Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The Phone, the Father and Other Becomings:
On Households (and Theories) that no longer Hold

Vikki Bell

Reader in Sociology & Head of Unit for Global Justice, Goldsmiths

Now what if Others were encapsulated in Things, in a way that Being towards Things were not ontologically severable, in Heidegger's terms, from Being towards Others? (Avital Ronell, The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech, 1989, p24)

Psychoanalysis has no feeling for unnatural participations, nor for the assemblages a child can mount in order to solve a problem from which all exits are barred him – a plan(e), not a phantasy. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p260)

The father becomes father only in answer to the call of his son. (Kelly Oliver, on Paul Ricouer, 1999, p46)

Preamble: Modes of engagement

The reader may engage with this article in several different modes. It could be approached in straightforward, if quirky, sociological mode as an exploration of the idea that the literature on post-divorce arrangements and step-families, and especially literature that attends to children's contact with their non-resident fathers, can be re-read in order to consider the issue of contact via communication technologies (predominantly the telephone but also other forms of communication), a form of parent-child contact not captured in the ways that 'contact' is measured in present studies. Of interest in itself, perhaps, this point of entrance opens up onto further questions about the management of human affect, and how rearrangements in lines of affect have reverberations beyond those captured by an Oedipal model, insofar as they are not about contact and severance but are various kinds of displacement for all involved. In particular, I am concerned here with the rearrangement of affect for the fathers as their role becomes dispersed, shared and intermittent, a set of problematics that also includes the various ways in which the very body of the mother is removed or circumvented. On a second level the article speaks to a different literature, in that it is an elaboration of the notion of the network as a dispersed hybrid that entails both human and non-human entities, within which any absolute distinction between human and non-human is to be problematised but, I wish to argue, without losing the specificity of human interaction, that is, the questions of human emotion, human desire and human ethics. This elaboration moves toward a critique of the very ubiquity and endless

utility of the network idea through the suggestion that its appeal may conceal moments and movements where more unexpected effects are taking place. Indeed, I suggest that there may be some twists in the familial dynamics of 'households that no longer hold', where some selected thoughts from a reading of Deleuze and Guattari, specifically around the notion of 'becoming', may lead one to read other stories than that proffered through the master trope of the network, ones that are maybe closer to some of the original impulses behind actor-network theory. And thirdly, the article may be engaged as a reflection on contemporary ways in which familial life is governed in contemporary Britain. The family as both a site of economic arrangements and a site of the arrangement of human affect-sexuality-reproduction, are held together and in tension through forms of contemporary government of the family. Contemporary rationalities of familial morality seek to make its members responsible parents without intervening to the extent that they would seek to make them responsible spouses[1], seen here in the implication that fathers' economic responsibilities for children are not co-extensive with their emotional connections to women. As opposed to any other familial figure – such as the *pater familias* or the mother of Donzelot's thesis – who may have been the link between family and government, it is through the promotion of the figure of the child that familial life is presently and predominantly governed. It is my contention here that it is through the promise of non-government that a notion of an ethical parent (it is predominantly the non-resident father who is being targeted here) is promoted, whose duties to his children and his nation-state should mean that the former should not need to be dependent upon the latter. Alongside other policies that seek to simultaneously promote familial life and paid work-life through the notion of the ethical citizen, and the attendant judgements of those dependent on welfare state provision (see Rose, 1999), contemporary policies surrounding the household that no longer holds expose the various and contradictory modes by which families are 'made up' within contemporary regimes.

Introduction: Beyond Oedipus, the Network?: The Family and the Phone

An image. Let me begin elsewhere, with an image. There is an advertisement in Britain at the moment (Summer 2000) for Motorola mobile telephones. A young man holds up his mobile phone, his tongue pushing out his cheek and his eyes averted in a swoon; the caption reads, 'Curvier than my new step mum', and a figure of a (remarkably un-curvaceous) woman stands in the background. Her back is turned. (Stepmothers, even if sexy as opposed to wicked is a dubious advance, are still too difficult to represent but obliquely.)[2] Whatever else one might want

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[1] Although there is still 'punishment' of adultery in the sense of granting divorces, this is rarely seen as an incentive to improve the quality of the marriage relationship.

[2] The household becomes less about lines of blood and descent and perhaps more overtly than ever about sexuality rather than reproduction. The teenage stepson in the advertisement notices

to say about this advertisement, it brings together two signs of changing culture: advances in technological communication culture and changes in the organisation of familial life. Just as the mobile telephone is released from its visible line of connection, so too the child of separated parents has his or her visible proximity to another node in the familial network removed, or extenuated. In this article I want to suggest that new theoretical flexibilities are required in response to the new configurations or assemblages that emerge when attention is focussed at this meeting point of technologies of communication and changing familial patterns. 'The stepchild' may indeed be the central figure of the meeting of these two developments, since it is her/him who is placed (potentially) in contact with several family members of new networks that form after her/his parents separate, and as intrafamilial dynamics are becoming exterior to the household, they come to involve, often, the question of communication over distance so that these technologies figure importantly in the dispersed networks of contemporary families.

