoing, dynamic, flux of being, we can see Rowan fluctuating almost simultaneously between these. We needed these concepts to describe the constant shifts in her becomings and to make visible the proto possibilities the wild afforded Rowan to becoming other and thus potentially rupture the history of place.

We have suggested how Rowan's everyday practices were imbued with unconscious affects of being stuck, impotent and of expanding. We can only speculate about the unconscious affects underlying her need to hide, yet the protection afforded by the vast wild beyond her back yard may have acted as her private world of experimentations and *délire* (Guattari, 2006). Maybe in attempting to achieve autonomy, Rowan risked the wrath of those who remained bound to the patterns of practice that had ensured the community's survival in the past? When Rowan acted out of step with local feminine practices she may have been in danger of upsetting the very fabric of life in the community. Guattari (2006) reminds us that stepping out from the *socius* can only be achieved momentarily because it requires courage, effort and great risks. In the end, for a liveable life, girls such as Rowan have to live within the *socius*. Hopefully, the small experiments and incremental moves made by young people to transcend the past provide glimpses of freedom, proto possibilities that may emerge as becomings and accumulate just enough alternative life for the whole community to shift a little and move on. This is why it is important to map these, usually unrecognised, proto possibilities and begin to grasp how 'to understand in more explicit terms how newness, change, [and] the unpredictable, are generated' (Grosz, 2011, p. 86).

We plan to use Guattari's concepts to think of how to support Rowan through the frightening panicky feelings. Her panic relates to feelings of 'not existing' if she tries to break out. Guattari argues that we can work through these experiences by supporting people to try out new experiences within a context of considerable support. There is no reason why such practices should not be a part of education in post-industrial locales. However, this would require considerable shifts beyond a narrow version of the curriculum defined as disciplinary content organised as stages and levels. To follow Guattari's suggestions would require educationalists to first recognise what young people can already do and then build on these forms of knowing and being within supportive environments as the basis for transformation.

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- 2 While the case study in this article features data generated with Emma Renold, the full research team included Gabrielle Ivinson, Emma Renold, Kate Moles and Mariann Martsin.
- 3 The study has been informed by a number of historical and contextual sources specifically: Judith Marshall's 2008 Doctoral thesis, supervised by author 1 and Mike Ward's Doctoral thesis supervised by author 2; historical sources including: Bruley, 2007 and Penlington, 2010 and visits to various museums including the Welsh National Museum and the Big Pit, National Mining Museum.

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