

Guiding visually impaired walking groups: intercorporeal experience and ethical sensibilities

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As a sighted guide, traversing the Lake District hills with a visually-impaired companion, I feel their hand on my elbow. That hand - its grip and changing orientation – helps me to feel the walker's movements behind me and I adjust my pace accordingly. I also feel worthwhile - I am traversing a hillside, not just for the exercise or sheer joy of the view, but to be someone else's eyes and for the joy of an immediate and required connection with somebody else. I have a clear purpose, a seemingly worthy role and a grateful companion - a companion who has been partly incorporated into my own 'body schema' as I am into theirs. This practice of guiding requires learning the habit of 'sensing for two' and moving 'as one'. (Macpherson, edited extract from Reflective Field Notes, 2006.)

Introduction

Being a sighted guide for people with blindness and visual impairment involves a range of tactile-kinaesthetic connections between two different people and a habitual practice of 'sensing for two' and 'moving as one'. This chapter explores how these experiences are significant for participants in the guiding relationship and for attempts to understand the relations between embodiment, touch and ethics (Varela 1999; Weis 1999; Diprose 2002; McCormack 2003). The chapter is developed from qualitative research material generated while acting as a sighted guide with specialist visually impaired walking groups who visit the British countryside (Macpherson 2008; 2009a; 2009b). Sensuous ethnographic observation is used alongside interview material and photography to give an account of the interconnected, haptic and habitual qualities of the guide-walker relationship. The chapter reflects critically on who needs who in such 'worthy volunteer' situations and what exactly is being 'given' by the bodies of volunteer and visually impaired walker.

Specifically the chapter focuses on the intercorporeal spaces that emerge within the guide-walker relationship. Such intercorporeal spaces that occur between bodies

have had a tendency to be overlooked by research which focuses on the individual body (cf. Thrift 1997; 2007) and by geographic research which focuses on visual impairment as simply a ‘way finding problem’ or as an individual lived experience (Hill 1985; Gollege 1992; Jacobson and Kitchin 1997; Kitchin et al. 1997). Therefore the concept of intercorporeality is used here ‘...to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies’ (Weis 1999, 5). Building on an intercorporeal approach to understanding embodiment it is revealed that the guide-walker relation is *not* a matter of one worthy volunteer *talking* a grateful blind person through an unfamiliar rural environment - a pre-conception of many observers and first time guides. Rather, it is shown that a successful guide-walker relationship is more akin to the *kinetic synchrony* achieved between partners in a dance - a set of pre-reflective movements founded upon a coupling of their body-schemas that require only limited verbal accompaniment (Olsezweski 2008).

This touch of two bodies in movement transforms participant’s sensibilities for it involves a ‘sensing for two’ and moving ‘as one’. This is important, not only because it is a novel empirical observation about people with visual impairments tactile-corporeal relationship to sighted guides but because it has implications for how geographers, including researchers of (dis)ability, approach research on ‘the body’. Specifically it points to a need to take seriously *the coupled, intercorporeal qualities of bodies* that touch and move together, including how they open up and enact particular forms of corporeal-ethical spaces. The chapter is structured as follows:

First, I review previous geographic research on visual impairment and suggest a need to move research beyond a focus on individual way finding behaviour or socio-spatial experience. Secondly, I describe the methods and movements involved in guiding and show how this practice requires both guide and walker to habitually ‘sense for two’ and ‘move as one’. Thirdly, I note that for synchronous movement to be achieved the visually impaired walker must sacrifice their independent ability to way-find and bestow upon the guide a ‘gift of trust’ in order to move through an unfamiliar rural environment at walking pace. Fourth, I argue that acknowledging this ‘gift of trust’ is significant because it is more often the volunteer guide who symbolically occupies the ‘worthy role’ in the guide-walker relationship.