Getting over Oedipus. Theoretical attempts to capture and explore new familial arrangements are being forced to leave behind certain images and assumptions that, with a focus on the household unit, have tended to rely upon versions of the nuclear family, seeing other arrangements in its terms, that is, seeing the same form 'reconstituted' or approximated in the 'single parent' or 'step' -family. The nature of contemporary children's emotional ties with various familial members force a reassessment of theoretical models, especially those derived from classic psychoanalytic models. If more evidence is required of the increasing redundancy of the Oedipal triangle as a map of the dynamics of the familial relationships that children form, the statistics of the changing forms of households in Britain illustrate that triangles will no longer suffice as the shape of the family from the child's point of view. Although most children (about 80% in the UK) live in a family with two parents (Social Trends, 1997, p44), about 23% of children (containing 2.8million children, according to Bradshaw et al, 1999 drawing on Haskey, 1998) live in lone parent families – over 90% of these with their mothers – and estimates suggest that of those living with two parents, there are approximately 3 million children living in step-families in 2000 (Simpson et al, 1995, who stated that if current trends continued there would be 3 million children in stepfamilies by 2000; see also Bradshaw et al, 1999).[3] Statistics offered at every turn - the average age of children on separation is 4years old (Simpson et al, 1995), 25% of children can expect their parents to divorce by the time they are 16 (Macionis and Plummer, 1997, p474), 6% of men aged

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approvingly his father's partner's figure, and this image brings with it its mirror-image, that of stepfathers noticing the figures of teenage stepdaughters, an image rather more frequently presented in cultural texts and in statistics of sexual abuse within the household.
[3] A quarter of children can expect their parents to divorce by the time they are 16. Don't know about those who are not married – a third of births outside marriage, with 80% of those registered with both parents' names.

16-69 have children living elsewhere (McKay 1997, using Family and Working Lives Survey)[4] – suggest that the emotional ties and their disruption and rearrangements are not captured simply by an Oedipal model. Beyond these statistics, one can imagine that as well as the many step fathers and step mothers (there are three times as many step fathers as mothers, since children are more likely to stay with their natural mothers – Social Trends, 1997, p44), there are also those co-habiting with, married to or just in relationships with adults who have dependent children who do not have familial labels as such, but who figure in children's familial, and presumably emotional, landscapes.

Reconfiguring the Family. These families are breaking down the notion of the household as 'holding' the elements that are most familial. The sociological term 'reconstituted families' is not a fitting one here, since, as we'll see, it seems from the most recent research that non-resident fathers are not so readily eclipsed where a new household is formed when (in the most common scenario) a mother with dependent children forms a new relationship and/or marries again.[5] Contact with the non-resident parent – usually the father – is frequently maintained and, one might hazard, is likely to be an increasing characteristic of British children's lives as 'pro-contact' ideology is promoted both culturally and in legislative changes. The Children Act 1989 no longer speaks in terms of households as enclosed sites or units where children are 'kept' – with terms such as custody and access - but prefers terms that open onto the dispersed family - residence and contact - and lines of connection (if not seeing contact nor necessarily communication) are all but enforced by the Child Support Act 1991. The family as a 'machine' for developing new citizens is being governed differently as parental responsibility has been decoupled from marriage, partnership and even shared households. Perhaps more accurately, it is the *father's* role and responsibility that is being revolutionised, tracked and placed under scrutiny, since the mother's responsibilities for children were never in question. Reversing a policy tradition that had accepted that men would devote their income to the most recently formed relationship and family, often leaving ex-partners and children from former relationships to be dependent on state provision, the Child Support Act 1991, developed through the 1980s and coming into effect in 1993, has involved the deployment of the notion of parental responsibility[6], the ethical citizen-father, alongside a new focus on children's interests that has also been supported by other

[4] Other expresssions of this statistic are offered by Haskey (1994) who estimates that 1.5 million men have children living elsewhere, and Bradshaw, J et al (1999) who report that of 33958 men aged 16-69 questioned just less than 5% said yes they can a chld living elsewhere
[5] Even though in 1996 marriage at a 70year low Britain has 3rd highest rate of marriage and highest rate of divorce in Europe (Macionois and Plummer, 1997, p474)
[6] The notion of parental responsibility is used in the Children Act 1989, which in many ways is to be understood in tandem with the Child Support Act 1991, as significant in the changing government of the family in Britain.

legislative changes. His relationship to his children, his ex-partner and indeed, his nation-state[7] are, accordingly, reconfigured.

With a variety of terms and descriptions of relationships being offered to capture these new states of affairs, social scientists have resorted to terms such 'fluid families' (Robertson et al, 1997) or the 'unclear' family (Simpson), even though the complexity of relationships remains mapable (by Simpson himself, figure 2) and narratable by even the youngest of participants. A woman describes an interaction between her daughter and her step-son:

> 'I had to smile to myself when I overheard my four year old daughter having what seemed to be a competition with her half-brother (he's ten and lives with his mother, who has remarried) about which of them had the most cousins. They carefully counted them all out in turn, including his step-father's nieces and nephews (none of our family has ever met them or is likely to). He also unhesitatingly included my sister's children and so he got the higher score and won. But he seemed to have had no doubts about his relationship with everyone in his extended family. As an afterthought he decided his half-sister (my daughter) should include his step-father's relations in her list, after all, if they had all these other cousins in common and they were brother and sister, then these must be her cousins too! It was a game of course but it showed how matter of factly he had absorbed all the different branches of his family, extended through remarriages.'(quoted in Burrett, 1993, pp.92-3)

The Network as Dispersed Hybrid. The boy quoted here illustrates how his extended family is a network which although complicated is not unclear to him; he also illustrates how familial relationships can lose their dependency on blood and marriage lines of connections so that the image of his family qua network can extend widely without any rules about where the lines of connection should stop and the boundaries of the family be defined. His half-sister's mother, by contrast, attempts to 'cut the network', a phrase that Marilyn Strathern (1996) has suggestively employed, at least insofar as she draws a boundary that leaves her partner's son's step-father's nieces and nephews outside: 'none of *our family* has ever met them'.

