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# Losing A Father in an Ex-Industrial Landscape: a researcher's emotional geography

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**ABSTRACT:**

My story of a familial connection on the move was part of the research process of an ethnographic project about a demolished ex-industrial village. Growing up there in the 1970s, my fatherless childhood was silently lived out in its spatial geography. My proximate, unknown father was a potent figure I would glimpse in the street spaces but was never allowed to acknowledge. Twentieth century accounts of working-class life have little to say on the personal stories of families where 'father' was rarely present (Steedman, 1986). Here I offer a daughter's emotional geography of fatherlessness. To sketch a socio-cultural backcloth to the personal subplot I explore, I draw on scholarship about fatherhood, fatherlessness and lone motherhood as a way to discuss men's involvement in fathering in relation to my own experience of living without a father in a paternalistic company village. Turning to my return in 2015 as a researcher, I use autoethnography to explore the personal familial subplot bubbling underneath the main project. I chart how the methodologies I used held affordances which offered a process of coming to terms with the inter-connections of spatial and familial absence and loss: the loss of my home-village where memories of an absent father were played out and the revelation of the loss of an already absent father through a DNA test. In this way, it traces the shifting movements of a familial (dis)-connection through memories, photographs and mobile research encounters against the backcloth of the absent spaces of an ex-industrial community.

**KEYWORDS:**

(Please supply up to 6 keywords for your Chapter)

1. Fatherlessness
2. Ex-industrial landscape
3. Spatial loss
4. Mobile methodologies
5. Autoethnography
6. Dynamic familial relationships

**Introduction**

I knew that when I appealed in the local press for stories about Carpetvillage to start a new ethnographic project about responses to demolition in the ex-industrial village of my childhood, I would be poking at the embers of a dormant relationship with my biological father (WH). The people of the study told me that whole families had worked in the mills. Mine was no exception: my mother, maternal aunts, step-father, biological father and his wife had all worked at Carpetmakers. My parental connection with WH was re-ignited when I returned this time as a researcher, some forty years later. The project explored what happened when the once thriving mills, offering employment and 'communal being-ness' (Walkerdine, 2010) to the local community, were pulled down. Here I show how the project forced me to confront a deeply personal set of emotions about my absent father across the research journey. I weave a discussion of two historical moments through the chapter: the experience of absent fatherhood up until 1979 when my mother and I left the village to join our step-family; and my return to Carpetvillage embarking on the 'landscapes of loss' project in 2015. By using two different moments, it traces changes in the village and the movement and change in my perceptions of my relationship to a lost father. It refuses the idea of fatherlessness as a static entity carried by the individual across the life course; rather, it emphasises fatherlessness - on the move - in the dynamic re-making of familial relationships across time and place. From the standpoint of the personal, it looks at how my story is used to make an academic narrative about familial relationships through the research. Using empirical methods which took me back to the community to hear about their lived experiences of spatial change, while tangentially revisiting my own memories, it traces a collection of highly

charged emotional moments in the research process as the potent figure of WH re-surfaced in the materials and objects of the research.

**Childhood in the village**

Growing up there, my fatherless childhood was lived out in the spatial geography of the contours of the company village without ever being spoken about. My mother 'had' me out of wedlock in 1966. She had worked in the 'setting'; he in the mechanics shop. They had carried on 'going out' until I was two and half years old, but marriage eluded them. Much to WH's embarrassment, he later told me, my mother returned to full-time work at Carpetmakers in 1971. But after their relationship ended we had no official contact. My proximate, unknown father became a highly potent figure I would occasionally glimpse walking past in the street spaces between the mills and the school. My most vivid memory of him is that he would sit to have his break in all-in-one blue overalls on the low window-sill of Carpet Mill at the crossroads of the village with another worker. We sometimes saw each other in the village but we never spoke, never waved, never acknowledged each other.

   In Landscape for a Good Woman (1986, p. 6) Steedman tells her reader that her mother didn't really want children in her account of growing up in a household in the 1950s. Hers was a mother who, 'told you to accept the impossible contradiction of being both desired and a burden' (1986, p. 7). Nor was her father a 'master' in the patriarchal sense, in fact he was barely around. I grew up alongside a white working-class mother who wanted me, lived on a council estate and brought me up with her ageing parents, but who was ashamed of her single parenthood. A mother who only recently told me in