The gift of trust that visually impaired walkers bestow upon their guides also draws attention to a range of forms of '*corporeal generosity*' (Diprose 2002) that are at work within the guide-walker relationship, where this generosity is understood as '*... being given to others without deliberation in a field of intercorporeality*' (4). Therefore in the final section I explore in more depth how successful guiding movement involves a coupling of the 'body schemas' (Merleau-Ponty 1962) of walker and guide and a form of corporeal generosity. In so doing I make a contribution to a renewed geography of disability which recognises the intersecting and interdependent nature of (dis)abled and able bodies (Weiss 1999; Crooks 2010; Power 2010) and a contribution to non-representational concerns with the walking body, the habitual and the taken for granted dimensions of experience (Thrift 1997; Harrison 2000; McCormack 2003; Thrift 2007; Harrison 2008; Wylie 2006; Bissell 2010).

Researching experiences of visual-impairment

Social scientific and geographic research involving people with visual impairments has tended to be dominated by either; a practical research concern with how people with visual impairments can navigate urban environments effectively (Gollege 1992; Jacobson and Kitchin 1997; Kitchin et al. 1997); or a concern with social representations, attitudes and stereotypes that are encountered by these people (Butler and Bowlby 1997; Watson 2003). In such studies there is tends to be an assumption that the experience of visual impairment is one of social and spatial disadvantage (cf. Allen 2004). There have also been some attempts to explore the lived experience of visual impairment as an active 'body-in-space encounter' (Allen 2004). This includes Hetherington's (2002; 2003) exploration of visually impaired people's non-representational experiences of museum objects and a range of phenomenological approaches (Hill 1985; Cook 1992; Allen 2004) which take inspiration from Merleau-Ponty's (1962) and his specific example of the extension of body-schema through the cane of a person with blindness.

My own work can be located within these latter, phenomenologically inspired approaches. Yet I show how people with blindness and visual impairment are not only immersed in the materiality of the world but also in the materiality and movements of

other people's bodies. This intercorporeal approach to understanding visual impairment is distinct from the popular genre of autobiographical writing which insists that blindness creates its own 'world' or 'way of knowing' distinct from those who are sighted (Hull 1990; Kleege 1998; Hull 2001). For example, Theology Professor Hull suggests that '*...blindness is something which creates its own worlds*' (2001:23). However I attend to how people with blindness are also involved in a *co-emergent world* involving joint ways in which they orientate and attune themselves. For as deaf-blind author Helen Keller (1908, 58) put it over a century ago;

It might seem that the five senses would work intelligently together only when resident in the same body. Yet when two or three are left unaided, they reach out for their compliments in another body, and find that they yoke easily with the borrowed team. When my hand aches from overtouching, I find relief in the sight of another. When my mind lags, wearied with the strain of forcing out thoughts about dark, musicless, colorless, detached substance, it recovers its elasticity as soon as I resort to the powers of another mind which commands light, harmony, color.

Keller (1908) draws attention to the way in which she sometimes relies on other's sensory experience explaining that '*they yoke easily with the borrowed team*'. Blind Sociologist Michalko (1999) shares this concern with shared corporealities. In his autobiographical book '*The Two in One: Walking with Smokie, Walking with Blindness*' he reflects on his experience of navigating the environment with Smokie his dog and on departing guide dog training school writes that '*I was now ready to leave; I had arrived at the school as simply "me" but I was leaving as "we," as part of a dog guide team.*' (82). The 'two in one' for Michalko was the conjoining lives of a person with blindness and his dog guide. The 'two in one' relation that concerns me here is the felt relation between a person with a sight impairment and their human guide.

Sensuous ethnography and the work of the sighted guide

The methodological approach to this research has involved using my own body as an 'instrument of research' (Crang 2003) in a form of reflexive, embodied ethnography acting as a sighted guide. This form of 'sensuous scholarship' advocated by Paterson (2009) and other researchers interested in accessing the 'non representational' (Thrift 1997) or 'more-than-representational' (Lorimer, 2005) requires bodily immersion in a context, an openness to the experiences and feelings of

others and critical reflection on those experiences and the transformations undergone by the researcher. Here there is a concern with what is felt and done as well as what is said. For example, Stoller uses such an approach to consider how the Songhay people of Nigeria experience their world and defines sensuous ethnography in the following manner:

Sensuous ethnography, of course, creates a set of instabilities for the ethnographer. To accept sensuousness in scholarship is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate. (Stoller, 1997: xvii, cited in Paterson, 2009, 772)

Stoller's insight into what a sensuous ethnography might require resonates with my own experiences as an ethnographer and sighted guide where I attempted to 'experience with' visually impaired walkers, rather than simply observe. This involved accepting the transformative (rather than simply observational) nature of social research (Whatmore 2003) and reflecting on what it was like to go through the process of learning to be a guide and to end up 'seeing and feeling for two' and 'moving as one'. Therefore, in this section I will firstly outline some of the methods and body practices that are involved in learning to be a competent guide and then develop a set of reflections on the motivations, rewards and sensibilities of being a guide.

