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Abstract

In this presentation I share recent writing directed toward a rethinking of the movement of young people who are still at school into parenthood and the role of schools in responding to that movement. My specific focus is on teenage mothers: the 'teenage mother' signifier is, by default, a negative one. Working with the academic literature on teenage parenting, Deleuzian concepts and empirical research undertaken in Australia, I look to trouble this signifier by focusing on teenage parents, and schools, through a lens of 'becoming'. Becoming a parent, *becoming-parent*, is a very powerful threshold to cross (at whatever age it occurs). When the parenting threshold is crossed in the context of schools profound, enduring tensions are brought into play which challenge the limits of signifiers such as 'school,' 'teacher,' 'school girl,' 'adult' and 'child' – signifiers that are created and sustained by the habitual operation of what Massumi (1992) refers to as *The World As We Know It*. The paper, recently published in an international collection *A Critical Youth Studies for the 21st Century*, considers the possibility of a productive movement in our thinking around the 'problem' of teenage parents.

Introduction

Well, I left school when I was 17. I was pregnant; I wanted to continue my education but they asked me if there was anything I had to tell them and, when I told them I was pregnant, they told me that it wasn't possible to be at school. I was out of school for years before I came back here and enrolled to do Year 11. It was a really big step to come back when you've been out of the system. (Sara, quoted in Shacklock, Harrison, Angwin and Kamp 2006, 25).

I've been motivated since the day I found out about the school and having that opportunity to come back and right things that I didn't do so well the first time around. I knew this time I wanted to do it right and do my best. (Katie, quoted in Harrison, Angwin and Shacklock 2010, 43)

The title of this chapter is doing some work, albeit in a somewhat awkward fashion. Giles Deleuze appears, philosopher of a "bastard kind" (Massumi 1992, 1). Deleuze opens the work

because he, and his concepts, do something they are rather good at: a bit of troubling, a bit of “prying open” of habitual ways of thinking (Massumi 1987, xv). In this chapter that bit of troubling and prying open is directed toward a rethinking of youth transition and the role of schools in that particular form of ‘becoming.’ Teenage mothers appear as they, too, are ‘known’ to be trouble makers: the ‘teenage mother’ signifier is, by default, a negative one. As Sara found, ‘teenage mother’ as a signifier doesn’t rest easily alongside ‘school girl’ as a signifier. It is this assemblage of teenager+parent+school student – a gathering in which I too was once involved (Kamp and Kelly 2014) – that is the focus of this chapter. I engage with my prying by plugging into the academic literature and empirical research undertaken in Australia on the becomings of those young people, most commonly young woman, who through their ‘becoming-parent’ form or reform their connections with the education system. In this becoming they create assemblages that can be profoundly troubling for schools.

In doing this work I am taking up an approach similar to Nancy Lesko’s (1995, 180), where she reflected on her need to “write against the grain” and hold onto the “simultaneous statuses as mother, student, wage earner, family member, young person with racial identity, and sexual being” of the teenage mother as student. For me, it seems Lesko was connecting to the concept of becoming, a concept that portrays young people as *multiplicity*, continually transforming themselves according to the thresholds they cross within the course of their lives. Becoming a parent, *becoming-parent*, is a very powerful threshold to cross (at whatever age it occurs). A threshold is a point at which, by definition, connection occurs. In crossing the threshold new possibilities appear for a line of flight where established arrangements, identities, trajectories are disrupted; relations change their tone, register and directionality (Rabinow 2009). When the parenting threshold is crossed in the context of schools profound, enduring tensions are brought into play which challenge the limits of signifiers such as ‘school,’ ‘teacher,’ ‘school girl,’ ‘adult’ and ‘child’ – signifiers that are created and sustained by the habitual operation of what Massumi (1992) refers to as *The World As We Know It*.