response to recent contact with WH: 'to never to write about this in any of your books.' Steedman argues that her mother's type of life as a single parent had no place in twentieth century accounts of working-class family life. Set against the fixed backcloth of 'endless streets' in Leeds and Northampton, Hoggart and Seabrooks' accounts assume that mothers stayed at home, fathers were patriarchs and that children accepted the harsh discipline of their up-bringing (Hoggart, 1959; Seabrook, 1982). Concerned to depict the working class as group-bound by the urgent physical need for survival, such accounts deny working-class parents and children an opportunity to speak of, 'a particular story, a personal history' (1986, p. 10) through which to express an 'emotional or psychological selfhood' (ibid., p. 11). In this chapter I identify with Steedman's call to 'particularize this profoundly a-historical landscape' (ibid., p. 16), to 'use the autobiographical 'I'' and tell of a daughter's emotional geography of fatherlessness outside the traditional conception of a working-class community in the 1970s.

The project set out to research a community housed in an architectural built environment which made people feel 'held' together (Walkerdine, 2010). Carpetmakers had a reputation as a paternalistic employer and offered a host of social opportunities to bind the workers to its corporate aims. As a result, the community made strong affective ties so that Carpetvillage was a site of friendship, courtship and love as well as a workplace. Less referred to by ageing respondents looking back were the difficulties and the fall-outs between employees when relationships failed to go to plan. The irony for me was that those nostalgic descriptions of the Carpetmaker's 'big family' I heard in 2016 were contradictory and reminded me of what it felt like as a child to live out a different story, one that I learned was viewed by others as an incomplete, 'broken' family out of a situation I didn't fully understand.

In recognition that fatherhood is an historical construction, dependent on socio-cultural factors and changes in the construction of gender and sexuality in relation to masculinity (Collier, 1999), the piece attempts to unpick the temporal shifts in its meaning from an autobiographical perspective across time to trace the transition in a familial relationship. In similar vein as Smart has argued, normative motherhood is a 'highly contrived and historically specific condition' comprised of discursive strategies at given moments (Smart, 1996, p. 49). Discussion is geographically confined to the spatial site of Carpetvillage where both presence and absence of missing fatherhood was lived out. Across these two moments in time the space of the village was transformed from a busy village pervaded by the smell of wool and clatter of looms in the early 1970s to today's village scene: a bricolage of new housing juxtaposed with undeveloped tracts of land overgrown by weeds and subject to sales hoardings (see Figure 1). Absent fatherhood meant something different in each time and place. In the 1970s it was a time of puzzlement where I looked to adults for a sense of what was going on and how I was expected to behave, which was to ask very few questions and accept answers which always obscured the full story. But at least then there was a physical space in which people moved and lived and related to one another. My return in mid-life meant that I could take control – take a few risks, mention his name to people in the community and watch what happened. But the space itself was marked by absence – the buildings that workers' bodies traversed were no longer there; the distinctive aromas replaced by the noise of traffic passing through. For as researcher I was keen to acquire information about the sensuous memories of village community life; but in the process I was vulnerable to my own 'involuntary memories' (Edensor, 2005, p. 145) of WH as I walked the village with the people of the study. The space signified loss – of

place, of community, of a missed opportunity to get in touch and make a go of a parental relationship.

FIG 1 HERE

## Constructions of parenthood

*WH's Story*

Looking back, it seems incredulous that my father and I walked past each other in silence in the streets of the village. How was it possible for WH to publically deny his identity as a father in everyday settings? The question of involvement in fathering pervades the academic literature. Yet, fatherhood as a construction – in terms of 'doing' parenting, what it meant as a public identity and how it was manifest as an attachment between a child and a man (Morgan, 2003) only began to garner sociological attention in the early 1990s when – paradoxically - fathers were increasingly absent from the family (Dermott, 2008, p. 7). The statistics bear this out: lone parent families went from 7.5 % in 1979 to 23% by 1998 (Lewis, 2002, p.125). Writers tend to refer back to uninvolved fathering as an undesirable form of parenting. For example, Dermott argues that fatherhood, 'is now pervasive as a comfortable public identity' (2008, p. 1), which suggests that hitherto men felt ill at ease with its public identity. Similarly, in Williams' (2008) empirical study of men's conception of fatherhood they were cognizant that 'good' fathering was involved fathering; many of them were keen to pull distance from their own fathers' outdated role as the emotionally distant breadwinner (2008, p. 493). Hobson & Morgan acknowledge that the title of their book Making Men Into Fathers, 'suggests the weak bonds between men and fatherhood' (2002, p. 1). Indeed, Furstenberg argues (1988) that men can move between wanting more involvement and remaining distant during their own life trajectory. What the

scholarship maintains is that fathers like WH could negotiate their level of involvement in how far they parent their children and refuse the public identity of fatherhood in the process. This lack of involvement in terms of care was supported by government, legal and policy decision making in the UK.