(INSERT FIGURES 1 and 2)

The 'c' grip method of guiding (photo courtesy of the Author)

Sighted guides help people with visual impairments explore areas outside of their known routes. Throughout the United Kingdom volunteer guides are recruited by visually impaired charities and adverts for guides can regularly be seen on local volunteer recruitment websites. This research focused on participants of a Sheffield based visually impaired walking group and the visually impaired holiday charity 'Vitalise'. My research was initially motivated by a 'politics of representation' and a concern with representing under-represented visitors to the countryside. Therefore, I was particularly interested in the visually impaired members of these groups because they visited two landscapes of national significance in Britain - the Lake District and the Peak District. However, since the outset of the research I also became increasingly interested in the relationship established between walker, guide and landscape; and

the affective, corporeal components of these relations (See also Macpherson 2008a; 2009a).

There are number of styles and methods of guiding people with visual impairments. By far the most common method is the 'c' grip (Figures 1 and 2). Here the person with a visual-impairment will hold onto the guide's arm above the elbow with a 'c' grip in order to navigate their way through a new environment. This method allows the person with a visual impairment to stay one step behind the guide. Through their movements and their verbal instructions the guide can warn the person who is being guided of any forthcoming hazards. Thus, the 'c' grip itself as a 'direct tactile connection' is also part of a wider body practice of sensations, muscular tensions, movements and balance that take account of the needs of two people to navigate the terrain in a safe and effective manner. The 'c' grip method is widely regarded by visual impairment rehabilitation professionals in the United Kingdom as a preferable method to linking arms because it allows for a verbal and physical warning of forthcoming hazards. It is also thought to allow for a more 'impersonal' (less intimate) form of touch (interview with rehabilitation officer, 'Jade' 27-06-05). Yet the 'c' grip may in fact be more intimate than its description implies, because it is the start of a wider sensate body practice required for synchrony to be achieved.

Interestingly preferred methods for guiding vary between countries and reveal differing cultural attitudes towards forms of guiding touch; for example, in Greece it is more common to link arms (Charidi 2009). In Britain methods for guiding in the countryside vary; linking arms (Figure 3) was found to be a common method amongst friends and partners and was preferred by some participants because this method less obviously 'marked them out' as having a visual impairment. Linking arms could also provide a strong and reassuring level of physical support from the sighted guide who could be leant on if necessary. Touching the back of the rucksack (Figure 4) or holding onto a strap on the back of the rucksack were also common methods of guiding. These methods were useful for narrow paths, for steep descents or for when the walker wanted to feel a greater sense of freedom. Handholding (Figure 5) was also a useful tactic for tricky areas or a method of guiding used amongst friends and partners.

[Insert Figures 3,4 and 5]

Methods of guiding visually impaired and blind walkers in the countryside

Figure 3 Linking Arms

Figure 4 Touching the back of rucksack

Figure 5 Handholding (All photos courtesy of the author. Consent granted by those individuals featured in the pictures)

Each method of guiding and each encounter with different terrain required the walker and guide to respond to each other's movements in quite specific ways. Visually impaired walkers who were able to balance well and did not need a direct connection to someone's arm were able to make good use of the strap on the back of the rucksack to guide them. When holding a strap their movements were often freer and more independent of the guide than when using the 'c' grip method. In these cases their response and interpretation of forthcoming hazards and changes in terrain was directed toward both the guide's movements and the material landscape, which they would navigate through their feet, their tactile-kinaesthetic senses and through the use of a walking pole or white cane as an extension of their 'body schema' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 143). In fact the lightness of the connection between walker and guide when using a strap would at times mean it would take the guide some time to realise if the walker had dropped the strap and lost them completely. This was certainly a disadvantage of this method.