This brings a further consideration into play. Human beings are not the only actors who are in a process of becoming: educational structures such as schools are also multiplicities, albeit ‘disciplined’ ones (Massumi 1992, 55). School becoming is, however, of a different kind: a ‘making-the-same’ (Massumi 1992, 106). Schools are calibrated for students to follow one linear trajectory through and beyond education in a timely, age-appropriate, independent manner. In this one might suggest that, for students such as Sara and Katie who want to continue their education through and beyond their pregnancy, *schools* are

the trouble makers. Yet while we might understand schools as a ‘whole’ given the forms of expression conventionally available to us, this understanding is limited: there are ‘cracks’ in schools in which becomings of other kinds can and do occur. It is these becoming-spaces and how they can contribute to the parent+student+... assemblage that I pursue in this chapter in the task of troubling education+training+transitions+critical youth studies.

The Teenage Mother as a Lost Cause

While teenagers from all social classes become pregnant it is those from disadvantaged social groups who are more likely to persist with their pregnancy and become teenage parents (Angwin and Kamp 2007; Kelly 2000; Lesko 1995). The reasons for this correlation are not my focus here. However, the *consequences* of it are, particularly in regard to the ways that media representations evoke the working-class teenage mother and a particular, disgusted, attitude toward her. Imogen Tyler (2008) provides a startling overview in her exploration of the new vocabulary of class in Britain: the poor, white ‘chav’ with its compulsory teenage mother, in many ways embodied by Vicky Pollard, the fictional construction of David Walliams and Matt Lucas in the television series *Little Britain*:

The reason Vicky Pollard caught the public imagination is that she embodies with such fearful accuracy several of the great scourges of contemporary Britain: aggressive all female gangs of embittered, hormonal, drunken teenagers; gym slip mums who choose to get pregnant as a career option; pasty-faced, lard-gutted slappers who’ll drop their knickers in the blink of an eye. (Delingpole 2006, 25)

These media portrayals sit alongside other less strident, but equally powerful, portrayals that associate teenage parenting with a range of behaviours and consequential disadvantages for the teenage mother, for the child, “for society in general and taxpayers in particular” (UNICEF 2001, 3). The dominant portrayal of the teenage parent remains overwhelmingly negative: teenage mothers are “the epitome of the problematic mother” (Silva 1996, 8), both social threat and social victim (McDermott and Graham 2005; Selman 2003). The general consensus has been that long-term economic, social and health risks suggested to be associated with teenage parenting are elevated when combined with prior disadvantage (Bonell 2004; Social Exclusion Unit 1999; UNICEF 2001). However, not all accept this view of the ‘catastrophic’ consequences of teenage parenting:

There is a severe problem with this ‘official’ view of teenage parenting – the research

evidence does not support it. There is little evidence that lack of knowledge ‘causes’ pregnancy, or that increased knowledge prevents it. Age at which pregnancy occurs seems to have little effect on future social outcomes, and many young mothers themselves express positive attitudes to motherhood, and describe how motherhood has made them feel stronger, more competent, more connected, and more responsible. Many fathers seek to remain connected to their children. For many young mothers and fathers, parenting seems to provide the impetus to change direction, or build on existing resources, so as to take up education, training and employment. (Duncan 2007, 308)

Yet this construction of this biography does not occur in a void; Duncan’s optimistic perspective – one that I welcome as a ‘former’ teenage parent – seems to suggest that social structure (both within and beyond schools) has *no* role to play in foreclosing on the kinds of assemblages teenage mothers, and others who relate to them in one fashion or another, might be able to imagine. Both Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) highlight contradictions facing women, acknowledging the role of gender divisions, relations and identities in how the social is assembled (Smart and Neale cited in McDermott and Graham 2005). For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) the processes of individualization that are argued to be associated with life since the latter decades of the 20th Century intensify the struggles between male and female identities. However, while adult intimacy might be fragile, the mother/child relationship is “the last remaining, irrevocable, unexchangeable primary relationship” (Beck 1992, 118), one that teenage mothers, no less than any mother, can embrace completely (McDermott and Graham 2005). While life in late modernity may be increasingly globalized, the very particular assemblages that result are also socially differentiated. As Lash (1994, 120) asks, “Just how ‘reflexive’ is it possible for a single mother in an urban ghetto to be?”

