

Critical psychologies of disability: boundaries, borders and bodies in the lives of disabled children

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Attending to the ways in which bodies and subjectivities are constituted in social environments is not simply a concern of social geographers but an emerging interest in critical psychology, childhood and disability studies. Boundaries and borders are nothing if not the different relational and durational articulations of bodies and spaces. These entangled boundaries include borders between parent and child; culture and body; school, family and child. Through analysing the ways in which these borderlines are continually re-composed and re-constituted, we are able to reveal their relational and embodied articulations. In previous works, we have explored the ways in which disabled children disrupt normative orders associated with school, family and community. In this paper, we take up the concepts of boundaries and borders to explore their relational and embodied articulations with specific reference to stories collected as part of an ESRC project entitled ‘Does every child matter, Post-Blair: the interconnections of disabled childhoods’. We ask, how do disabled children negotiate space in their lives? In what ways do they challenge space through their borders and boundaries with others? How can we re-imagine, re-think and differently practice – that is revolutionise – key borders and boundaries of education in ways that affirm the lives of disabled children? We address these questions through reference to the narrative from the Derbyshire family, with particular focus on Hannah and her mother Linda, which we argue allow us to consider the ways in which disabled childhoods can be understood and reimagined. We explore two analytical considerations; ‘Being disabled: being mugged’ and ‘Becoming enabled: teacups, saucers and communities’.

Keywords: disability; childhood; bodies; boundaries

Introduction

According to Watson (2012), over the last 30 years, studies of disability and childhood have moved from a preoccupation with the impact of certain impairments on the lives of children towards an analysis of the ways in which these children risk being excluded from aspects of everyday life. The politicisation of the lives of disabled children has gathered momentum through the exponential growth in empirical and theoretical work associated with disability studies (Goodley 2011). We firmly believe that it is no longer possible for psychologists and other related professions to presume and articulate the view that a child’s impairment unproblematically and causatively links to their incompetence, ‘handicap’ or inability to learn. Instead, thanks to disabled activists, their allies and the emergence of the trans-disciplinary space of disability studies, we can confidently conclude that children with sensory, physical, cognitive and mental impairments are subjected

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to everyday conditions of what Thomas (2007, 73) defines as *disablism* 'a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well being'. At least in the field of critical disability studies disabled childhoods have been firmly replanted: from a psycho-medical ground in which disability is viewed as synonymous with impairment into the fields of politics, sociology, critical psychology, educational studies and social policy which emphasise the socio-political conditions of disablism. Similarly, in the field of childhood studies, Woodyer (2008) observes that early conceptions of children and childhood were traditionally biologically deterministic and reductive (see Prout 2005 for an overview). In contrast, contemporary theories have emphasised childhood as a historical, social and cultural phenomenon. The social turn in both disability and childhood studies have necessarily refocused attentions on the social construction of child and disability: demanding, among many things, for practitioners, policymakers and researchers to challenge their own individualistic essentialist views and recast their own work as fundamentally social, cultural and political. A common trope within disability and childhood studies is the notion that the disabled child is a very social thing. Such a position statement is very much at the core of developments in critical psychology: where the psychologising, individualising and pathologising tendencies of mainstream psychological theories have been challenged and usurped by ideas of a more politicised and socio-cultural bent (Gergen 1999; Rose 1999; Goodley and Lawthom 2005; Fox et al. 2009). Simultaneously, the fields of disability and childhood studies and critical psychology have debated whether or not this turn to the social might have gone too far. In childhood studies circles, a common accusation is that while constructionist views say much about social and cultural foundations of childhood but risk making children's bodies an 'absent presence within accounts of children's lives' (Woodyer 2008, 349). In contrast, Woodyer (2008, 358) argues, 'we can no longer deny the materiality of the child's body'. Embodiment is implicated in everything children see, say, feel, think and do. We need to address and understand the role of the body and its materiality in children's constructions of social relations, meanings and experiences (Woodyer 2008, 358). Meanwhile, a number of critical psychologists have questioned the presumed potency of a turn to discourse, language and culture, which, they argue, ignores the realities of embodiment (Cromby and Nightingale, 1999). Similarly, as a strong socio-logical analysis of disability became ever more accepted in disability circles, questions abounded about the lack of attention given to the impaired body. As one of us argues (Goodley 2012), while disabled feminists such as French (1993), Corker (1998), Crow (1996), Thomas (2001, 2007) and Reeve (2002, 2008) had made a strong case for the inclusion of discussions about impairment, Shakespeare's (2006) book was perhaps the most concerted and controversial attempt to address the question: what about impairment? For Shakespeare, the body had been denied in disability studies because of the dominance of the materialist social model of disability. This model bracketed impairment in similar ways to in which biological difference had been denied by some feminists in the 1970s (Goodley 2011, 28). Shakespeare argued that impairments are important because some are static, others episodic, some degenerative and others terminal. Hence, a social model can only explain so much before we need to return to the experiential realities of 'impairment' as object(s) independent of knowledge (Shakespeare 2006, 54). For Shakespeare, impairment *is* a predicament and *can* be tragic. Other disability studies writers have embraced a less realist and materialist bent, suggesting instead that we need to attend to the phenomenological realities of living with and through different bodies. The work of Hughes and Paterson has been particularly significant in reinserting the body back into sociologies of