Strathern has argued that the notion of the network, an old image given a new inflection by recent theorisation, can be used to show how 'effects are produced out of alliances between human and non-human entities' (1996, p.520); in her discussion of Latour, she suggests that when heterogeneous elements, held together by interactions, constitute an object, event or string of circumstances the network 'is, in short, a hybrid imagined in a socially extended state' (1996, p.520?). The hybridic nature of the network means that one can link or enumerate disparate entities without making assumptions about level or hierarchy, and points in the network or narrative can be of any form or material (1996:??). The rhetorical force of the dispersed hybrid is

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[7] Although the rhetoric of the CSA conjures up the image of aberrant fathers who are forcing the state to provide for their children, as Simpson et al (1995) comment, the Child Support Agency has been dubbed the Treasury Support Agency by some, as mothers on benefits have their benefits reduced by the amount they are receiving from fathers who have been made to pay to the mothers of their children.

its critique of pure form; but, Strathern points out, the advantage of the network image is also its disadvantage as the notion of the network becomes limitless. Those within, and those engaging with, networks, including the theorists of networks themselves, have to engage in forms of cutting that halt 'the flow' of the fractal logic they allow in order to participate in and to speak about them.

Of course kinship networks are the ones that are most commonly accepted as such; but in the accepted version, each node remains human and is connected in the family trees by a similar looking line, even if it may be crossed (to indicate divorce). Neither the hybridity, nor the cutting (the fact that the diagram is cut out of one much larger and indeed limitless if one allows a descent into myths) is represented as such on these figures. I want to push the notion of dispersed hybrid that is variously 'cut' as Strathern suggests, and to do so I will enlist the help of a human familial figure – the non-resident father – and a non-human object – the telephone - which is, to gloss the point, what the members of households that no longer hold are left holding.

The Father and the Phone. Neither of these figures will behave themselves, and stand still for depiction. They exist only in relationship to others. One never stands alone as a 'non-resident father' since the very phrase tries to pull in other figures. The child(ren) most obviously, but also their mother; since the separated/divorce/non-cohabiting parents are at once together in the child – mingling in her production, in her gestures, in her biography and autobiography – and separate(d), refusing to be depicted together. (Step-child, the always potential future label of the 'child of separated parents' suffers the same problem). The phrase, like recent legislation, requires the parents 'be' together at the very time when they need to be apart, as Smart and Neale (1999) have commented on recent legislative changes in Britain. The telephone, for its part, 'is' only a telephone when it is plugged into a network, and only announces itself as working like a telephone when operated by human hand and intermingled with the human speaking voice. Even before I begin, then, there is a question mark over the singularity and purity of these figures; but I want to pursue them a little further in order to ask about the place of the latter in the life of the former, and to use the network image to start me off on an exploration of the dispersed hybrid that is the contemporary family. Along the way I will change my allegiance, my intellectual partnership, as I grow weary and wary of the network imagery and fancy to prefer some modes of thinking about these changing familial relations inspired by the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, who were in fact, one source of inspiration for those who promoted actor-network theory (Latour, 1999; Law, 1999).

'It's your Father': Becoming a Phone

'And when he phoned and she answered, just the way she came in and said 'it's your father' had a sort of resigned weariness to it, which I'm sure she didn't intend, but it was there.'(Child in To and Fro Children, 1993, p.136)

In her reading of the life of Alexander Graham Bell in <u>The Telephone Book</u> (1989), Avitar Ronnell suggests that in holding the telephone we might be thought to be holding on to others, as the object can be a reanimation of a lost other.[8] In the Motorola advert, the mobile phone becomes (like) the step mother, in the 'inappropriately' trained eyes of the sexually aware youthful 'step-son' whose 'social life support' is no longer connected to the family but comes via his mobile telephone (with radio and internet access); there are processes of identification, and of proximity and distancing that are startlingly disruptive of conventional familial lines. But leaving these aside for the moment, I want to argue that the telephone is more likely to become the father – 'it's your father'. (And perhaps answering machines and telephones that display the telephone number of the caller place another node in the network here – the mother will be able to exclaim 'it's your father' without even the telephone needing to be raised, nor even the human voice to be heard.)

In general, research in Britain[9] has focussed attention on the lamentable *non-contact* of non-residential fathers. Bradshaw and Millar (1991) reported that only 25% of non-resident fathers in their sample had contact at least once a week and 47% had no contact for the past year, and that 40% of fathers lost all contact within two years of separation (Bradshaw and Miller, 1991). But a more recent study suggests a higher rate of contact, finding that only 21% of non-resident fathers hadn't seen their children in the last year, and 47% saw their children at least every week (Bradshaw et al, 1999). The authors offer various methodological reasons why the two studies showed such differing rates of contact.[10] The authors also point out that contact was measured in the study in terms of seeing the child(ren) and 'did not perhaps tap alternative ways of maintaining fairly close and perhaps valued relationship between fathers and their children, including regular phoning, correspondence and even e-mail.'(1999, pp.412-3).[11]

In the absence of any information about telephone contact, I am perhaps guessing that it figures importantly in the lives/lines of separated parents and their children, but reading the literature on post-divorce/separation and step-parenting, reinforces the guess, as the words of

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[8] I cannot do justice to Ronnell's remarkable book here, but suffice it to say that Ronnell reads the biography of Alexander Graham Bell emphasising the part that Bell's dead brother plalyed in his invention of the telephone and the hold his memory had in Bell's life.