While I was aware that WH paid a small weekly maintenance in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, probably as a result of the Maintenance Order Act (1958), how was he able choose the option to not take up the role of parental carer? Lewis (2002) argues that legal and policy decisions in the UK were strongly tied to the breadwinner model with an emphasis on financial maintenance rather than care. In the 1970s, The Report of the Committee of One Parent Families (1974), a government committee set up as a result of the increase in divorce, conceded the importance of men's responsibility, but it fought shy of the work to trace and prove paternity, given the confidentiality of personal information in Britain. It also took a *laisssez-faire* stance on male behaviour, arguing that it was hopeless to dictate to men who they should co-habit with in a liberal democracy (Lewis, 2002, p. 129). It is also the case that practices of fatherhood have tended to be tied to marriage and the role of provider – the increase in lone mothers since the 1970s removed the automatic link between father and husband, hence it has was difficult to develop policies on practices centred on care as opposed to cash. Thus government and policies acknowledged that men needed to take responsibility for the care of their children and expressed real concern that they presented poor role-models to their children, but action to address these concerns was missing. In these ways, WH was only officially expected to pay a small amount of maintenance, and beyond that his role of father extended no further.

*My Story*

Fatherlessness is for some children, as it was for me, a reality. However, my experience in the 1970s was probably relatively rare; Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner and Williams (1999) found that at that time, only 3% of fathers had no contact with their children. Dermott argues that the lived experience of fatherlessness is an absence across three dimensions: there is no physical experience of a man within the household in which children live; no financial support; and there is emotional distance from a parent in children's lives (2008, p. 10). My mother probably received Supplementary Benefit (1966), which was given to the unmarried mother who went back to her parents' home to care for herself and her child (Kiernan, Land & Lewis, 1998, p. 151). What Dermott fails to mention is that there was an increased responsibility on me to carry the emotional burden of witnessing the struggle of my mother to cope. Moreover, psychologically there is space within the mentality of the child to foster highly charged emotional fantasies about the unknown absent parent. This tendency to fantasise about WH continued long after I had established my relationship with my step-father in the late 1970s.

My mother married my step-father in 1979 and the trend for what is termed today the 'blended family' was set to continue. What was clear during the 1990s, was that the 'stable' nuclear family structure was less in evidence – an examination of the micro settings of lived family practices showed arrangements with descriptive labels such as 'bi-nuclear' or 'step', terms which attempted to more accurately mirror family formats (Hobson & Morgan, p. 17). In a conception of families which refuses to see them as 'static' entities, which can be 'broken', these developments testify to the notion that familial forms are always 'on the move' across time. Marriage breakdown and separation

ushered in these changes and when new relationships were forged, routes to social fatherhood by non-biological fathers became socially accepted and increasingly visible. While dominant discourses still privileged the rights of biological fathers, *doing* social fatherhood was tied to the idea, 'that fathering is becoming an achieved social relationship' (Edwards, Back-Wiklund, Bak & Ribben McCarthy 2002). For me building a parental relationship was a process of hard work and negotiation, but it was something that my step-father, who legally adopted me in 1980, was prepared to do.

*Mum's Story*

I was acutely aware that my mother, probably to this day, has felt the stigma of being an unmarried mother. This should not surprise us, there is a long history in which unmarried mothers, in particular (Smart, 1996), have been categorised as a demoralising force. In the 1950s unmarried mothers were regarded as emotionally unstable or psychologically disturbed (Kiernan et. al, p. 108). They were encouraged to give their illegitimate babies up for adoption; 10,000 were adopted in 1955, rising to 19,000 in 1968 (Ibid., p. 39). However in the late 1960s and 1970s there was a shift to the idea that natural mothers played a key role in the psychological health of babies and this was extended to unmarried mothers. The distinction between unmarried and divorced mothers was harder to determine and mothers began to resist giving up their babies (Smart, 1996). The Report of the Committee on One Parent Families (1974) proposed support for lone mothers from the welfare state – somewhat radically - this was regardless of their particular route to lone parenting. During this time, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children began to melt away. Smart argues that the 1970s was a fleeting but important moment when the boundaries between good and bad motherhood

became blurred and motherhood itself was discursively constructed as autonomous and arguably powerful across moral, psychological and legal sites. The changes meant that my mother was not made to enter a 'mother and baby' home to give birth, nor was she forced to allow me to be brought up by another member of her family, with the circumstances of my birth shrouded in secrecy - scenarios that were not uncommon earlier in the twentieth century (Kiernan, et. al. 1998, p. 5). Rather, she could live in relative autonomy compared to earlier decades. Her circumstances however, probably did make my step-father's marriage proposal - which relieved her of full-time paid work, life on a council-estate and freedom from living with her elderly father and young daughter – seem both attractive and more crucially, respectable.