‘Teenager’+parent+student+...

For feminist theorist Nancy Fraser (1989, 163) social policy debates begin with the definition of the needs of a particular group: “needs claims have a relational structure; implicitly or explicitly, they have the form ‘A needs x in order to y’.” In this, needs interpretations and needs claims are connected in chains of ‘in-order-to’ relations. Lesko (1995, 179-80) plugs into this notion of chains of ‘in-order-to’ relations to highlight how provision for the parent+student+... multiplicity can quickly become impoverished at the same time as doing all that is required of it. For instance, in the face of any challenge it can be demonstrated that

needs *are* being met, even if the needs that have been interpreted and are met are other than those that might be established from other perspectives. Lesko suggests that teenage mothers might be deemed to need ‘life options’ that counter the risk of a sense of hopelessness. ‘Life options’ could be interpreted ‘thinly,’ perhaps as a need for decision-making skills and these could be met in a six-hour after-school course. Yet ‘life options’ could also be interpreted ‘thickly,’ perhaps involving education, health care, access to contraception, access to jobs that pay a living wage and so on. Such a ‘thick’ interpretation could then be further elaborated: education could imply a need for teacher advocacy, for income support services, and funds. Thickly-interpreted needs result in *fuller* policy recommendations or, in Fraser’s language, in “elaborated chains of in-order-to relations.” For Fraser (1989) ‘thin’ interpretations serve a purpose in stopping needs ‘leaking.’ In needs were permitted to leak they would trouble the accepted boundaries in ways that might force a critical debate about the legitimate needs of young mothers rather than “depoliticizing” the parent+student+... as “just personal family problems or as individual pathology” (Lesko 1995, 180).

In plugging into these perspectives, I also plug into research undertaken in Australia where a senior second level school responded to the commitment of young parents to reconstruct their life/student narratives subsequent to the birth of their children.¹ Notwithstanding that the educational policy in Australia is largely silent on the ‘problem’ of becoming-parents in school settings there have been a number of interventions in a variety of contexts (see Harrison, Angwin, Shacklock 2010). My particular focus here is the Young Parents’ Access Project (YPAP) established in Corio, a suburb in the provincial city of Geelong in the state of Victoria, Australia. Corio is one of Geelong’s northern suburbs, a community which continues to be recognized as having high levels of social disadvantage (Vinson 2004). At the time of the research, this was evident within the student population of Corio Bay Senior College² (CBSC): the school had an independent student population – that is, students who were living independently – of 57 students from an overall enrolment of just over 360 students. 52 per cent of the CBSC population held health cards – only available to

¹ Senior secondary schools are schools enrolling only Y11 and Y12 students, the two years generally associated with completion of the senior school qualification: the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Vocational Education and Training (VET) is often an additional component of the school offerings.

² In 2011 Corio Bay Senior College became one campus of Northern Bay College and is now known as Goldsworthy 9-12.

the lowest income earners³ – and only 45 per cent of students or their families contributed financially to the school by way of voluntary school fees of a few hundred dollars per year (Angwin, Harrison, Kamp and Shacklock 2004). The teenage birth rate in the area at the time was also high: nearly four times the national average (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). That there was an opportunity related to how teenage mothers transition into school was apparent. Every week young mothers who had dropped out, been pushed out, of a prior school as a result of pregnancy (or who had been early school leavers before they became pregnant), would contact the Principal to discuss the possibility of returning to school, intent on gaining their senior school certificate (Angwin and Kamp 2007).