In contrast the 'c' grip method of guiding gives the visually impaired walker a direct and continuous felt connection to their guide and the walker could read the landscape and respond to the changes in terrain through the movement of the guide and their own tactile-muscular and kinaesthetic senses. As a guide I found it to be my preferred method because I could literally feel the location and movements of the walker I was guiding and I could co-ordinate my movements with them in order to move 'as one' across the hillsides. For example, subtle movements of hand position and grip combined with a proprioceptive sense of my own and the other's bodily position would make me aware that the person I was leading had fallen too far behind me and I could adjust my pace accordingly. This required a 'response-ability' of walker and guide to be directed toward each other's movements and the terrain. In general only limited verbal interpretation of the terrain was required when using the

‘c’ grip, because the walker could feel the movements of the guide and respond accordingly. Flatter terrain meant that walker and guide could synchronize their movements more easily and conversation about a range of topics could flow (if so desired). In contrast steep and/or rough terrain required a sort of constant somatic vigilance that often precluded any conversation; instead walker and guide would concentrate on each other and on changes in the terrain.

At best, the co-ordinated dual movement across the hillsides gave me a rewarding sense of silent camaraderie with the person I was leading. It was a quiet, practical means of going founded in our ability to respond to a situation. This has been referred to in previous literature on embodied ethics as a form of ‘ethical know-how’ (Varela 1999) or ‘response-ability’ (Caputo 2003). For in these cases the response to the other person involved a form of ‘flow’ - a responding to the other in movement, where response-ability is understood ‘...to be a matter of settling into the singular demands of a situation and responding, a matter of being taken hold of by the situation and facing up to what it demands of us’ (Caputo 2003, p 71). Thus guiding and being guided involved a pre-reflective, habitual movement together comparable to the synchronous movements achieved between dance partners. This dual movement has been elaborated upon by Charidi, a Greek anthropologist who is currently researching the practice of being a sighted guide in Athens. In her auto-ethnographic writing she describes the guide-walker movement;

In general, both the blind and the sighted try to move in a co-ordinated way, let’s say schematically “as one body”. This draws the practice of guidance out of its authoritative use of “showing the way” and puts together blind and sighted in the world of sight’s absence. “You have to think you are taller and double in size”, Stefanos explained to me, during the first times I guided him. On the one hand, I had to move in the space “like” him and see “instead” of him. On the other hand, he had to “lean on” my eyes and perceive through my body what I see. Thus, moving “as one body” entails a mutual motion towards the other: the blind has to attend to his guide’s body and the sighted has to encompass in her own body that of the guided. (Charidi 2009, 4)

Charidi discussed how Stefanos teaches her to guide, by telling her to move through a space imagining she is twice the size. For her, this involves a ‘mutual motion toward the other’. I think such a conception of guiding is important because it acknowledges the mutual ties and reciprocal (rather than authoritative) nature of the guide-walker relationship. Furthermore, it begins to show the way in which guiding is

important not only because it can potentially make a volunteer guide feel better about themselves (and the recipient of the guiding progresses to somewhere they couldn't have gone otherwise) but also because it makes the guide and walker feel the other's immediate needs. In the setting of the Lake and Peak District this dual movement did not always run smoothly though. Some walkers would lean heavily on their guides upsetting their guide's sense of balance and making it difficult to respond and coordinate guide-walker movement effectively. Also, while guides would try and navigate the landscape for two at times this could become difficult - steep descents, overhanging branches or rutted paths were a challenge to the smooth coordinated movement of walker and guide.

Mistakes were sometimes made by the guide; for example, I once forgot that my companion was taller than me and we crashed into some overhanging branches. Such mistakes are interesting, firstly, because they highlight how the majority of the time guide and walker manage to respond to each other effectively and move smoothly through the landscape in a synchronized, response-able manner. Secondly, they are interesting because they highlight the level of trust that is bestowed upon the guides in these settings. I will attend to this latter issue regarding the 'gift of trust' here, before reflecting further on the accomplishment of smooth dual movement.