## Methodology

The kernel for the landscapes of loss project was sown on an uphill drive with my step-father in the dank winter of 2003: the demolished hole where Carpet mill once stood to my left, dad driving on my right. The atmosphere in the car felt heavy. Dad stayed silent, but affective pain hung in the air. I said something in the car when we reached the brow of the hill – that I understood that driving past a once-mill must feel strange and quite difficult if you had worked in it for 30 odd years. Dad cleared his throat and fell back into silence – a familiar sign that he was not going to talk about it. That moment widened my thinking to wonder how other members of the community had coped post-demolition. Located at the heart of the crossroads of the village, Carpetmakers had produced fine woven carpets since the late 1880s. Pride in making carpets was an important part of ex-worker identity. But in the 1980s the company fell into decline and then closure in 2000. In 2002, what one respondent described

as the 'iconic' Carpet mill was demolished leaving a vast hole where there had once stood a building redolent of industrial heritage.

In 2015 I put together the research design for the 'landscapes of loss' project – a small scale empirical study that would require ethical approval to conduct. In July 2015 I won an internal mid-career research prize (8k) and was given ethical clearance to conduct the research. The project shared affinities with my earlier ethnographic work, also conducted locally, on the relationship between classed (and gendered) gardening practices and lifestyle television of the late 1990s. Interested in voices 'from below' it explored how desirable middle-class aesthetics bulldozed working-class gardens in make-over television. In similar vein, this project was interested in hearing and documenting the experience of a largely working-class community who had lost a village with a strong industrial identity. Returning in 2015 to begin my new project, I wanted to ask how people who had watched the consequences of the post-industrial economy eclipse a thriving manufacturing village managed to live in an altered landscape. How was locality held together? How were affective bonds - once maintained within works buildings - sustained? How did people practically navigate through a village that had altered beyond recognition?

A press call out: 'Untold stories wanted about Carpetvillage' appeared in the nostalgia pages of a local newspaper in November 2015. The feature introduced me and my institutional affiliation and urged interested ex-workers and local residents to get in touch:

> Dr Lisa Taylor ... has launched a new project which aims to understand the effect of the demolition of the iconic mill on the village and community. As a key part of her research she would like to invite

participants - ex-Carpetmakers workers or those who live in Carpetvillage to a focus group.

It showed an image of me standing on the pavement, the undeveloped tract of land with its wild buddleia, rubble and advertising hoardings replacing the site where Carpet Mill once was in the background. At the time the academic motivation for the project was about investigating peoples' responses to spatial change. But as I look now at the newspaper cutting – which cannot, for ethical reasons be used as a figure illustration because it would reveal the place name of the community – the need for me to return to this community was also about unfinished personal and familial business. The project gave me an opportunity to look back to a place entwined with personal family history, to where it all began some fifty years earlier to assess where I stood in relation to a complex familial parentage. My step father had died in 2014, another father – laid dormant for twenty-four years – was still around and the project offered the possibility of renewed contact. And mother, she had hinted some years earlier that it might be time for me to re-forge a connection with WH.

The article got a good response, 25 people made contact, 24 of whom had worked at Carpetmakers. My mother also agreed to be a research participant. There were 14 men and 11 women. The sample was white and aged between 65-100. The group formed a constituency of workers from different parts of the company: there were weavers, people who worked in export, sales, setting, sewing and the testing lab. Once I had the respondents in place, I set about planning the first phase of the research, which was to hold four focus groups in Carpetvillage community centre, a new build which lay over the site where one of Carpetmaker's canteens had once stood. It aimed to scope the main themes emerging from the people of the study. Focus groups consisted of 5-7 people. Each group meeting was two and a half hours long and was

comprised of two parts. In the first I asked: what was your working-life like at Carpetmakers and/or what are your memories of the village? In the second I asked them about life post-2002 in the wake of the demolition of Carpet Mill.