disability (Paterson and Hughes 1999; Hughes and Paterson 1997; Hughes and Paterson 2000; Hughes 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004). A ‘carnal sociology’ has emerged, theorising the body as *the* place where self and society interact (Goodley 2011, 56). This attention to the place of the body has particular resonance for disabled children. Children experience their bodies in relationships with others, in institutions such as families and schools, through which a number of embodied responses and ways of being are demanded. Indeed, one of the key debates in critical psychology, disability and childhood studies relates to where (disabled) children are allowed to be and become. For disabled children, this often relates to questions about the appropriate choice of inclusive or segregated (educational and therapeutic) settings.

For children *per se*, debates about place and belonging and the relationship between bodies and the environment continue to occupy policymakers, practitioners and researchers. In 2008, Horton, Kraftl, and Tucker (2008) carried out a review of literature associated with children’s geographies. They concluded that research around children and their place in the world should attend to a number of things, including (1) missing children and young people; (2) alterity, otherness, interrelations; (3) close, empirical, evolving attentiveness to the importance of everyday spatialities; (4) emotions and affects; (5) becoming; (6) doing politics and participation in research, teaching and learning; and (7) engaging ‘other’/‘youthful’ sub-disciplines. Disability, as is often the norm, remains missing from Horton et al.’s discussion of the cutting edge of children’s geographies. This is a shame because, as we will demonstrate, disabled children have much to teach us about the embodied, relational and geographical social realities of childhood. Attending to the ways in which bodies and subjectivities are constituted in social environments is a growing consideration of critical psychology (Blackman et al. 2008; Bridger 2010), childhood and disability studies (Parr and Butler 1999; Gleeson 1999a, 1999b; Imrie 1998, 2000; Power 2009; Hansen 2002; Holt 2010; Pyer et al. 2010) and a line of analysis we take forward in this paper.

Bodies in space

The ways in which bodies, relationships and environments interact are particularly apposite at the intersections of childhood studies, disability studies and critical psychology. Challenging the material barriers of the physical environment and opposing the segregation of disabled people into spaces away from mainstream public sphere have long been the concerns of disability studies activists and researchers (Gleeson 1999a; Power 2009). Space and psychology are intimately connected. The arrangement of environments and the place of social actors or objects within those environments play a role in what Imrie (2000, 9) describes as ‘the constitution and transformation of the subject: the various interpolations and practices through which individual subjectivities are constituted’. How we understand ourselves, construct our identities and view our surroundings very much depends on our place in the world. A lack of flexibility in the public/private sphere to recognise the needs of different bodies and subjectivities effectively keeps disabled people in their place, on the periphery of mainstream society (Hansen 2002). Disabled people often feel unwelcome in mainstream spaces and are forced to struggle with a sense of belonging. This can have huge impacts on one’s sense of self. After all belonging evokes identification and emotional attachment (Yuval-Davis 2006). There is a sense of security in feeling that we belong to and in certain contexts.