As Sara and Katie’s opening words suggest, for some schools the tensions created by teenage parents wishing to engage with schools are best managed by keeping the “pregnant self and/or mothering self separate from school” (Pillow 2004, 115), even if the young woman is of an age where there is a statutory requirement that school is where she should be (Vincent and Thomson 2010). “*School isn’t for Pregnant Girls*” is the headline above a recent story in the Irish Sunday Times reporting how a teenage mother, formerly disengaged from education, wishing to return to school and, having been offered a place in a highly-regarded second level school, had that offer withdrawn when her status as a parent became known to the school. This ‘banning’ occurred on the basis that it was the “duty” of the Principal “to protect the honorable majority” of his pupils (McCarthy 2012). In a similar regard, Vincent and Thomson (2010) introduce Rebecca, a talented student who wished to continue her schooling and who found her pregnancy motivated her to achieve. Yet while her school leadership were supportive – a point that Rebecca put down in part to her academic ability and likely contribution to school league tables – others were far less accommodating:

He was teaching our lesson and I was just chatting with my partner [classmate] ... I was asking him what he was on about ’cause I didn’t quite understand it. That teacher then turned around and said to me, “slappers like you don’t belong in this school”. (Vincent and Thomson 2010, 379)⁴

³ Health care cards in Victoria are income tested. At the time, single person initial eligibility was based on a total gross weekly income of less than \$351.00.

⁴ Rebecca would go on to gain 14 GCSEs. Harrison, Angwin and Shacklock (2010) record that the YPAP included many academically-talented young mothers and those with high engagement in the school (for example as School Captain). These young women were a positive force in troubling preconceptions around ‘the *kind* of girl who ...’

At Corio Bay Senior College some staff had attempted to develop flexible solutions for teenage mothers wishing to continue their education. These solutions included modifying the curriculum to allow additional time to complete the requirements of the senior school certificate⁵, providing support in accessing welfare entitlements and assistance with transport, interacting with childcare providers and so on. At times, the Principal would “look after the baby” (Angwin and Kamp 2007, 95) while students attended classes and, although as a rule it was not supported given the potential for classes to be disrupted, some teachers would accept the presence of students’ children in classes when a lack of childcare was a barrier to attendance for a teenage mother. This is not to suggest that the presence of these students was universally welcomed: some teachers did not endorse the support offered to teenage mothers who, by their status, were deemed to be undeserving of any additional support. However, even where it was allowed, the acceptance of students’ children in classrooms was problematic in placing pressure on the mother (and on occasion the father) to minimize the visibility of their child and was distracting for teachers and other students. Equally significant, the practice did not allow for the developmental needs of the child to be considered nor did it articulate or respond to the on-going challenge of access to appropriate, quality childcare for young children, whatever age the parents might be.

In this context, a decision was taken to begin the development of an integrated project which would provide on-site dedicated childcare for the children of students, staff and the community (including a training room where qualifications in childcare could be completed by any school student), a modified curriculum for the VCE, and the employment of a Parent Support Worker who would work closely with students to identify their needs and to advocate for those needs to be met. The immense challenges of achieving this project in a context where policy was largely silent on the rights of teenage mothers in school settings are not my concern here and have been articulated elsewhere (Angwin, Harrison, Kamp and Shacklock 2004; Angwin and Kamp 2007; Harrison and Shacklock 2007; Kamp 2006a; Shacklock, Harrison, Angwin and Kamp 2006). Yet with the YPAP established, even where teachers were ideologically supportive, we found that they and the parent+student+... were always operating “under, within, and against predominant discourses” (Pillow 2004, 140) and perceptions of constraints:

⁵ Many teenage mothers would complete the ‘usual’ two-year curriculum over three years.

I guess it's viewed as a positive in a sense that it's providing an opportunity for young parents to come back but then when it comes to the crunch of what they need to do in order to support that programme or support those individuals, then it's like, "Ooh this is hard," so then all of a sudden it's not so great. (quoted in Harrison, Angwin and Shacklock 2010, 36)

These needs also challenged the technical competency of some teachers: young mothers who had disengaged prior to their pregnancy might have left school as early as Y8⁶. With the YPAP's location in a senior second level school their re-entry point would be into Y11 subjects, an entry-point that put pressure on curriculum and classroom practice, arguably in positive ways. By this, I refer to the persistent "leaky" needs (Lesko 1995) of young parents, needs that flow beyond the time-based, assessment-focused, age-based-curriculum-driven boundaries that can constrain what happens in classrooms and that force an agenda of reflective practice by teachers.