The second phase was based on the findings from the focus groups. Individuals were asked if they would lead me on a 'go-along' tour (Carpiano, 2009) of the village. Due to issues with mobility, 18 respondents took me on tours. This mobile methodology, which took the form of 'walk and talk' was selected because the research aimed to capture peoples' responses to spatial and architectural change through *in situ* memory recall. This method was also used in conjunction with insights from multi-sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015) in which the dominance of the visual is challenged in favour of attention to other environmental sensory experiences alongside sight – such as smell, touch and sound. Respondents were asked to bring along photographs of their time as workers at Carpetvillage.  Influenced by the work of Strangleman (2008) who argues that photographs give access to subjective associations of, 'identity, attachment and loss' (2008, p. 1051) and Edensor's (2005) assertion that they can unlock both, 'syneasthetic and kinaesthetic effects' (ibid., p. 16), I discussed peoples' photographs over post-tour refreshments at a local café.

Thus far I have offered an account of the suite of methodologies I used to research the key questions of the project I was undertaking as researcher. But what interests me here is the *other* story which bubbles up underneath the main project. Later I show how each of these methods unexpectedly forced me to brush up against the figure of WH, so that a personal subplot about my relationship with him began to form through the processes of the research.

In the quest for rigour, academic writing tends to leave out the personal, even though the subjects that interest academics are often personally

motivated. Anecdotally, I have heard it said in conversation with colleagues that, 'we are often writing about ourselves'. When academic writing does foray into intensely personal matters, the experience of reading it can be very powerful. At times though, one can be left intrigued about the researcher's decision not to reflect personally on research which relates directly to their own lives. For example, in Kitzinger & Kitzingers' (2013) empirical research about families coping with severely brain injured relatives, they explore the 'window of opportunity' for allowing death by refusing treatment. Their research reveals the distressing experience the families who agreed to life-sustaining treatments which renders their loved ones sustaining lives that they describe as, 'a fate worse than death.' The data, revealed by the voices of the participants, is deeply distressing. But it is not until in the discussion of how the writers accessed their respondents in 'method' that we discover in just one line that these sisters are intimately connected to the material:

> We are recruiting research participants through advertising via brain-injury support groups and websites and through our own social contacts (we have a severely brain-injured sister) (2013, p. 1098)

In this powerful piece, one can only wonder how their practical and emotional experience must – implicitly - have informed their motivations, their research design and the analysis of the data. Yet they choose, as is their prerogative, not to use self-reflexivity to explore how the personal impacts on their research. Valentine (1998), on the other hand, uses personal geography to write directly about both her intellectual and embodied experience as a gay feminist academic of being stalked by a proximate homophobic harasser. Her sense of identity in relation her sexuality, her role as geography researcher and as an academic are thrown in to turmoil by the claims of the harasser. Of particular interest is her analysis of how the 'geography of harassment' can disturb

meanings of place. The space of her home moved from a site of security, privacy and trust to a space contaminated by hate mail, 'phone calls and evidence of stalker activity. In these ways the personal can be used to explores notions of what she calls, 'research-self-geography' (1998, p. 308).

As is already clear to the reader, I am personally invested in the landscapes of loss project. I was 13-years-old when my mother married my step-father and we left the village. I was a pupil at the local school alongside children, many of whom also had parents who worked at Carpetvillage. This situates me in a specific place within the research and it must somehow also affect the account of it I can produce. In Andrews' (2012) work about tourism in Magaluf (aka Shagaluf according to Andrews) she describes her location as a serious, white, married ethnographer who is not on holiday as feeling, 'different, awkward, out of place' (2012, p.225). My location as a researcher in Carpetvillage is contrary to her felt difference. The people I was researching were my people, I was at ease, in place. There are affordances in my location – a known geography of the spaces they described, a knowledge of the history of the village, an understanding of the people, their cultural mores and local dialect. It also means the project is swaddled in my own emotions of grieving, regret and sorrow about the loss of the village where I grew up as a child.

I use directly personal experience by taking up the autobiographical 'I' and I declare myself an insider in the community I researched. As such I draw on an interpretive autobiographical method (Denzin, 2014). The relationships I capture are subject to textual and narrative conventions of processes of selection and construction. Using my perspective I also use academic research by sociologists of parenthood to frame and construct a contextual story to shed light on how this personal story of lone motherhood, fatherlessness and

step-fathering in the 1970s was socially possible. I hope that by using performative practice which reflects on a familial relationship I can use my biography to move, 'outward to culture, discourse, history and ideology' (2014, p. x), in a way which enables reflection on fatherlessness across a particular moment in time and space. I draw on the 'progressive-regressive' method which shuttles back and forth in time, working from 'turning point' events or 'epiphanies' (Denzin, 2014, p. 12) in my life in which my absent father appeared. I recognise that these personal stories are inconclusive and open to multiple interpretations by the reader. I am conscious too that WH is denied a voice with which to speak directly in this text and from that my reader will draw their own conclusions.