Disabled children often occupy a distinct place in what Kitchin (1998) describes as ‘spatialities of disability’: the different ways in which disabled people are allowed to or

expected to inhabit space. While disabled children might occupy a space such as the school playground, classroom or leisure context, the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging within these spaces is debatable. This is because power relations make their way through structures, spaces and discourses of social, economic and cultural life (Armstrong 2012, 12). Occupying a space brings with it psychological and subjective consequences:

The experience of environments depends on one's existential – phenomenological stance to it, the organisation of materiality, as well as one's sensual experience of it (and on being able to imagine sensual alternatives, more comfortable ways of organising materiality). (Freund 2001, 689)

Following Hansen (2002), the social-cultural intricacies of the public sphere are often very complex, involving far more than physical environmental adaptation. In addition, she observes, there are a host of micro-social relationships and encounters, which have a bearing on how (disabled) people flourish or fail in these contexts. How we theorise phenomenological, embodied and subjective encounters with space takes on a particular significance in the case of disabled children. In many cases, one could argue that disabled children are both present and absent in the space. In the current climate of post-segregation, where more and more disabled children have been granted the right to occupy the mainstream sphere,

at least in theory the conception of space has changed from something which can be marked and reserved for particular populations – think about Indian reserves or Jewish ghettos – to something which has to be organised in such a way that it enables all people to live in the presence of others. (Masschelein and Verstraete 2012, 2)

However, while many disabled children appear present, we know from disability studies research – and from the testimonies of disabled children, their families and disabled activists – that this presence is often at best precarious and at worse tantamount to absence. Disabled children continue to be subjected to psychological, relational, systemic and cultural exclusion within so-called inclusive spaces of school and community (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2011).

In order to develop a critical psychology that is responsive to the ambitions and aspirations of disabled children and their allies, then we need theoretical resources that are responsive to the everyday details of spaces that might seem inclusive but continue to exclude. Here the interventions and concepts of social and human geography are useful. Dorn and Metzel (2001) argue that geographers approach the study of human phenomena through a spatial lens using an enriched analytic vocabulary (proximity, locality, access, etc.), employing maps to situate the emerging subjectivities of human life. Restrictive environments control access to social spaces, determining in a very real sense who does and who does not belong (Hansen 2002). This is because powerful norms and values are embedded in everyday practices within specific social networks and these 'norms (re)produce the hierarchical identity positionings accorded to more or less valued bodies' (Holt 2010, 10). Holt notes that the value accorded to individuals influences their subjectification and self-identification (e.g. as 'disabled' and whether an individual perceives this as a positive or a negative attribute). However, these 'valuations are not fixed; they are contextual, influenced by individuals' social networks, and spatially embedded' (Holt 2010, 10).

Important here is not only the types of social relationships but also the socio-spatial contexts within which the social networks are reproduced (Holt 2010, 19). Holt's analysis

of disabled children's encounters with educational, community and friendship locales found that being educated in mainstream schools did not necessarily lead to a deconstruction of the boundaries between disabled and non-disabled people as envisioned by proponents of inclusive education. In many cases, these 'inclusive' spaces actually reproduced disabling and exclusionary geographies (Holt 2010, 20). This encourages us to delve deeper into these spatial and relational contexts.

Bodies, borders and boundaries

Notions which can feel stable and ubiquitous ('childhood', 'disability') are actually diversely patterned, complexly interconnected, processually constituted and extended at multiple scales, and experienced differently in different time/space contexts. (Pyer et al. 2010, 3)

Curti and Moreno (2010) offer a specific methodology and theoretical approach for analysing (disabled) children's spatialities. We understand their approach in terms of a number of key assumptions and ideas. They understand children and childhood not in terms of developmental stages or forms of childhood but through what children do and are enabled to do (Curti and Moreno, 2010, 413). They pitch their focus on children's geographies, relationships and emotional lives in terms of boundaries or borders between bodies and space. Children's lives are typified by encounters with a host of borderlines between child/family; child/child; child/teacher; child/school and child/community. By considering what happens at these boundaries we are invited to understand the ways in which each side of the border helps constitute one another and, crucially, challenge one another. The entangled borders of child/family or family/school give rise to a host of relational and embodied articulations producing distinct behaviours, emotions and identities (Curti and Moreno 2010, 414).