The gift of trust

Most of the visually impaired walkers that attend the trips are accomplished at navigating their local environments without the use of a sighted guide using a combination of memory, habit, a cane or a guide dog. However, visually impaired walkers give up their achieved, independent ability to way-find in order to move through areas of challenging terrain with a sighted guide. The human guide was necessary because guide dogs are trained to navigate paved, urban environments and information gained from walking cane, residual sight, tactile and audio clues did not tend to be enough to navigate unfamiliar rural environments successfully with partial sight. Thus, walkers needed to hold the guide and trust the guide's movements in order to move at an average walking pace through rural terrain. In this way, by entering an unfamiliar rural environment the visually impaired walker is placing themselves in a position of vulnerability. In such an environment I think they bestow upon the guide a sort of 'gift of trust'. A quote from congenitally blind walker Jim

begins to illustrate this gift of trust and the vulnerability felt by the visually impaired walker in an unfamiliar rural environment;

I think I feel more of a sense of freedom in the city in an area I know - admittedly they are small - than I do in the country, where I am totally dependent on a sighted guide... If I lost my grip on the guide's rucksack or sleeve I would immediately have to stop and call to my guide and say, could you stop? I have lost your sleeve, because that in a sense is your lifeline, if you lose your sighted guide you could be in trouble. (Jim, congenitally blind (25-35 years old) Interview: August 2004)

Jim refers to the guides sleeve as is 'lifeline' he is dependent on the guide to navigate the environment for them both. He trusts the guide in order to enjoy the other symbolic, physical and social rewards that walking in the Lakes and Peak District National parks can afford. This dependence of the walker on the guide is a largely enjoyable (rather than burdensome) experience for the volunteer guide because it bestows upon the guide a feeling of responsibility and a worthwhile role. This 'gift of trust' is also found to occur in urban as well as rural settings, for example, in the following extract we can see how Ellen, who has macular degeneration, gives her visual impairment as a gift to a helper whose assistance she does not really need:

Sometimes I will be standing waiting to cross the road and someone will come up to me and say Are you wanting to cross the road? And I will think yeah I would be crossing the road if you just shut up and let me listen to the traffic! Do you know what I mean? (laughs) But being courteous and sometimes allowing them to help me is as much for them as for me... It is a fine line... and you know sometimes I am just too damn lazy and I just think oh I will let some body else do that (both laugh) ... sometimes some little person will come up to me and say can I help you? and well I do think 'ok you don't get much chance to help people, go on then'. (Ellen, macular degeneration, (55-65 years old) Interview: August 2004)

Ellen explained to me how sometimes she would just 'let' someone guide her even though she did not necessarily require guiding at that moment. Thus she offers her visually impaired status as a charitable gift toward someone who would otherwise not '*...get much chance to help people*'. Ellen (like Paul and Jim in the earlier extracts) lets herself be guided by people who are sighted. This is significant because it is more common to recognise that the sighted guides are 'giving up' something as volunteers in order to 'help' the visually impaired walkers. For example, at the disabled holiday charity Vitalise (read 'vital-eyes') sighted guides pay a subsidised trip fee (in order to recruit adequate numbers) and people with visual impairments pay

the full cost of the holiday. Vitalise advertise their week long walking trips to sighted guides with the following text on their website:

Would you like to enjoy your holiday knowing that you've also helped someone else get the most out of theirs?

Sighted guides are an essential part of Vitalise Holidays. You could make the difference between a visually impaired person having a much-needed break or no holiday at all. Not only that, but as a sighted guide you will be adding a whole new dimension to the holiday for our visually impaired customers, whether you're describing the Sistine Chapel, navigating the Lochs of Scotland or narrating the thrilling last moments of a Cup Final. You could even find that you're looking at things in a new way yourself. So becoming a sighted guide enhances the holiday of our visually impaired customers and is a unique and incredibly rewarding experience for the guide. It can sometimes be demanding, but it's also great fun. (Vitalise, 2007)

The advert for guides mentions that the sighted guides are an 'essential part' of the holiday and that this will be 'rewarding experience'. However the rewards on offer remain somewhat undefined. Participant explanations would draw upon a range of charitable discourses, ethical principles and personal stories in order to explain some of the motivations and rewards of guiding. Some participants drew on broader charitable principles around 'doing good' for others to explain their guiding practice but unfortunately these could end up reproducing a 'tragic' or 'pity' narrative of the experience of visual impairment. For example, Angela states *'I wanted to help somebody who was in a worse off position than myself, because I feel so privileged in day to day life'* (Angela, Sighted Guide, (45-55 years old) Interview August: 2005). While Julie states:

I wanted to give a visually impaired person an opportunity they won't get in their everyday life...because one is so conscious of the fact that so many visually impaired people go away and they don't get to go walking again until they come back on one of these holidays, which is just so awfully sad. (Julie, Sighted Guide (55-65 years old) Interview July: 2005)

Such stated justifications for volunteering as a guide risk perpetuating an outdated 'tragedy model' (Swain et al. 2004) of disability because they rely on a distinction being made between the volunteer who is supposedly 'better off' and the 'pitiable' visually impaired individual that requires their charitable act. However, it is important though to question who needs who in such volunteer situations and what exactly is being given. Allaharyi (2000) in her study of volunteers in Sacramento,

California, refers to a problem of ‘moral-selving’ where conceptualizing of volunteering as worthy runs the risk of denying the obvious ‘recipient’ agency and denies the possibility of mutual ties. This produces an ‘altruistic paradox’. So when a guiding volunteer such as Julie says she wants to ‘*give a visually impaired person an opportunity they won’t get in their everyday life*’ or when Angela states that she ‘*wanted to help somebody who was in a worse off position*’ they maybe unwittingly implicated in reinforcing a lower status position for the person being helped (see also Douglas 1990, ix).

In recognizing this issue of ‘moral-selving’ Sennett (2004, 140) asks us to acknowledge that volunteering ‘for’ others may simply ‘*...serve the more personal need to affirm something in ourselves*’. I would agree that practising as a sighted guide may indeed involve an element of this ‘worthy self-affirmation’. However, it is also important to note that practising as a guide presents people with an opportunity to experience a transformation. This is because in walking together with someone as a sighted guide, the guide embodies the person’s sight impairment as they sense for two and move as one. Thus guiding rather than simply being an act of self realisation may also force an encounter with the ‘*ambiguity of existence*’ (Diprose 2002, 90), because the guide experiences something in themselves that they have not necessarily encountered before - a coupled body schema and a capacity for habitual synchronous movement.

Thus the appeal and ‘rewards’ of this form of volunteering may not be located in simple ‘self affirmation’ but rather in the displacement and disruption of a coherent sense of self; a feeling different. In the following section I therefore explore in more detail the dual movement of walker and guide, showing how guiding and being guided involves a pre-reflective ‘coupling of body schemas’. This coupling is shown to occur as the guide learns to be a competent guide and as the walker learns to trust and follow the guide’s movements.

Learning to be a competent guide

Prior to meeting with the walking groups I had read the literature on how to guide a person with blindness and attended a training course for volunteers working with blind and visually impaired people delivered by the Newcastle Society for the

Blind. I had hoped this preparation would enable me to act as a competent sighted guide from the outset, but, initially acting as a sighted guide did not ‘come naturally’. I noticed at the outset that I was a rather hesitant, clumsy and unsure guide in comparison to some of my more accomplished peers. As a new guide ‘looking for two’ and moving ‘as one’ required mental effort. This mental effort of acting as a guide changed over time and during my third outing into the countryside with visually impaired walkers I gradually began to find myself feeling more at ease as a guide - thinking less and utilising a range of skills and physical dispositions which were suitable to the sightless group dynamic. For example, I learnt to utilise touch to introduce myself as well as sound – a verbal signal and a hand on the arm to make contact (because no eye contact was available). I would also instinctively shift my arm back as we were getting off a bus so that the person behind me could hold onto it if they needed to.

My attention was drawn to the habitual nature of these body practices when, after spending a day with the visually impaired group, I would still find myself navigating the terrain by allowing for the width of two people on a path and watching the terrain for low branches. This meant I was absorbing the person being guided into my own habits of practice and ‘body schema’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This is a sense of bodily awareness is elaborated upon by Merleau-Ponty (1962, 165) when he writes of the extension of body schema through the cane of the person with blindness:

The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight. In the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressly as a middle term: the blind man is rather aware of it through the position of objects than of the position of objects through it.