[9] Some American research is beginning to stress that there is more contact and that contact changes over years from time of divorce. Maccoby and Mnookin argue that high contact (90%) of fathers with their children 4 years after divorce in the state of California points to the importance of divorce policy (quoted in Burgess, 1997)

[10] The samples weren't matched; that the study may be biased to those still in touch in latter study; that lone mothers and non-resident fathers perceive and report contact differently. The study also found that remarried fathers were 2/3rds less likely to see their children regularly, and that proximity and the relationship with the mother were important in keeping regular contact.

[11] By contrast, Australian statistics report that of those who visited their natural parent rarely or never, 33% aged 2 years and over had some contact by phone or letter. (ABS April 1997,).

many children and adults suggest that familial lines of descent, of marriage and blood, can be extended and overlaid, enmeshed perhaps, with lines of communication that make the human-non-human-non-human-human hybridity of telephone network part of the network that is the dispersed contemporary family. Perhaps fathers, who have been associated, in both sociological surveys and psychoanalytic theory, with the moments of legislative 'cutting' – saying 'no', severing the mother-child dyad dropping contact, moving away, cutting the umbilical cord – are becoming more difficult to figure as such. Technologies outstrip theories, as thinking the familial network as network involves 'the tracery of heterogeneous elements' (Strathern, 1996, p.521).

Some people have commentated on the use of the internet as a means of keeping contact with relatives overseas (Slater and Miller, 2000; see also Goulborne, 2000, who argues that Castell's notion of the 'network society' could be seen in operation where Carribean families in Britain maintained contact with their transnational families). But e-mail may also be used in more proximate cases, as a supplement rather than an alternative to telephone or physical contact:

> 'He gets in touch with me on email all the time which is remarkable. I am actually more in touch with him now then I was before he left home, which is quite unexpected because he communicates with me about once a day and sometimes rings me.'(non-residential father, child at college, in Smart, 1999, pp.81-2).

While Smart and Neale call this 'virtual parenting', I'm suggesting that it is a version of the familial network where lines of communication involve – even depend upon - technologies that maintain contact, in a mundane sense, but that are also part of familial dynamics, and are therefore entangled with the familial lines of sexuality, with lines of desire and affect. Speaking on the telephone is about being *close*, having a proximity despite distance; one is holding the other in one's hand and close – 'whispering secrets' as one commentator envisioned the telephone before its invention was even perfected (Ronnell, 1989) – and when between a child and the non-resident father, in ways that remove the body of the mother, that place her outside the conversation. E-mail probably has a subtly different affect; but both are communication that enters the home through technological means that are intimate without being proximate, and both are surrounded by emotion.

Because these fragile lines of communication are surrounded by affect, when they are refused or halted, that gesture is understood as the final mode of communication lost, a refusal to allow one network (telephone) to continue another (the familial). In Strathern's terms, a cut:

> 'I think my kids have had their minds poisoned against me, this being the reason I now never see them or even speak to them on the telephone.'(Simpson et al, 1995, p.33)

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suggests that ??% of fathers were in contact by mail or telephone...

The affect in question here is not simply a case of the relationship between non-resident father and child, but also involves the negotiation of other relationships within the network. As the weary mother quoted above answering the phone to her 'estranged' husband illustrates, the telephone with its intermittent bell is an intermittent interruption in the household it calls upon.[12] The hesitation of the ringing telephone, its pauses that pretend and mimic their genealogies[13], are a curtesy built in, as it were, to the telephone. How often one makes it ring, however, is a question of ethical conduct for the non-resident parent. As Haraway has remarked, 'it is people who are ethical, not these non-human entities' (2000, p.134), and an advice book for non-resident parents suggests: 'Avoid any temptation you may have to do anything – like phone too often – that might be seen as interfering.'(Burrett, 1993, p.126). They, like the telephone, should become hesitant.

Phoning too often – using the telephone line to reactivate and reconfirm a line of familial connection – becomes an interference when that interval is judged poorly, or used instrusively. 'There was a good deal of intrusive contact from the father of two of the children; *he would telephone frequently*, cancel visits at the last minute, fail to appear for visits or demand visits when the stepfamily had planned an activity.'(Robinson and Smith, 1993:197, emphasis added). Even though communicative fathers (Smart and Neale, 1999), ie. those who are able to maintain a good communicative relationship with the mother, are seen to be the most successful in terms of keeping contact with their children, this communication has always to be a judged communication, one that is monitored by all. The nature of being a non-resident father is thus about intervals in terms of judging the intervals, and also, even where there is no longer mourning, anger or regret, about getting over the interval, coping with the interval between visits:

> 'it's like not seeing his school report, not seeing the school photograph, or the recent photograph of your child, not having one. Quite often there are sudden jumps at this time of life. Last time I saw him I was quite shocked – he was really growing up and you miss that continuity … it's like shots taken every so often, the little pieces you have.' (Tim, Simpson et al 1995, p.60).