We want to move a geographical analysis away from geopolitical manoeuvrings to consider 'the little mo(ve)ments' – that is the embodied and shared micro-political moments as movements – that are the vital relational circuits through which negotiations, capacities for responsible and effective agency and change can most tangibly be grasped, explored, expressed and understood. (Curti and Moreno 2010, 414)

Children's boundary work is often experienced in the context of the family. Hence, the family borders and encounters the child but so too does the school, the community and other institutions (and, of course, vice versa). They suggest that boundaries are fraught with feelings and emotions including fear, threat and danger but also safety, possibility and hope. This leads them to ask 'can the articulated borders of different materialities and the emergent boundaries of different re-imaginings – whether different bodies, family members or the family body and governmental institutions – be part of affirmative becomings of families?' (Curti and Moreno 2010, 414–415). This affirmative aspect of their approach gives hints of their theoretical approach.

Curti and Moreno adopt a Deleuzoguattarian approach to their theorisation of bodies/space. This approach has gathered momentum in studies of disability, childhood and critical psychology (Gibson 2006; Goodley 2007; Goodley and Roets 2008; Hickey-Moody 2009; Overboe 2007; Shildrick 2004, 2007, 2009). Curti and Moreno take forward this theoretical application through the appropriation of a number of concepts that they feel are often embodied in what 'children do and are able to do'. First, they are interested in what bodies and borders can become rather than be. 'Cannot health', they ask on page 415, and to this we could add education, 'be understood through what bodies do rather

than what they are (or what they are supposed to be according to hegemonic imaginings)?' 'How do children actively exert agency through affections and affects to help imaginatively transform, recreate and realise different becoming spaces, places, relations and boundaries of familial and institutional care?' (Curti and Moreno 2010, 415). To this we could add educational provision, pedagogical practice and community action. Second, they look to celebrate those moments when children revolutionise thought and practice in very concrete and micro-political ways. Children offer creative and practiced (re)imaginings of the boundaries, borders, circumstances and institutional and familial relations in which children find themselves that transformational revolutionary encounters take place (Curti and Moreno 2010, 415). Third, these revolutions are understood in terms of transforming 'behaviours, mentalities, practices and relations of affective becomings' (415): in essence, children have the potential to shift families, schools and communities through their very becomings. Curti and Moreno ask us to think of borders between childhood/adulthood, parent/child, school/child, child/family, institution/individual, education/school and the designated roles that are assigned to each and then think again about how we might re-imagine these borderlines and roles. What kinds of fixed dogmatic ideas are reproduced at the borders of, say, child, family and school? What new ways of doing family, school and childhood are created at these boundaries? When key players border each other how are institutionally located ideas of family, education and community reproduced or challenged? Through analysing the ways in which these borderlines are continually re-composed and re-constituted, it becomes possible to reveal their relational and embodied articulations and possibilities.

Recasting our attention to the borderlines of disabled children's lives allows us to consider the ways in which emotions, bodies, relationships and institutional practices are reproduced, revised and transformed. For Woodyer (2008, 350), children are active links in heterogeneous assemblages and connections. They are socio-material, rather than simply social actors. Such a conception of the child's work at the borderlines has the potential for recognising the resistance and potential of children:

Culture is no longer conceived as an assemblage of texts to be interpreted, but is understood as performed. This requires us to address the embodied performances of the various actors involved in the encounter. (Woodyer 2008, 351–352)

By attending to encounters between child, others and the environment – at the boundaries of key actors – we are able to explore the ways in which (disabled) children, their families and the institutions and communities they border are made and remade. As borders move forward and detract in relation to different encounters, we are encouraged to look for changes in relation to childhood and disability.

The body, the subject, is never fully determined; not bounded, but provisional, relational and enacted, in constant dialogue with objects, environments, spaces, times and ideas. This multiplicity results in complexity, but this complexity is so fundamental to our being, so commonplace, so everyday, that it is taken-for-granted; it is lived not deliberated. (Woodyer 2008, 353)

This deliberation should encourage us to attend to the intimate and intense nature of children's engagements with their environments (Jones 2009).