## A Lost Father Re-Appears

*Part One: Fieldnotes*

I kept fieldnotes in a journal for the landscapes of loss project. It is significant that the first entry on 13th November 2015 contains a reference to WH only three lines down.

> Excited today – calls for respondents going into X Echo and X Courier …I wonder if WH will get in touch, I'm fantasizing about that. Is it a power thing? Me in control of the questions. Is it about being seen to have achieved things since we last met? To take control of a version of history that he has a bit part in?

When the call-out feature was published in the local press I was excited about the project, but a part of me felt a *frisson* of anticipation about the idea that WH might notice me. It was I who had written to him, some twenty-four years earlier to suggest we meet up for the first time in 1991. A new MA post-graduate, I had just started my first teaching post. His requests at the meeting

had revealed that he too had indulged in fantasies about what our relationship could become. Were I ever to marry, he said, he would like to be the one to give me away and from now on, I was to call him 'dad'. Startled by these requests I immediately thought of what that would mean for my step-father: 'You mean push X aside and you take the role of giving me away?' I had asked – adding, 'because being a dad is a social thing.' This did not seem to register any understanding from WH. This suggestion of a transition in the relationship felt over-whelming; after all those years of silence, of not being able to acknowledge each other, now we were to start performing in familiar fashion familial roles. He telephoned me some months after we had met – to apologise for missing my birthday. I recall thinking at the time: was our new relationship to be one based on saying sorry already? After some thought I decided to leave it; in the fullness of time neither of us contacted each other, that is until relatively recently.

But at my return in 2015 I thought I could make a more mature intervention. I could re-enter the geographical space in which I had felt powerless and silenced as a child about a relationship that was prohibited by a tacit decision by the adults. Earlier literatures testify to the choice fathers make about their involvement: to own fatherhood as a label, to contribute to the 'doings' being a father meant, to give cash as maintenance. My father delivered none of these. In 1966, the social context in Britain made it possible to take absolutely no involvement in fathering. Those forms of neglect made me feel angry. While Dermott's (2008) account of the experience of fatherlessness rings true, her work failed to talk about the storehouse of emotional fantasies I harboured about WH. In the early to mid-1970s, the man who was both my biological father and a stranger, produced thrilling sensations of excitement shot through with fear. My thoughts went something like this: what kind of person is WH?

While he doesn't seem to be, is he kind and funny if you got to know him? Is he (secretly) interested in me as his daughter? If anything happened to mum, would he have to take me, look after me? What would it be like to be looked after by a stranger who was your dad? Does he have other children with his new wife? In 2015 the methods of this project enabled me to throw the ball into his court, to trigger a set of feelings and possibly some kind of happening. I felt certain he would not come forward as a research participant. But being back in Carpetvillage would somehow enable me to create a presence within the community that would generate repercussions.

*Part Two: Focus Group*

On 10th December myself and my research assistant Laura Ettenfield held the second focus group. It had 9 in attendance and it felt more difficult to handle; there were too many respondents who arrived without warning, talking tangentially and straying from our questions, some people arrived late and produced photographs during the focus groups rather than in the requested, more intimate setting of the café after the walk and talk. There was a diverse mix across the class spectrum – from weavers, to an office worker, to a regional sales manager – which created a slight tension. My mother, who worked in both the 'setting' and then later in 'design' was also present. An emerging pattern across the meetings was that in the first half there were nostalgic memories of life in the company village. As one respondent put it, 'the village felt more alive when Carpetmakers was here.'

   Before its closure and dereliction people used relating strategies which gave the village a unique sense of place. Shared narratives bound the village together and these were recounted over and again, for example, the flood of

1968 and the Carpet Lane lorry crash in 1973. The management strategy of paternalism, which was a highly affective mechanism for creating community and avoiding industrial unrest (Fine, 1993), which came in to play in the 1920s at Carpetmakers, also bound people together. People referenced the social activities, sports clubs, night- time 'dos' which were all spoken highly of; these acted to bind the affective ties of the community. All the focus groups had referenced the feeling of being 'looked after' – both financially and in terms of the good relations the company fostered; 'it was paternalistic' (KL), it had a 'family feel' (MC). And because 'whole families worked there sometimes across three generations' (LF) and people met their partners and married them, peoples' families literally peopled the works. But when my mother took the discursive floor to speak at length about Carpetmakers' I was rather taken aback:

> You had a partner in the setting you worked with a partner … there was 36 frames each with two people on. You knew all their business and all their – it just came naturally. It was like a family. And I enjoyed it everytime I was there, everybody was friends, nobody, there was no back stabbing.