> 'I have thirteen days between the times I see them. I have to divert my attention to other things to fill the gap.'(Simon, quoted in Simpson et al, 1995, p.59).

For these fathers, parenting is no longer habitual (the habit, *habere*, to hold) since they do not have the house that holds; instead fatherhood is 'intervallic' (Crocker, 1998). The interval

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[12] Similarly, in the course of her 'fieldwork' with stepfamilies, Christina Hughes quotes a stepmother who was upset my the interruption of her step-daughter's mother's friend telephoning their house, . Hughes asked herself: 'Why should [the stepmother] make such a big thing about the phone call? She spent a lot of time talking about it and was getting very upset. I think her comments … show her basic insecurity about her relationship with [stepdaughter] and [the stepdaughter's] relationship with her mother, but why should a seemingly innocent phone call cause so much concern?'(1994:39).
[13] In that the 'bell' rings out as if it were still a bell being hit by a hammer.

is described in terms of a kind of separation of biological from social fathering in another father's words:

> 'I suppose I go over there [to collect the children from the former matrimonial home] and be a father, and here, I'm not. We talk about the kids during the week, but I'm not a father here, because I've not got the kids in that sense.' (Simpson et al, 1995, p.61)

The children 'make' a father; but becoming a father was also, for this man, about assuming 'a more mature aspect' during the car journey to collect his two children (Simpson et al, 1995 p.61), as if fatherhood were a role he were performing, one based on the accentuation of age differentials, that he had to assume as he approached the children's home. This is perhaps unsurprising; as the father becomes proximate to his children, that line on the network is reactivated, emphasised, and made salient. But it is at this point that the network image becomes rather strained, and doesn't allow one to consider the changing relationship of the node to itself; how the node itself can alter and change. More than this, the movement toward the previously shared home brings the father close to a place that emphasises his literal 'deterritorialisation', so the intensity of his relationships changes, as his proximity to other elements in the assemblage produce changes in him. This father seems to suggest that 'the father' as a figure is not something that one is, but an individuation that approaches what Deleuze and Guattari term 'haecceity'(1988, p.261) that consists of 'relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected.'(1988, p.261). On the car journey to collect his children, he is not assuming a role that he once played, nor a role that is defined in advance, but is becoming something different again, a figure that has no defined role, is not represented culturally nor hardly discursively, except negatively as an absence: the non-resident father. (Indeed, the fathers in the Simpson et al study raise the issue that there is as yet no culturally developed role for non-resident fathers when they asked 'how are we "supposed" to behave faced with this new situation?'(1995, p.70)).   These tensions surrounding the father-becoming-non-resident father-becoming phone become even more complex when one considers what may happen to 'the father'.

Hanging On: Becoming Fathers, Un-becoming Fathers

> 'becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfils, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. This principle of proximity or approximation is entirely particular and reintroduces no analogy whatsoever. It indicates as rigorously as possible a zone of proximity or copresence of a particle, the movement into which any particle that enters the zone is drawn.'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.272)

It is intriguing that non-resident fathers speak about themselves as *becoming parents through their separation* from the children, as if the node or notion 'father' becomes itself as part of the network when, paradoxically, the lines of connection with others are threatened or ruptured. One father reports

> 'Sometimes I feel I'll never get really close to them, not being part of their everyday lives. I don't think I'll able to influence the way they're growing up as much as I'd like to. But it's going really well most of the time and *in many ways I'm more of a parent than I would have been* if we'd stayed together.'(quoted in Burrett, 1993, p.16).

The dispersed familial connections accentuate the part(icle)s that make up 'father', scattering the elements that make him up across the network, severing the biological 'fact' of fatherhood from the other parts, including the social, financial, emotional, authority-holding, care-giving and role-modelling. When the household no longer holds, 'the father' faces the possibilities of several becomings. Becomings here are more useful than thinking the father as a node within a network, insofar as one is freed of an idea of a clearly referenced point, singular and comprehensive. I want to use the notion of becomings to see how the 'non-resident father' is not captured in the traditional idea of a familial network exactly because the point of origin itself disappears, fragments, and is dispersed. The father – with its mixture of authority, care-giving, biological, economic, role-modelling and protective elements – becomes scattered and mobile as families move and rearrange themselves. By contrast with a 'node', becomings do not think in terms of points and lines. As Keith Ansell Pearson explains 'in rhizomatic-styled becomings becoming denotes the movement by which the line frees itself from the point and renders points indiscernible.'(1997, p.136).

At its most dramatic, I'm suggesting, it is through the dispersal of the family that men can become parents, articulated above as becoming 'more of a parent now' or as learning a whole new way of being:

> 'One man spoke of needing to learn how to 'be' with his children as he had never really taken sole responsibility for them prior to the separation.'(Simpson, 1995, p.75)

Men who have not participated very much in the parenting of their children, glossed here by the report authors in the language of taking 'responsibility for them' that echos the language and mood of contemporary legislative constructions of fathers, are, it seems, those who are most likely to lose contact altogether (ref?), but there are also many who did not take much responsibility who find their new situation requires a process of becoming-father.