Our study and one story

This paper draws on a British study of disabled children, their families and communities funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES – 062–23–1138) (see project website: <http://post-blair.posterous.com/>) ‘Does every child matter, Post-Blair: Interconnections of disabled childhoods’. The account of methodology we provide here is adapted directly from Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2012a). Our main aim was to ask what life is like for disabled children/young people and their families in the aftermath of the changes for children’s policy and practice since 1997 set in motion by the New Labour government in Britain. Our methods included interviews with disabled children, parents and families, focus groups with professionals and analysis of policy documents. The study also had an ethnographic component with families and the emergence of a child-centred participatory approach to data collection, explained below. Overall, our participants included 11 disabled children aged 4–16, 20 parents/carers and 15 professionals who work with disabled children, including teachers, third sector workers, health workers and social workers. Children had a range of impairment labels including autism, cerebral palsy, developmental disability, Down’s syndrome, achondroplasia, profound and multiple learning disability and epilepsy. Katherine acted as research fellow to the project and was involved on a day-to-day basis with the design and implementation of the empirical work (as well as the analysis). Katherine accessed families via parent support groups and other community contacts. Our sampling also had an element of snowballing to it as potential families were informed by word of mouth, emails and via websites about our research. The ethnography involved Katherine attending children’s birthday parties, bowling, shopping with families. She was also invited to impairment-specific leisure activities, including an autism-specific social club, parent groups and user consultation meetings set up by local authorities, services and professionals to access the views of families. A few of the families involved in the interviews were also involved in the ethnography, but the latter was extended to include different children and their families. Katherine’s own positionality as a mother of a disabled child, and her willingness to share this with the families, undoubtedly shaped the research in positive ways. It was less helpful in some meetings with the children when we felt that they did not want to speak to someone who reminded them of their own mums! The use of digital cameras and other child-led methods were adopted instead (see Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2012b).

This paper makes reference to the family story of Linda, John and Hannah Derbyshire. John and Linda are in their forties. John runs his own business and Linda runs the home. Hannah (who at the time of writing was 16) is their only daughter. Hannah has the label of learning difficulties. They live in a small village on the outskirts of a town in the North West of England. Hannah has attended mainstream provision since she started in education. John and Linda have been determined for Hannah to access mainstream schooling, although this has not always been easy to achieve and they have had to challenge professional judgements and advice in order to achieve this.

Inspired by the paper of Curti and Moreno (2010) and drawing on previous attempts to learn from a singular although different family tale (Goodley 2014), we focus on the Derbyshire family story because of its rich turns and twists, plot and characters. This is a narrative of many different boundary encounters and events in which disability is both enacted and challenged. This is a tale of a family bordering school and community. This is also an affirmative account. Linda and Hannah’s stories have since been publicly shared (Derbyshire, Runswick-Cole, and Goodley 2011; Derbyshire 2013) and celebrated during

a number of public events including two conferences in the UK. They have consented to have their family history shared in this paper and have kept their real names. Whether or not the reader buys our analysis is perhaps irrelevant because Linda and Hannah's first-hand accounts can be accessed independently. What we do feel though is that they push us towards – and illuminate – theories from critical disability studies, childhood and geography. How do disabled children and their families negotiate space in their lives? In what ways do they challenge space through their borders and boundaries with others? How can we re-imagine, re-think and differently practice – that is revolutionise – key borders and boundaries of education in ways that affirm the lives of disabled children? We thank the Derbyshires for the opportunity they have given us to share in their challenges but also their breakthroughs.

Analysis: affirmative lessons with the Derbyshires

We turn now to a tale. In re-presenting the Derbyshire's story we hope this exemplifies a methodology that enhances 'understandings of the complexity of family lives through adopting creative ways of involving others in the research process' (Pyer et al. 2010, 4). We also hope it allows us to digest some of the details from one family that will have resonances with the accounts of others.

Being disabled: being mug(ged)

Linda told us about the time she worked for a temping agency that asked her to go and work in a company that employed disabled people. Linda told us that some of the temps did not want to work there, but Linda was happy to go and was made to feel very welcome. When tea break came the employees with learning difficulties had their breaks and lunches in the staff canteen; however, the employees with physical impairments would take their breaks and lunch in a separate room where they were served tea in cups and saucers by people with learning difficulties. In the canteen, people with learning difficulties got their tea in mugs (Derbyshire 2013)