Teenage mothers, regardless of their potential for conformity to the model of good student remain "deviant by virtue of [their] obvious rebellion against the proper chronology of events" (Lawson 2000 cited Lesko 2001, 138). In contexts where managerialism is increasingly the dominant discourse for the administration of public institutions schools can become sites of profound anxiety for teachers, for students and for parents who have concerns about "fitting in, being judged, and measuring up to their respective roles" (Luttrell 2003, 173). Mansfield (2000, 146) takes up Foucault's work to argue that when we judge ourselves or others

we are trying to revalidate an autonomy and closure that we think we need to monitor in order to avoid the condemnation of doctors, family members, superiors, and tabloid journalists.

These "dogged identities" reflect arborescent thinking that replicates the established order, the "likeness to the model of the good student, or the model of the good teacher" (Roy 2003, 106). Roy (2003, 115) provides us with an apt illustration of how the pursuit of this likeness can foreclose on the vital potential of the threshold that is becoming-parent:

We sit around and the editor holds forth on a special issue he is bringing out on

⁶ Year 8 is the second year of second level school.

alternative schools: addressing issues on teenage pregnancy, drug abuse etc. Macy whips around angrily: “Did you hear how he said teenage mothers’\”? What’s he know about teenage motherhood? I’m a teenage mom and am proud of it. Wouldn’t give it up for nothing. I love my baby.” With these words, Macy impugns the patronizing discourse about teenage pregnancy, and a new plateau of intensity emerges showing the poverty of the discourse. I am witnessing a living curriculum. Macy spotting patriarchy, Macy grappling with monolithic patriarchy, Macy resisting with her multiplicity, with her right to be a student + a mother+ a teenager +Observing [the teacher] I realized that he was focused entirely on what the editor had to say, and had not paid attention to what Macy said in response. ... Macy’s outburst could help reconvene the murmurs and ‘stammerings’ that Deleuze constantly alludes to in his writings ... and the curricular possibilities and connectivities that could emerge out of that experience. [The teacher] seemed more focused on the formal aspects of ‘what the students learned.’

As Lesko explains, teenage mothers perplex schools: if they are already adults by virtue of their status as parents, what place do they have in schools increasingly concerned with keeping young people “socially young” (Lesko 2001, 145)? Kelly (2000; 2000b) uses the notion of the ‘dilemma of difference’ to explore the contradictions and tensions that surround the presence of pregnant and parenting teenagers in mainstream schools. As Rebecca found, managing the dilemma of difference can lead to stigmatizing and stereotyping: teenage mothers in particular become “visible only as disordered chronologies and sexual deviants” (Lesko 2001, 147). There is a tension, a complexity, between young parents’ own desire to be treated the same when the same treatment *implies* the recognition of different needs. There is further complexity in that even when schools do recognize and respond to different needs *positively* they do so within accountability arrangements premised on difference being managed *negatively* (Harrison and Shacklock 2007). In other words, the success of the school is measured in terms of how difference (such as the teenage mother) accommodates to the becoming-the-same (the school) rather than becoming-the-same accommodating to difference.

A basic principle from a Deleuzian perspective is that, none-the-less, there remain cracks in these becoming-the-same structures. There is no determination, definition or category that does not *at the same time* create zones of indetermination, indefinition and

flow; these zones are the generative spaces within which unusual connections may be forged, in which different discourses of becoming can tentatively be uttered. Cracks appear in what Massumi (1992) refers to as ‘The World As We Know It’ when, for example, the needs of teenage mothers force schools to cross the boundaries of the individualized student, the boundaries of daily and weekly school timetables, the boundaries of the ‘normal’ two-year timeframe for completion of a senior school certificate. At the heart of judgments about the success of the YPAP were assumptions about the economy of student worth, what counted as legitimate learning and who had the authority to make that judgment (Angwin, Harrison, Kamp and Shacklock 2004). The students in the Project were – as were all students in the school – enrolled in VCE and VCAL subjects, culminating in the senior school certificate. These programmes of study have currency in educational and employment markets beyond the school and community. In the current neoliberal context, these have been and *are* the acceptable outcomes for Victorian schools and it is these outcomes that determines ‘the ranking’ of the school, its ability to ‘market’ its offerings to potential students and, therefore, the amount of state funding it attracts. However, the development of skills and knowledge within the YPAP includes outcomes that move beyond those recognized in second level certification. In considering innovations such as YPAP and the challenge it created in the context of one school, we can critique the state and the spaces it works within: relentlessly seeking educational innovation while ensuring there is no massive shedding of strata: signifier ‘student’ and ‘teacher’ remain in line with the state machinery (Roy 2003). Difference cannot be successfully – or justly – managed from such a perspective of one-and-the-same-only. Rather, Rajchman (2000, 82) argues, regimes, including schools, “should be judged in terms of the space they allow for multiplicities and their individuations.”