The direction of the becomings, interestingly, seems to be closely dependent on the relationship to the mother. Just as the father's role is mediated by the mother within marriage (Backett, 1982, 1987), so the consensus in the literature seems to be that the mother's attitude and co-operation with the father is crucial in the father being able to maintain contact with the

child(ren) and to feel positive about his role after separation (Bradshaw et al, 1999, p.415; Simpson, 1998; MacLean and Eekelaar, 1997). Simpson et al explain this as follows:

> 'At divorce this dynamic [of father taking cues from mother] is made highly explicit. … In circumstances where contact with children encounters problems, it is common for fathers to blame this on the failure of mothers to provide support. Once motherhood is removed from the equation, the non-custodial, non-residential father, to a greater or lesser extent, is a free-standing agent and may not have the resources in terms of knowledge, information and emotional insight to be able to relate to children on his own terms. The father might thus come to perceive himself as *hanging on* to his relationship with his children by a precarious thread.'(Simpson et al, 1995, p.62, emphasis added).

The conditions of possibility of becoming a father are in the hands of the mother, they 'pass through' her; not a becoming-woman exactly but certainly, where there is a sympathetic proximity to her, it seems that his becoming-father is more likely to emerge in positive ways. He is more likely to hang on than to hang up.[14]

One author states that 'within five years, half of those separated or divorced will be remarried' (Burrett, 1993). With this sharing of the 'father' role between the 'biological' father and the mother's new partner, there is a dispersal of the elements that constitute fathering. There is for example the question of who is the child's 'role-model':

> 'I would like to see him become the role model that I can't be 'cos I'm not there … he's the man they have twelve nights out of fourteen'(Simpson et al 1995, p.51).

It also illuminates the problematic question of authority-figures. The telephone line, again, maintains a line to the non-resident father in the following scenario, described by him, where the children's step-father had wanted them to go to bed early:

> 'He tried to put them to bed early at half-seven, when it was not a school day. They reacted, wanted to ring me up. I don't think [step-father could handle it]. He was sort of threatening, the children were crying. I didn't know what to do … I think the children wanted me to come right over, I heard crying in the background.'(Smart and Neale, 1999, p.101).

The authority figure of the father is both appealed to here – called up – and refused; it hesitates, vacillates between the father who 'doesn't know what to do' and the step-father whose authority in his own home is trumped via the powerful dual networks of blood and telephone. The territories of fatherhood are unclear with all sorts of lines crossing them without securely mapping them out.

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[14] 'Fathers who had an amicable relationship with the mother were much more likely to have regular contact with their child then those whose relationship with the mother was hostile.'(1999:415).

When paternal authority is removed by the dispersal of the family, what the father becomes can remove itself completely from 'the father' so that he enters the zone, as it were, of a different relation/ship altogether:

> 'I notice that when I'm with them now, strangely, it's on friendship terms. They don't see me as a father … they see me as somebody they can have fun with rather than somebody just laying down the law .'(Simon, quoted in Simpson et al, 1995, p.67).

> 'Since we split up, me and Philip are really really close. In fact, we're like brothers now. He don't call me Dad no more, he calls me Terry.'(Smart and Neale, 1999, p.104)

With these fathers, their becomings are becoming-friend or becoming-brother. Interestingly, especially in the second quotation, the father's moving away has enabled him to 'become closer' to his son. In ways that the network image struggles to contain, these fathers emphasise the sense in which they become or behave as different 'nodes' in the network altogether.

Breaking up: Cutting the Network

> 'He's telephoned them a couple of times and they wouldn't speak to him on the phone.'(mother, Smart and Neale, 1999, p.97).

Coping with family re-arrangements after a separation or divorce can be figured as realigning affect with the rearrangement of the network, or the reconfiguration of the assemblage. When the family is dispersed, the household no longer holds all these elements within the space – literal space (such as a house) or discursive – of 'the family'. Cutting the network is fraught with all sorts of emotions. It goes without saying perhaps that there will be those fathers who will attempt to hold onto the household. One woman is quoted in the Simpson report in a way that illuminates how the physical house and the people it holds become almost synonymous; her comment doesn't make sense unless one accepts that losing access to a site is losing access to a range of emotions associated with the people it holds together:

> 'He keeps trying to get hold of us all – the house – [he] wants unrestricted access, which is totally unreasonable.'(Simpson et al, 1995, p.41)

There will also be those who will attempt to cut the extended network in ways that reflect their strategies of emotional coping or their assessment of the children's well being. To avoid doing so is difficult, as two mothers state:

> 'It's very easy to say 'You're not going to have him on Saturday because I don't want you to. You've hurt me and that's it.' It would be easy to do that and you have to try very hard not to let emotional bitterness come into it.'

> 'I feel that in my case that if he never saw them again … both my children and myself would have happier and healthier states of mind.'(both in Simpson et al, 1995, p.39).

Mothers may feel that the lines of connection that are imposed by the Child Support Act 1991 disallow them the freedom to cut the network, forcing them to reconnect with a man they had wished to leave behind (Clarke et al 1993, quoted in Burgoyne and Millar, 1994)[15].