Here Merleau-Ponty’s example of the ‘blind man’s stick’ shows how a sense of bodily awareness is not necessarily limited to the outer surface of the skin but rather is extended through the cane. It is also possible to apply this conception of an extended body schema to other aspects of bodily and environmental experience. For example, Allen (2004) in his research into the way finding behaviour of visually impaired children, shows how these children incorporate fixed elements of their home space and neighbourhood into an ‘*extended corporeal schema*’ (734) that enables visually-

impaired children to navigate in an effective, habitual manner that is not reliant on obvious cognitive maps. Similarly, guiding and being guided involves an extended corporeal schema or more appropriately here ‘a coupling of body schemas’ that incorporates the other person. Where the embodied adaptations necessary to be a competent guide became a habitual looking and feeling for others – an embodiment of their sight impairment.

It is interesting to note that even when not guiding these embodied adaptations – the ‘coupling of the body schema’ can persist. For example, I found myself navigating the landscape for two despite a conscious acknowledgement that the person I was guiding was no longer present. Such an experience indicates the way in which the brain is not simply a mirror like system but rather a device which becomes accustomed to certain patterns of sensory stimulation and attention. This accustomization, or habit of the brain, is evidence that below our intellectual control the mind is organizing itself (Damasio 1999; Norretranders 1999; Connely 2002). Here the guide experiences something comparable to having a ‘phantom limb’ where they still ‘sense for two’ and move as if they are still guiding another person. Thus it becomes important to acknowledge that habits can also guide people’s behaviour. As Connely (2002, 36) puts it, ‘...*brain regions respond not only to events in the world but also, proprioceptively, to cultural habits, skills, memory traces, and affects mixed into our muscles, skin, gut, and cruder brain regions*’.

Here the idea of consciousness (in terms of an individual’s continual conscious control of all their thought and actions) is a ‘user illusion’ (Norretranders 1999). Instead intuitions, habits and dispositions guide people’s behaviours. Such observations undermine the idea that we have complete control and knowledge of our actions and intentions. Similarly, just as the guide experiences something comparable to having a ‘phantom limb’ partially sighted walkers incorporate sighted movements into their movements, habits and dispositions. For example, in order to navigate the steep and varied terrain of the Lake District and Peak District a silent relationship of mutual trust and proprioceptive, corporeal-kinetic understanding had to be established, which was reliant on touch. As Paul explains:

When you hold somebody's arm, you sort of switch off and it's brilliant, you know? You can listen to the what is happening in the countryside, you can relax more... sometimes you are tense thinking you might get a cut in the head or you could fall over something that someone has put in the way. But really it is great the freedom really to walk unhindered with a guide. (Paul, blind since childhood (35-45 years old) Interview: June 2004)

Here the synchronized movement of walker and guide that occurs through practice becomes a habit that enables Paul to 'switch off' and 'walk unhindered with a guide'; a coupling of the body-schema that emerges out of repetition and ultimately habits of practice. This practice of guiding and being guided involves a form of what feminist philosopher Diprose (2002) has referred to as 'corporeal generosity' for as Diprose (2002, 4-5) writes;

Generosity... is an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness. Primordially, generosity is not the expenditure of one's possessions but the dispossession of oneself, the being-given to others that undercuts any self-contained ego that undercuts self- possession. Moreover, generosity, so understood, happens at a prereflective level, at the level of corporeality and sensibility, and so eschews the calculation characteristic of an economy of exchange. Generosity is being given to others without deliberation in a field of inter-corporeality...

Guiding and being guided involves this form of generosity as '*...being given to others without deliberation in a field of inter-corporeality*'. This is a form of generosity and ethical sensibility which is embodied and which may remain at the level of habit. It is what Weis (1999, 131) has referred to as a 'bodily imperative' toward the good rather than stemming from a more precise set of ethical values and it involves an openness to transformation within a situation. It is comparable to the form of '*ethics as sensibility or ethos*' that McCormack (2003) refers to in his reflections on the bodily ethics involved within the actions of Dance Movement Therapy. Where such ethics require '*...an openness to the uncertain affective potentiality of the eventful encounter as that from which new ways of going on in the world might emerge.*' (503). A form of bodily disposition that is open to the alterity of the other, where, as Weiss (1999, 163) suggests, we may be able to develop '*....a sensitivity to the bodily imperatives that issue from different bodies as a necessary starting place for our moral practices*'.