Five Strategies for Becoming-Imperceptible

In the space that remains, I want to plug into the strategies sketched by Brian Massumi (1992) in his “*User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.” In that work, Massumi takes up the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to outline how becoming can be foreclosed, limited in its joining-up by the constraints established before the event by what already *is*, by fixed notions of ‘student’ or ‘teacher’ or ‘learning’ or ‘transition.’ Macy’s learning which I quoted earlier is a case in point: her teacher cannot see the connections she is making in the newsagent office, seeing only the formal learning outcomes that have been fixed before the event.

In the first of five strategies that he outlines – *Stop the World* – Massumi explains that becoming must interfere with the habitual operation of The World As We Know It. This World is the one where the teenage mothers is, by definition, a ‘slapper,’ a Vicky Pollard (Sara, Katie, Rebecca, Macy ...) who doesn’t belong near the ‘honourable majority’ in a school even if they might wish to be there. *Stopping the World* requires an intervention to break this habitual operation, an intervention that involves both ‘tactical sabotage’ of, and improvement in, existing arrangements. Together, these strategies open space for “a redefinition of the conditions of existence laid down by the molar order: their conversion into conditions of becoming” (Massumi 1992, 104).

In other spaces I have explored the development of a new Graduate Diploma of Education (Applied Learning) (GDAL) in light of this particular strategy (Kamp 2006b). Evolving at the same time as the establishment of YPAP, the broad aim of the GDAL was to implement a new form of pre-service teacher training programme that would result in the development of “professional educator[s] in the knowledge era” (Deakin University Faculty of Education 2005, 11). These teachers would be able to work in partnership with students in new ways and new contexts, often beyond the classroom. A specific aim of the programme was for graduates to attain registration as teachers. As a ‘teacher’ these graduates would have the credibility to ‘think difference’ within school settings, a need that had been found within the YPAP where the Parent Support Worker had “no credibility as she is not a teacher”:

She is central to that project, she understands what needs to happen at a much more intuitive level. She has information that teachers aren’t privy too and she thinks about things in a completely different way. She doesn’t think about them just embodied as a student, she thinks about them as a person who happens to be a parent, a child, a student ... she always seems to ask that same thing: how would it look if we just put that young person at the centre whereas the teachers are all “no, no, no, couldn’t do that.” And they won’t listen to her, even though she has information they may need, because she is not a teacher so she doesn’t have that status of knowing anything worthwhile. (Field Notes 2004)

In my earlier work I noted how in some schools this challenge to the signifier ‘teacher’ was turned back on the GDAL programme with the graduates being positioned as ‘less’ than ‘real’ teachers given the applied nature of their training. At the same time, in other schools the potential of the GDAL graduates was apparent to principals who had already committed

to the operation of their school as a “becoming structure” (Roy 2003, 60). This realization eventually occurred at CBSC when the Parent Support Worker was invited to speak to GDAL students, an assemblage that affected many lines of flight and a rush of requests from GDAL students to do their compulsory placements at CBSC. For those teachers at CBSC who were unable to imagine how to meet the needs of parent+student+... who had left school at Y8 then re-enrolled at Y11 with a child by their side, the presence of the GDAL students/graduates with their community networks and diverse pedagogies was a vital potential.