She was speaking about friendship and camaraderie in relation to what I had asked the group. But for me personally this statement reverberated in my own mind in relation to WH. I knew she felt lonely, ashamed – the act of going back to work after I had been born was tremendously difficult – to describe Carpetmakers as a 'family' carried such contradiction and irony. For me Carpetmakers could never be described as a family: as a child it could only have been described as a place where our unconventional family was shrouded in silence or I was asked questions I could not answer. Only yards away from the works I remember sitting at a hexagonal table with four other children in primary school, 'I haven't got a dad' I said to them. 'But you've got to have a

dad!' one of them said. Later that evening I mentioned this to my mother. 'You *have* got a dad' she said. 'But are you married?' I remember saying. 'No,' she replied. 'Then he can't be my dad' I rejoindered. Presumably she wanted to avoid a response that might have strayed into a discussion about sex, so she left it there: a childhood assumption unanswered, unresolved. A question too difficult answer, so a pall of silence swallowed it up.

It was that same focus group where photographs were shared at the end as we were packing up. Community was momentarily relived as the tone became informal; people pointed and identified people in the photographs they knew from Carpetmakers. The atmosphere was convivial as respondents laughed and remembered. Suddenly there it was as I leafed through the Winter 1994/5 edition of the Carpetmakers in-house magazine: WH in a group photograph. A tiny image of him, his head and shoulders. He stares out of the photograph to meet my gaze. It is a visceral moment. There is an adrenalin surge and I feel the colour rising in my cheeks. Does he look like me? I've thought this all my life. It is just like being a child again – I'm bound by silence and secrecy, I can't say anything in the focus group setting. I realise that if I photocopy this one, I will have two photographs.

Again, I'm hurtled back to the one I have of him. I pilfered it from my mother's collection. It must be around 1963. He's got his arm around mum on a sofa; they're both laughing. It's in black and white and contains a look of happiness and promise. At a time when my step-father had told me off sometime in the early 1980s, when he was doing the difficult job that, as Edwards et. al. (2002) argue, earns the role of fatherhood, I remember taking this photograph of my 'real' dad and then entering a phase of idealising him. I remember thinking that he wouldn't have spoken to me like that. On the back

of the photo I've written in blue biro 'My Dad'. I'm not quite sure now of the photograph's precise location, but it is somewhere in my home. As Edwards (1999) argues, it is not just the representational image, but the materiality of the photograph as object that matters and the question of where photographs are displayed. It was bent, would not lie flat and spent its life shrouded away in my secret world. For me it captured something I had never seen – my parents' once-relationship – frozen in ghostly black and white. It mattered because of the silence that pervaded its existence.

*Part Three: Walk and Talk*

In March 2016 I went on a 'walk and talk' tour through the village with a weaver. I used mobile methods to capture a sense of being 'in place' so that memories could be produced there and then. Affordances in 'go-along' interviews are that they help to unlock respondents' relationship to space. I wanted to observe what Fincham, Mcguinness & Murray (2010) call the 'phenomenal experience of the journeys – what they saw and felt' as well as embodied 'phenomenal reactions' (2010, p. 6). In this encounter there were happy memories for AJ, who recounted, as we walked down the street, where the weaving sheds had been replaced by housing, the pranks workers played on each other out of boredom and camaraderie. We walked to various other locations in the village, he recalled the cockroaches you crunched underfoot if you ever went to the dye house at night. We crossed over to the tract of underdeveloped land where Carpet Mill once stood.

Perhaps AJ himself prompted some of what was about to happen: he had a Yorkshire accent, a build and demeanour not unlike that of WH and he was of similar age. Edensor (2005) argues that one of the affordances of ruins is that

they evoke histories and memories. Ruins can prompt what he calls 'involuntary memories' unpredictably, in situ (2005, p. 145). Re-ignited by seasons, smells, sounds or atmosphere, they can hurtle us back to powerful recollection. I was conscious that I was trying to listen to AJ's recollections – but I was over-powered by my own. While AJ was talking about the once-mill, I was transported off momentarily to those sightings of WH in his overalls, with his mug of tea sitting on the low window-sill at the crossroads. I am near, by feet, to where he would have sat, but because the building has been knocked down I have to imagine the building and his body back into empty space. Movingly the pavement dips down just as it was – worn by the feet of the men who walked on it in to the mechanics shop. WH's feet would have traversed that pavement (see Figure 2). In my mind's eye I am transported back to take the view I would have had of him from across the street, crossing the road from the shop to the school. There is a surge of affect as I think back to the thrill of sighting him while at the same time wrestling the facial muscles to render them still, to look away should he look at me – my dad – the proximate stranger who had left us.