Fast forward to the early 1990s and Linda is a proud Mum of Hannah. Her daughter has the label of learning disabilities. The secondary school is questioning whether or not Hannah should be allowed to attend – or whether or not a segregated special school might 'suit Hannah better'. Linda and John had other ideas, they had been determined from the beginning that Hannah should go to mainstream school – they did not want her to be part of a 'special needs merry-go round'. Hannah was two and a half when Linda was told that Hannah had a 'learning disability'. Linda described how she held Hannah in her arms and made her a promise: that nobody would hand her a mug, Hannah was going to be a teacup and saucer girl. Linda and John found that having a daughter labelled 'special needs' was enough for some people (even sometimes those who had not even met her) to offer her the mug. They had to fight to get Hannah into mainstream primary school and to keep her at mainstream school. They challenged the attitudes teachers, psychologists and other professionals in their fight to keep Hannah in mainstream. At the same time, they challenged the discriminatory attitudes of the other parents who left Hannah off the list of birthday party invitations when they invited every child in the class to Hannah's party.

Linda's account acknowledges 'dogmatic ideational boundaries of who or what identity must perform what role and when' (Curti and Moreno 2010, 415). The mug is a sadly appropriate word. We refer to others or ourselves as mugs when we have shown a lack of

self-awareness or savvy. Perhaps we have been conned by more street-wise others, exposing our deficiencies. When mugged we are robbed of something, often material, sometimes symbolic other times psychological. Hannah risks being given a mug like the individuals with the label of learning difficulties in Linda's recollections. Being mugged captures the limitations of 'being disabled' that can occur at what Curti and Moreno (2010) identify as *fixed boundaries* between parent/child; school/child; child/community; dis/abled. The child risks being made other. This alterity of childhood (Jones 2009) is reconstituted through fixed borders: the child as other to adult. The disabled as other to non-disabled. Alterity is heightened by the mugging of the child: the pathologisation of the individual as *being child, being disabled*. When boundaries are clearly defined and little attempts are made to transgress these fixed borders of adult/child and dis/ability, then disabled child risk being forever mug(ged). Fortunately, Linda and Hannah refused to be cornered in by these categorisations of disability and segregationist practices. They sought out their own spatialities of disability (Kitchin 1998).

Becoming enabled: cups, saucers and communities

Hannah enjoys school. She has lots of friends and finds the teachers helpful. She has recently completed some work experience at a local department store. This is hard work but she enjoys arranging the clothes on the rails, making tea for herself and her work colleagues and attending to the tills when punters come to pay for their garments. A letter of commendation from the department store manager is proudly displayed in her scrapbook at home. The scrapbook documents her many activities at the shop and includes pictures of meals out with friends and family, the school prom and the limousine that took her and her friends on prom night ...

... Linda tells us how life has continued to be full of promise and potential since they bought the caravan on the caravan park some 30 miles from home. They spend most weekends down at the caravan. Within minutes of arriving Hannah is off to the social club and bar which is situated in the centre of the park. Here Hannah meets with friends, helps with the bar and more often than not discusses plans for the Saturday disco with her pals. Linda and John feel like the caravan has given the family freedom: space for Hannah to do what all teenage girls do and time for them to spend a few hours as a couple catching up on the week. Some Saturdays are punctuated by trips to their cherished football team for Hannah and her Dad. This is the football ground where even the most prudish individual can be caught up in the most outlandish of chants, irrational emotions and fanaticism. This is another space of belonging.

Hannah's presence in the school has made Linda say and do things that she never envisaged she might do. She is an advocate. She is versed in knowledge of disability legislation, disability living allowance and concepts of 'eligibility criteria' for disability support. Mum/advocate/expert hats are swapped continuously. Linda has given herself no choice: Hannah will get her teacup and saucer. Linda's expertise is recognised by other parents who go to Linda for help in filling out forms and for support in their battles with schools.

... Linda and Hannah sit nervously waiting for their timeslots. In a short time both of them are going to give presentations at a conference in the university. Linda will talk about fighting for Hannah's inclusion in school. Hannah will proudly share her story of work experience, parties and friendships. Conference delegates (children, young people,

parents/carers, professionals, activists and academics) will learn about possibilities and hope.