Massumi offers a second strategy: to *cherish derelict spaces*. The important idea to hold on to when thinking rhizomatically is that concepts of ‘arborescence’ and ‘rhizome’ are not opposing: there are *always* rhizome shoots in arborescent structures (such as the kind able to be generated by the GDAL students) just as there are *always* arborescent knots in rhizomes. Yet the becomings that schools *primarily* invest in are those focused on “making-the-same” (Massumi 1992, 106): making the parent+student+... assemblage into ‘student.’ ‘Leaky’ young parents are one group who resist such submission. They create zones of indistinction and it is in these zones – these cherished spaces – that becoming-other can occur.

The reason we must cherish these derelict spaces is that they are spaces where imagination – the mode of thought of becoming-other (Massumi 1992) – has room to work. Imagination requires that we be attentive to opportunity *within* the constraints of the existing order: for instance, the ability to recognize Macy’s becoming in the context of an already fixed curriculum. This kind of becoming “performs an operation” on the categories we all inhabit, opening a space in the frame that categories delineate, a space into which other bodies “slip” allowing a kind of “contagion of becoming-other” (Massumi 1992, 101). This contagion is apparent in Rebecca’s further story: Vincent and Thomson (2008, 379) outline how Rebecca was the first pregnant pupil at her school who had chosen to remain enrolled at the school and this forced the school onto a “steep learning curve” through being confronted by issues that could not be ignored. For example, Rebecca’s presence required a rethinking of established ideas around the safe use of chemicals in science classes⁷.

The third strategy Massumi suggests is to *study camouflage*. The idea here is that to

⁷ It is not without relevance that the lack of any protocol related to how the needs of teenage mothers would be identified and met meant that Rebecca was left to self-identify potential risks for her and her unborn child (Vincent and Thomson 2010).

become ‘apparent’ in the scheme of things, that is, to reach the point where an idea, project or new approach can be taken seriously in the pursuit of educational reform, one has to be able to ‘pass’ within the existing structures. The point to take on board here is how finely balanced this ‘passing’ is. On the one hand, to be able to continue their work a ‘passing’ group such as the students and staff in the YPAP had to be able to guarantee the requirements of the molar: the students must meet attendance and assessment requirements to be considered legitimate members of the school. On the other hand, they must not allow themselves to be swept into that space where their operation becomes completely framed by the terms of the existing order, becoming-the-same. As Massumi (1992, 105) warns, it is “all too easy to become what you” are (by molar definition). From the perspective that this strategy offers it would seem that, at the end of the day, the YPAP failed in balancing its camouflage. As I write I am advised that, with the integration of the school into a new structure as one campus of the Northern Bay College and the appointment of a new principal, the YPAP has been integrated into the school’s generic welfare provision. The implications of this becoming-the-same for future pregnant and parenting students remain to be seen.

To *sidle and straddle* is the fourth strategy and it concerns the limits and possibilities of revolutions and/or evolutions in transformational projects of the kind envisaged for the YPAP (and, for that matter, the GDAL pre-service teacher training programme). Here the strategy concerns being aware that head-on confrontation with molar forces risks “sudden death on an ill-prepared battleground” while gradual change risks slow death “by creeping molarity” (Massumi 1992, 106). Side-stepping – a simultaneous coming and going – offers a way forward. The idea here is to weave between the actual and the possible, sidestepping between the pursuit of reform and the smoothing of confrontation. In the process of this weaving between what is, and what might be, a line of flight is drawn, one that carries the process forward to new, uncharted spaces in which new discourses are constructed, ‘problems’ are framed in new ways, and far-reaching policy responses begin to seem possible. In her argument in support of a feminist genealogy as a policy studies methodology, Wanda Pillow (2003, 155) called for, among other things, an *embodied* analysis that

proliferates the asking of what has not been questioned, a telling of what has been unspoken and unspeakable, creating spaces for multiple subjectivities, theories and practices to operate.

The operation of multiple subjectivities, theories and practices demands *experimentation*: it is

through imagination and experimentation that our brains can be “remade to enable us to speak in new non-standard ways” (Rajchman 2000, 80), non-standard ways that break with habitual discourses of teenage parenting and its predetermined (negative) consequences.