Yet despite having a grounding in the body, ethics as sensibility or habitual disposition is not always open to all bodies equally as an acknowledgeable possibility, for some bodies tend to be valued more highly than others. For example, I have shown that it is the sighted guides who must be ‘recruited’ and who symbolically occupy the ‘worthy role’ in these rural walking contexts. So like other forms of generosity, the *acknowledgement* of a bodily generosity or ethical sensibility remains governed by social norms and value. Such norms ‘...*determine which bodies are devoid of property and so can only benefit from the generosity of others, and which bodies are worthy of gifts and which are not.*’ (Diprose 2002, 9). The social norm that persists in this research context is that ‘the visually impaired’ should be the grateful recipients of the assistance from the ‘generous and worthy’ sighted volunteers. Yet I have shown that people with visual impairments also ‘give’ something of themselves in guide-walker relationship, including the ‘gift of trust’.

Conclusion: the touch of two bodies in movement

In this chapter I have shown that the synchronous movements of walker and guide open up spaces of the body as a ‘coupled entity’ and opens a potential for a coupled, habitual ‘ethical sensibility’ to sense for two and move as one. This is an intercorporeal ethical sensibility distinct from the more standard social scientific notion of ethics as that which requires cognitive reflection or rule following behaviour (cf. McCormack 2003). Of course this co-emergent bodily sensibility is not unique to the walker-sighted guide relationship. Rather, it is a form of intercorporeal experience evident in a range of parenting and other caring roles. However, often such forms of corporeal experience have been undervalued, relegated to women’s roles and ignored as a key source of ethical behaviour (See also: Furrow 2005; Diprose 2002; Young 2005) therefore they remain deserving of attention here. Such observations are also significant for geographer’s attempting to grapple with the non-representational qualities and affects of rural walking; for a renewed geography of disability that recognises the co-emergent nature of corporeal experience and for conceptions of ethical subjectivity as involving pre-reflective and habitual components. In these final paragraphs I summarise and reflect on these contributions.

Firstly, non-representational work on ‘rural walking’ has tended to start from a focus on the individual and their relations with the landscape (Lorimer and Lund

2003; Wylie 2005; 2006) or on landscape and animal life (Lorimer 2006). This chapter builds on such non-representational work on walking and rural landscape, but develops a specific set of insights into the joint *corporeal attunements to each other* that are involved in walking through the material landscape together as walker and guide. Secondly, the chapter has shown how the *kinetic-synchrony* achieved by walker and guide involves a *coupling of their body-schemas*. Such an observation contributes to a renewed geography of disability which recognises visually impaired corporeality as not simply a way-finding problem or individual lived experience, but rather an intercorporeal experience which involves both (dis)abled and able bodies (Macpherson 2008; Power 2010; Crooks 2010). However, I think further work is needed here to explore the power relations that structure such joint corporeal engagements, including the gendered dimensions to corporeal generosity.

In this chapter the subject is found to act ethically ‘in-the moment’ via habit rather than reason. That is to say the original principles around ‘doing good’ that motivate guides to guide are not the ones that end up dictating all their bodily behaviour or enjoyment. Rather, they learn to guide and develop habits of guiding practice which result in a guiding sensibility as an embodiment of the other’s sight impairment. Here guide and walkers bodies can be understood as simultaneously socially inscribed and capable of co-emergent, intercorporeal properties that produce alternative outcomes to that inscription. For people are not autonomous entities, instead their bodies are constantly being partly ‘undone and remade’ in particular circumstances and occasions (cf. Latour 2004). In the case of guiding and being guided it has been shown that new bodily habits can be adopted to suit the sightless group dynamic and new sensibilities developed within the guiding relationship that are attuned to the other’s immediate needs. Geographers attempting to grapple with corporeality and ethical sensibility need to further develop their understandings of such co-emergent sensibilities.

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1. Pseudonyms have been used here to protect the identity of participants. Those people featured in the photos have given full consent for their use and they to ensure anonymity they are not the sources of the quotes in this paper.

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