In his own way, the following father also feels he had to 'cut the network':

> 'Every time I pulled up to the driveway to let him off it was like part of me was dying all over again. I could barely keep myself together long enough to give him a hug goodbye; I knew it wasn't good for him to leave seeing me so visibly upset each time … I had to break it off totally just to survive.'(quoted in Burgess, 1997:194)

Breakdowns in communication between parents can also be thought of as cuts, as in the following exchange where the lines of affect are denied by 'translating' them into an issue of financing of telephone lines: 'He'll say 'I'm not talking about it now in front of David.' 'OK, well phone me.' 'I'm not going to pay for a phone call to you.' 'Fine.'(Smart and Neale, 1999, p.109). The couple illustrate how the decision to be apart is in tension with the desire to stay connected with the node (the child) that connects them, how the telephone network connects them despite their attempts to halt emotional flow, but its use value is so overlain with lines of affect that the monetary cost of the telephone network can become an excuse to block the flow of the familial network.

Other ways of cutting the network may be more subtle or covert. Robinson and Smith (1993) make mention of grandparent's wills. Stepfamilies, they write, can be destabilised in later stages by 'a will left by a parent or grandparent which excludes non-biologically related family members … suddenly step-grandchildren, perhaps loved and accepted by the grandparents in life, can seem like outsiders again when their stepbrothers and sisters or half-brothers and –sisters are remembered in a will but they are not.'(1993:205). Less legalistically, the cut can be performed by the children. Children may refuse to speak to the father on the telephone, as in the quotation at the beginning of this section (Smart and Neale, 1999), or they may refuse to see their fathers out of loyalty to their mothers (Burnett, 1993, p.143) for example. Or, they may attempt to perform a cut by their behaviour, as in a case reported by Simpson et al where one father 'spoke of his children having to pretend not to like him whenever their mother saw them with him'(1995:37); similarly, a member of an audience where I spoke about this article told me afterwards how when he phoned his children they seemed constrained by the loyalties that the maternal space from which they were speaking required of them. He told me that my paper had reminded him of his own situation:

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[15] The quotation supporting this point was from research that pre-dates the implementation of the Act, so was pre-empting how the women might feel. Men may also feel they are being obliged to place their previous familial obligations above his more recently formed ones, but these, in this research, tended to be expressed in terms of finance (1994:101).

> 'I'm separated from my former partner and I remember when I phoned [my children] at first I would say "so are you going to say you love me?" and I sensed they felt awkward and hesitated ... because their mother was within earshot.'(quoted with permission).

Thus although the mother's body was removed from the intimacy of the conversation, as argued above, in this case she was not entirely displaced; she was still proximate and crucial for the children's context. The children then, aware of the complexity of the lines that connect them and the emotion that is attached to them, were activating a plan(e), a way of coping with the assemblage in which they are, by their very existence within this network of relationships, enmeshed. Their alliances are not severed, but in their familial assemblage, the lines of descent do not hold them. Thus even when lines of descent are involved, one can find their contrast. As Deleuze and Guattari would insist, assemblages are multiplicities made of heterogeneous terms that operate in terms of alliance and not filiations (that is, not successions or lines of descent).

Making Up the Family: Government Calls Up(on) the Father

Following the work of Donzelot, Foucault, and Rose, one might study the assemblage that is the dispersed family as involving not only technologies of enunciation in the mundane sense (the telephone) but technologies of governmentality. How do the technologies of government speak 'the family'? How are familial relationships articulated through their government?

The neo-liberal promise of privacy to the family that manages its own affairs and has no need to call upon the state, and the rendering public and governed those that do not so manage, has been obliged to move beyond Oedipal and nuclear models in its articulation of the responsible parent/citizen who acts responsibly toward his/her children with whom s/he does not reside, and will 'rescue' his/her children from dependency on the state. The Child Support Act 1991, which came into force in 1993, obliges non-resident parents (predominantly fathers) to honour their 'moral and legal responsibility' to maintain their children, while attempting to achieve a 'fair balance between first and second families.' The Child Support Agency was established with responsibility for the assessment, setting and collecting of payments. Dubbed cynically by some the Treasury Support Agency (Simpson et al, 1995), the Act reflected the Conservative attitude to welfare provision, seeking to reduce payments to 'lone parents' and to place that burden back onto the parents. Lone parents (predominantly mothers) on state benefits were now to claim, through the agency, from the children's fathers, and not from the government, with pressure on them to name the father in order to enable the agency to pursue him. But New Labour ideology has dovetailed nicely with the principles embodied in the Act, and 'making up' the responsible

parent who acts and who pays, always 'in the interests of the child/ren'[16], remains the explicit governmental aim.

Thus New Labour continues the emphasis on the importance of the family, and of marriage, tied explicitly to a concern with 'stable environments' for children, while it also recognises the contemporary pattern of households in Britain. The tensions in the Child Support Act 1991 are born of this tension between the ideological/rhetorical commitment to 'the family' (read nuclear, heterosexual family) on the one hand, and the realistic/social scientific awareness of household variation, on the other. Thus there is a sense in which the 'dispersed family' is being forced to be reconnected and appear as an 'unmodified family' in a way that participants, for financial, emotional, political and other reasons, have reacted negatively against. De-intensification is disallowed and the lines of the formation once again re-joined by a twist of the governmental lens through which they are envisioned. The father is re-imposed on women and child/ren as the eccentric 'head' of the household and their source of financial sustenance; he is constructed both as 'errant father' and as 'family man' so that the 'family' is made both private and paternally dependent once again (Diduck, 1995). But the Act also constitutes its subjects in ways that are less easy to characterise, neither radically nor conservatively. For example, insofar as the amended Act recognises 'second families', and, responding to its critics, that households in which fathers live may include not only further children but children who are not 'his' but are a part of his family, the Act recognises the complex realities of familial lives. From the point of view of women, the Act is ambiguous, promoting forms of private dependency that may or may not be preferable to public[17], as well as recognising the women are heads of households (Diduck, 1995, p.539) and that as primary carers they are frequently bearing indirect as well as direct costs in raising children, since part of the payment recognises the cost to a parent of being unable to earn as a result of caring for a child (MacLean, 1994, p.517).