When we think of saucers, well, some of them fly. And when they do they evoke fascination and mystery. They are often difficult to track down. They are imperceptible. So too are Linda and Hannah. They refuse to be sited by fixed boundaries. They capture:

The always-ongoing, always-emergent, always-contingent nature of all bodies and geographies: the messy, persistent unpredictability of the social world which constantly – perhaps necessarily, inevitably and characteristically – exceeds and eludes the kinds of neat terms and logics ('childhood', 'disability') which are habitually used to fix and capture it. (Pyer et al. 2010, 3)

The terrains that the Derbyshires travel were, at first, unexpected and scary. This is no surprise when one is involved in 'becoming-other – where becoming relates to emerging action, function, effect, assembling and doing – accomplishments with revolutionary micro-politics of relation and change' (Curti and Moreno 2010, 416). Hannah/Linda – child/mother – create new boundaries including child/advocate. Simultaneously, Hannah is transformed. She might be conceptualised, following Curti and Moreno, as a 'difference-making capacitor' who pushes the Derbyshires to reimagine different articulations of the kinds of productive spaces they would like to inhabit. We also feel the rhizomatic connections and lines of becoming in the caravan park, the football ground and the school. 'Rhizomatic learning is always in process, having to be constantly worked at by all concerned, and never complete. This in-betweenness is an inclusive space, in which everyone belongs and where movement occurs' (Allen 2011, 156). Learning might constitute what Curti and Moreno (2010, 416) define as 'communal becomings': 'impulsions of becoming are never the privileged domain of isolated or autonomous bodies ... rather they are intimate social mo(v)ements shared with and through the differentiating capacities of the world'.

Communal becomings [are] – communities of relations, ethics and mappings of togetherness which always challenge the delimitations of borders ... rather than viewing becoming adult, becoming responsible, becoming community as the purview of conventionally defined adult or parent, which is what the sociology of childhood literature tends to assume, we ignore the power of children as active becomings and their revolutionary power of their imaginings: children's capacities are materially and institutionally alienated. (Curti and Moreno 2010, 417)

On interacting with one another these different bodies – or communal actors – have the potential to transform each other's capacities. 'The immanent and active doings of children and their capacities to imagine and practice the world differently' (Curti and Moreno 2010, 417) permit familial becomings: Hannah invites the Derbyshires to 're-imagine and transform her family body and its relations to institutional borders' (423). The family/school borders are transversed. The school is visited, assessed, educated and advised by Linda. As Hannah enters the space of the caravan park, then its members are moved to consider its responsibilities around care, support and inclusion to think about its 'affective relations of love, care and responsibility that children's revolutionary imaginings and their differentiating geographical movements and actions create' (424). The school and the community are asked 'to re-imagine, re-think and differently practice – to revolutionise – borders and boundaries of care and responsibility' (424). Hannah has done something profound not only to her own family (in the sense they are becoming together, a familial becoming) but to the various spaces that she comes into contact with:

The ways established ideas – such as the role of the child, the role of the parent, relations of health [and education] – and spaces – of the family, of the personal, of the institutional – are subverted and transformed by and through children’s life-affirming practices and imaginings. (Curti and Moreno 2010, 425)

Conclusions

The ideas of the philosophers of difference are made to work in a practical sense in two ways. First, the ideas themselves are used to provoke a different kind of sense-making within the field of learning disability. It is not easy to see, think, and act differently; it is necessary, therefore, to also use some of the theory practices of the philosophers of difference to help achieve a new orientation. (Allan 2011, 153)

Watson (2012) argues that theorising the lives of disabled children risks mystifying the very moments of exclusion and oppression that many children and their families experience. We do not agree. As Allan cogently puts it: theory invites us to seek new orientations that have, at their very heart, analyses of exclusion and resistance. Pyer et al. (2010, 2) argue that children’s geographers could do more to understand the issues, needs and spatio-temporalities of ‘disabilities’. Similar demands could be made of studies of disability, childhood and critical psychology. We are reminded by Bell (1999) that identities and subjective sense of oneself is not *being* but also *longing*; there is an affective/emotional dimension to occupying a self and social space. Belonging can be considered to be an achievement, a performance and an on-going one at that – so that the communities we occupy, and our performative responses to them, will change and morph over a given period of time. But Bell (1999) also notes that all communities have histories to them, some of which are more inclusive than others, some afford belonging while others seem not to. The Derbyshire family remind us that borders are to be crossed and new homelands to be found.

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