Massumi’s final strategy is to *come out*. And, for Massumi (1992, 106), what one comes out of is *identity*. The recognition here is that transformational efforts – be they the efforts to become-other of a teenage mother or the efforts to become-other of a school – cannot succeed if they begin in an identity that is categorically fixed; cannot proceed by reaching for resemblance to a norm (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 233). Neither is a project such as the YPAP best thought of as *fixed*: it was, rather, a process, an assemblage that ebbed and flowed depending on which actors were part of the assemblage. These actors included the Principal who drove its development and the principal who has overseen its integration into the school’s generic welfare system. They included the global funding that was available and the affect of that funding being used to provide for needs of a small group of (deserving or undeserving) students. They included the levels of support from the local community and the ideological position of the State government of the time. They also included electoral cycles, accountability regimes and rationalizations in government departments. To come out of identity – to move away from attempting to normalize trajectories to make room for a Deleuzian “anybody” with his or her vital potential (Rajchman 2000, 87) requires unruliness that can create profound discomfort in arborescent structures such as government departments and the institutions for which they must account; it is easier, safer, not to come out, to revert – tail between one’s legs – to becoming-the-same.

*Exit-point: Becoming New and Otherwise*⁸

Disgust and contempt motivate and sustain the low ranking of things, people, and actions deemed disgusting and contemptible. (Miller 1997, p. xiv)

The intergenerational poverty that troubles us so much today is predominantly a poverty of values. Our inner cities are filled with children having children, with people who have not been able to take advantage of educational opportunities, with people who are dependent on drugs or the narcotic of welfare. Bearing babies irresponsibly is, simply, wrong. ... We must be unequivocal about this. (New York Times, 20 May

⁸ (Mansfield 2000, 146)

1992 cited Lesko 1995, 178)

Here Nancy Lesko cites a speech by the then USA Vice President Dan Quayle in which he blamed the multiracial outrage in Los Angeles following the acquittal of four White policemen accused of brutalizing a Black motorist, Rodney King, on intergenerational poverty that was a “poverty of values” and goes on to connect this with “children having children,” with failure to complete school, with dependence on the “narcotic” of welfare, with the “unequivocal” wrongness of “bearing babies irresponsibly.” Lesko then works with Fraser’s (1989) argument that the identification of need is the mediator between ideological positions and what happens, *what can possibly happen*, in schools. In a given context, at a given point of time, what can be imagined as a legitimate need with a legitimate call on funding will be framed in large part by those with power: those who control the dominant discourse. The possibilities that are able to be imagined and defended in schools will not be shaped in conversation with the teenage mother but at this *prior* point of mediation.

The formation and subsequent dissolution of the YPAP provides a portrayal of how difficult it is bend the very disciplined becoming-the-same of a school. For the young women who availed of the YPAP, concerns about transition were not simply about moving out of school into work. Foremost they were about finding a sustainable entry-point *into* second level education after the birth of a child, an entry-point that made sense for all the multiplicities that came together in that assemblage. The dominant, linear youth transition discourse had little resonance in this assemblage but clearly acted on it, as did the dominant discourses of teenage parenting, its antecedents, its outcomes, its joys and its prejudices. And any number of other mediators.

In taking up the rhizomatic concept of becoming, in being troubled by Deleuze, and in conversation with Sara, Katie, Rebecca and Macy, this chapter opens space to foreground how the assemblage that forms when the parenting threshold is crossed is one that can open onto completely new possibilities, particularly for young women who, for whatever reason, have disengaged from school. The threshold opens onto a potential line of flight, a “becoming new” that must of necessity include a young mother, her child, a school and individual teachers. For schools to respond to this very particular opportunity, this form of transition demands its own line of flight. It takes imagination, willingness to experiment and a recognition that the *loss* of categorical identity opens the space for maximum gain, a space in which cycles of disadvantage that are fed by the “institutionalization of disesteem” (Fraser

1997, 243) might also be troubled.

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