The language of responsibility and the touchstone of children's welfare are the most pervasive in these governmental rationalities. The lines of power that trace the familial lines and to an extent, attempt to re-join lines that have been variously erased or re-drawn, are cast in terms that are not easily challenged. Nor is it clear that challenges made in the languages of rights or of equity position the speaker outside the terms of the Act. Engaging with the government of contemporary familial connections obliges one, therefore, to be somehow within the lines that constitute and reconstitute it. Of one thing, however, one can be sure; the lines that are drawn by

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[16] Reducing the numbers of children living in poverty have been a major target of the government; and children outside the familial domain are implicitly cast as potentially dangerous (Diduck, 1995) and costly.
[17] Furthermore, many were concerned about the pressure on women to name the father of her children, as a means of governing women's reproductive capacities and sexuality. MacLean suggested in 1994 that despite the fears this aspect of the Act has been handled sensitively by the agency (1994).

governmental technologies are surrounded by affect in the same way that are telephonic technologies. The necessity to govern will always ultimately reduce these familial lines of connection to financial considerations, something that as Marilyn Strathern has suggested, Euro-Americans will react to with distaste. The reactions the Act has prompted suggest that the lines are infused with questions of guilt, retribution, care, regret, love, desire for control, as well as the financial considerations (Burgoyne and Millar, 1994). These are the emotions that governmental technologies attempt to place 'on hold' while the ethical citizen-father is produced[18]; and these are the lines that are nevertheless there, to greater or lesser extent, entangled and negotiated at every step.

Using and (Re)Fusing the Network: Conclusions

The notion and image of the network as an extended hybrid has been useful in this paper insofar as it has allowed a certain description of the rearrangements of households, allowing an image of familial life as connected through technologies as a way of thinking about the newly drawn lines of contemporary households. The implication is that there are aspects of kinship in contemporary Britain that are revealed through the newly inflected use of the notion of 'the network', but only if it is allowed to drift back toward some of the more Deleuze and Guattarian moments that were part of its inspiration (See Law, 1999 and Latour, 1999, p.19, were he notes that 'as Mike Lynch said some time ago, ANT should really be called actant-rhizome ontology') but which often drop out of its usage so that networks are employed without capturing the transformations and deformations that transport and translation entail (Latour, 1999, p.15)[19]. In particular I have wanted to illuminate the various and startlingly moments of becoming, the ways in which nodes (or roles or 'actors') are brought into being as such, are dispersed becoming 'networks' themselves, shared across bodies, or are variously displaced (or repositioned). This has involved and been made possible by attention to the lines of affect that circulate within the household and outside its ostensible boundaries. (In a different context Doreen Masey has written: 'a large component of the identity of that place called home derived precisely from the fact that it had always in one way or another been open; constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it.'(1994, pp.170-1)).

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[18] In the same way that the advice book for parents quoted earlier (Burrett, 1999) states: 'A management responsibility that is shared won't work without good communication; neither will your management of paretning. You now have a major drawback to communication with your co-manager in the form of emotional estrangement and what's more, your responsibilities are exercised in different places. A manager's nightmare!'(1999:128).
[19] Latour has reflected: 'At the time the word network, like Deleuze and Guattari's term rhizome, clearly meant a series of transformations – translations, transductions – which could not be captured by using the traditional terms of social theory. With the new popularisation of the word network it now means transport without deformation, an instantaneous unmediated access to every piece of information. That is exactly the opposite of what we meant.'(1999:15).

Moreover, when combined with Marilyn Strathern's attention to the ways in which networks can be halted, the flow of lines of connections can be 'cut', there is the potential for considering both the everyday management of familial connections by those within them and the government of households through acts of such as the Child Support Act 1991. These modes of engaging with the contemporary household patterns do not dictate the story that emerges, and indeed, that has not been the objective. But in following the paths that these theoretical arguments suggest, this article has promoted a kind of muddling, in the spirit of Haraway's (1997, p.267) attempt to 'queer' the conventional and 'invested perceptions' of clear distinctions between human and non-human while retaining a sense that there are specificities to human emotions, desires and ethics.

Governmental technologies circulate and explicitly politicise these relations; they attempt to both reanimate lines between familial members and to 'stop the flow', to 'enact a stopping place' (Strathern 1996, p.523) by elevating and regulating financial concerns. Although the lines of power that are attached to them enable their rationalities to prevail in certain contexts, these governmental technologies are not to be elevated in the analysis as the ultimate site of meaning, but must themselves be regarded as one articulation of contemporary households, one that circulates in its contradictory way amidst others that cut into and across it.

In this way, the article has attempted to speak to different literatures that concern themselves with articulations and technologies; somewhere between the ethnomethodological and the sceptical, the theoretical and the empirical, the ancedotal and the political, it has been something of a hybridised journey connecting points of a story rarely narrated as such. It is itself, as such, a sort of hybrid network.

> 'The theorist's interpretations are as much networks as any other combination of elements' (Strathern glossing Latour, 1996:521).

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