Sexual Assemblages: girls, bodies and sexual becomings

Emma Renold and Gabrielle Ivinson
(School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University)
Our final sentence: “If girls do not move they also do not explore, take risks, experiment and therefore miss out on ways of being and becoming that may open up new imaginative worlds including worlds in which they build houses, work abroad and, dare we say it, desire” …
Young people and place: living and growing up in the south wales valleys 2009-2012

- Participants: 60 young people aged 12-15
- Locale: Semi-rural ex-mining community
- Ethnographic fieldwork: individual narrative interviews, photo-elicitation, observation, movement diaries, focus groups, walking tours, film-making
A gendered history of place ...
Valley girls and sexuality: some starting points ...

- Situating sexualised corporeality in place and time: teen girls and intensification of bodies-as-sex(ed)ual-objects and subjects.

- Being ‘in relationship’ as ‘being/survival’ for valley girls: the gendered significance of dwelling, history and locale.

- Diffracting ‘sexuality’ (Barad, Haraway): complexity, non-linearity, focusing on ‘entanglements’ and their effects - not reproducing the Same.
“We need to think differently about ourselves, starting with adequate cartographies of our embedded and embodied positions” (Braidotti 2012: 137)

“We are faced with an important ethical choice: either we objectify, reify, “scientifise” subjectivity, or, on the contrary, we try to grasp it in the dimension of its processual creativity’ (Guatarri 1992: 13)
We are mapping complex affective assemblages that recognise the entanglement of bodies in space, place, materiality and time, "where individuals, and subjective micro-intensities blend with and connect to neighbourhood, local, regional, social, cultural, aesthetic and economic relations directly" (Grosz 1994:180).

• Focus on what (else) can a body do or 'become', rather than what a body 'is'.

• The force that keeps all bodies in a state of forward movement is desire which is also synonymous with life (Fox, 2011).

• The creative potentialities of the body-in-relation (or becoming) is what Deleuze and Guatarri call the 'body-without-organs' (BwO).

• Assemblages are the effects of bodily relations comprised of material and non-material domains – or 'Universes' (Guatarri 1992).

• Created from radically different domains that push and pull in different directions, assemblages create becomings – not rational, individualised or structural linear 'symptom and cause', but transversal lines of intraconnection and inter-dependence – 'nomadology'
BwO are territorialized (blocking becomings) and de-territorialized (creating becomings) in assemblages.

**Territorialized ‘Valley Girl’ Sexual Assemblage**
(negative classed projections of fear and anxiety of desire onto the Other)

- sexual excess
- non-civilised
- parochial
- out of control
- pathology
- risk and danger

**De-territorialized ‘Valley Girl’ Sexual Assemblage**
(positive embodied knowing of desire as life force for survival)

- in-relationship
- safety
- creating community
- survival
- life affirming and producing
Exploring the limits of what (else) a body can do ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Body-without-organs</th>
<th>Empty Body-without-organs</th>
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<tr>
<td>(more ‘agency’)</td>
<td>(less ‘agency’)</td>
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<td>• the territorialized body is</td>
<td>• the territorialized body is</td>
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<td>entangled in assemblages</td>
<td>entangled in assemblages</td>
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<td>which produce a becoming</td>
<td>where there is limited capacity</td>
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<td>otherwise that can emerge</td>
<td>for movement and has ceased</td>
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<td>Case study: Rowan</td>
<td>Case study: Kayleigh (survival</td>
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<td>(becoming otherwise)</td>
<td>and safety)</td>
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Analysis: In each case study we map how affective forces within different assemblages territorialize and deterritorialize girls’ BwO paying specific attention to what a girl body can do, become and bear in a specific locale.
ROWAN

becoming-corporeal &
nature-culture entanglements
Yeah I started, I came up just in the pathway first, then I went further into like the zone that hasn’t got a path and that’s probably the most part I enjoy because you’re like you don’t know where you’re going ... so it’s like something new or something.

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 ... 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.

I don’t depend on people that much ... I like to do things in my own ... I get it form my grandmother ... we are all like that, the woman at least ... the men are wimps ... my grandmother built the house and the men sat there an did nothing ... and used to make me angry and stuff”
This is one of my favourite parts of the walk ... sometimes I go on a long one so I go up the mountain twice ... I try to go different places sometimes, not just always up here but this is like my favourite of all the mountains.

[talking about her picture of a twisted burnt branch]
It was burnt and I wasn’t sure about taking a picture of it, but I like the twists of it ...like different, twisted grass .... Its’ just different ... you never see one exactly like that anywhere else
“All the girls I know now, it's boys all the time, boys boys boys boys ... they all band together, 40 of them all out on a Saturday ... drinking and stuff ... I got time to drink and stuff when I'm older ... I've got more different things to worry about now ... like my future”
“Once 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”
De and Re-territorialised BwO

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.

... Yeah, me and Hannah always talk about like our own apartment and stuff, like ... that’s like quite exciting to think about it” (age 13)

“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” (age 14)
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 ...

ER: Yeah, yeah.

Rowan: ... then I come up and I peddle, this is like where I try to go like REALLY hard on 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, like down there and stuff ... Yeah I like the breeze and whatever, I like FAST
“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 ... 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 think you’d take lots of pictures 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 ...”

This is a way of thinking and knowing – a diffractive methodology – that foregrounds the “immanent living and lived body, as well as to the idea of a transgenerational, nonlinear memory of ones belonging to one’s species and community” (Braidotti 2012:130)
Risk and deterritorialisations: stability and safety

“You don’t reach the BwO and its plane of consistency by wildly destratifying ... you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata. [...] staying stratified – organised, signified, subjected - is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is that you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever”

(Deleuze and Guatarri 1987: 160/1)

Assemblages are a unique set of dynamic relations, always produced in space and time. They are the “specific and highly contingent actualisation of a field of forces stable enough and consolidated by their structural affinity so as to be able to constitute a plane of immanence” (Braidotti)

Second case study (Empty BwO): Kayleigh (unsafe, loss and trauma, fantastical ‘lines of flight’ for survival)
Re-thinking ‘sexuality’ ...

A renewed notion of sexuality ... that returns sexuality to its “original complexity as a force of intensity, intimacy and relationality” (2012: 142)

“Sexuality as the complex, multilayered force that produces encounters, resonances, and relations of all sorts cannot be contained in the power (potestas) structures of the dialectics of masculine/feminine. It is rather an active space of empowerment (potentia) and becoming that is capable of producing spaces of intimacy, experimentation, and relation to others”

(Braidotti 2012:148)