FIG. 2 HERE

We walked back to the community centre. We stood for a moment, I thanked him for his time. I could not seem to help what I was about to do. Here is my entry in my fieldnotes:

> I tell him about WH. Why I wonder? He gets on with WH – goes walking with them; he's still around yes. That could be our secret I say.

**Future fatherlessness**

In March 2017 I opened my email at work to a shock: there was a message from WH titled 'DNA'. This was the first time WH had ever initiated contact with me. This was the 'happening' I had fantasized about when I first made an appearance in the local press. But I was not prepared for a request to verify our biological link. Had AJ broken our secret and mentioned my casual admission that WH was my 'real' father? Had WH indeed noticed me in the press and stewed over getting in touch with this astonishing request? There followed a period of virtual dialogue: why a test at this time in our lives I implored – but WH eluded giving answers. Then in April 2017 we sent our cheek swabs from the privacy and comfort of our own homes to a 'bio-clinic.' It was a transportation of cells by Royal Mail, no need for a physical meeting. And the results, obtained by email, which delivered the 0% chance of paternity were opened on my mobile 'phone in a *B and Q* car park.

The academic story I told earlier enables an understanding of the movement to this point in the familial journey, but the journey goes on. For my mother, the 1970s brought a more liberal atmosphere in which illegitimacy became less significant: she did not have to deny her role as my mother, she could keep the baby she wanted, live with her parents, go back to Carpetmakers to make a modest living, find respectability through her marriage to my step-father and give me his family name. While she never recovered from the stigma of lone motherhood, she did have to allow me the latitude to explore my relationship with WH. The 1970s however, allowed WH to deny his role as father and pay miniscule maintenance. As I had childishly observed, because fatherhood was tied to being a husband, the fact that he and my mother were unmarried meant that he could be entirely uninvolved. What WH and I share though were fantasies about what our missed relationship might have been: discourses about involved fathering are saddening for me and all that I lost; for WH

perhaps my decision not to take up his requests that I call him dad in 1991 carry regrets for him. Before I ever embarked on this project about Carpetvillage it was, for me, a double landscape of loss. I can only speculate that his decision to secure the biological link was a way of resolving – once and for all – a genetic 'truth' or falsehood of fatherhood. Popularised by daytime television such as *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (Granada Studios, 2005-13), the opportunity for men to confer their genetic status as fathers through DNA testing has been a relatively recent development. Significantly, cases suggest that biology matters to fathers. Dermott argues, 'a genetic link is often *the* significant factor in determining whether a man should have ongoing rights and responsibilities, irrespective of any relationship that may exist between parent and child' (2008, p. 13). The choice to take an unwitnessed test – which carries no legal status – leaves me in a liminal space. Did WH use his own cheek in the test? I shall never know. The biological truth is irrelevant either way: I am cast adrift – still on the move - into a void of unknowing.

This chapter records a chain of 'forms' in which WH was encased. These forms were embedded in the geography of a company village across two moments: in the first, physical sightings, a photograph, some imaginings of who WH was and what he might do; in the second a photograph, a conversation against the backdrop of a post-industrial landscape, an involuntary memory in a place changed beyond recognition. In *Geography and Memory* Jones and Garde-Hanson (2012) declare an interest in:

> the geographic enterprise of 'becoming identities in places'… a performative construction/practice in which ongoing memories play a pivotal role. Relationality, mobility and process are fundamental here, and, against 'settled' notions of place and identity, we move towards the idea of 'becoming', as identities in and of places are always being

unmade and remade in a complex inter-play with the (remembered),
(settled) past and the novel events of the present moments (2012, p.2).

In that process of re-thinking and re-positioning the images and memories of WH, I have no choice but to take up the idea of 'becoming' as my identity of who I am and where I came from are unmade as the past jostles with the revelations of the present. The third space, the one I inhabit now, floats free of Carpetvillage: it is virtual, invisible, biological and asks that the forms I held before, the physical and the imagined, be both melted away and radically re-positioned. WH's refusal to look at me - to acknowledge me – still persists in these faceless digital encounters. It is a landscape which has lost its industrial past, its community and its sense of place.  But for me the empty spaces speak of a larger personal void as the buildings and street spaces dissipate into air.

## Acknowledgments

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Figure 1: Undeveloped land where Carpet mill once stood, 2016 (source: the author).

Figure 2: The trace of the entrance to the Mechanics Shop, 2016 (source: the author)