2014

Crafting New Relationships in Child and Youth Care: Human-nonhuman Encounters

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw
vpacinik@uwo.ca

Crafting and Uncrafting Relationships in Child and Youth Care: Human-Nonhuman Encounters

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

How do the differently situated human and nonhuman actors and actants encounter each other in interactions that materialize worlds in some forms rather than others?
(Haraway, 1997, p. 130)

'Being in relationship with children' shapes, molds, and dominates conversations in child and youth care. Humanism flourishes in many of these discussions; the focus is on human relationships—mostly youth-adult or child-adult relationships. In my practice with children, however, I have found that being in relationship involves more than humans. Some examples that matter in the context of child and youth practice include clocks (see Pacini-Ketchabaw, in press), doors (see H. Skott-Mhyre, 2012), a glob of paint and a chunk of clay (Kind, 2010), and crayons (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Thompson, in press). And then, as many of us who work with children and youth know well, there is technology. Being in relationship with children in our times involves being in relationship with technology: video games, computer games, social media, and on and on. It is this techno space I want to grapple with as I trace relationships outside the parameters of humanism. I attempt to inhabit the nonhuman worlds that are part of children's lives today as I challenge child and youth care to rethink its all-too-human conception of relationships. Because we live in a world in which the boundaries between categories such as humans and technology are blurring (Braidotti, 2011; Haraway, 1997), "the very genetic core of life itself" is changing fast (Braidotti, 2011, p. 56). These shifts are of paramount importance to a field that characterizes itself as caring for the relationships children and youth engage in. We need to find ways to engage with this relocation of the core of life itself.

In this chapter, then, I engage in a conversation with child and youth care about the kinds of relationships that feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway speaks of in the introductory quote—human-nonhuman encounters. Specifically, I explore human-nonhuman relationships in the context of Minecraft, the virtual reality computer game that captivates my 13-year-old son and his friends. My intention is that, rather than merely critiquing such games, or children's engagement with them, this conversation present an affirmative project for child and youth care that resists negative, neutralized, or reactive responses to the technological advancements of our times. I want to ask how we can "flourish together in difference without the telos of a final peace" (Haraway,

2077, p. 301). I am inspired by Donna Haraway's work as well as the work of other feminist theorists, such as Rosi Braidotti and Karen Barad, and of Indigenous scholars Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson. I take seriously Haraway's question above and propose that we expand the child and youth care conception of relationships centered on humans. What might child and youth care become when we take human-nonhuman encounters seriously? My goal is not to construct a mastery project of the best and most effective of these encounters, one that is ultimately accomplished. On the contrary, my project is to work towards the impossibility of completion and engage instead with what Haraway calls grapplings, worldlings, and entanglings. My project is future oriented as opposed to closure oriented; it attempts to evoke ways of relating rather than to define or explain what relationships mean or ought to be.

The chapter is also inspired by the title of this book, *With Children*. I have given much thought to what being *with* children, working *with* children, and playing *with* children might entail in a time of ecological catastrophes, intense neocolonialism, and unprecedented technological change (see deFinney, Gharabaghi, Little, & Skott-Myhre, 2012). Child and youth care literature has taught me about being in relationship with children (Fewster, 2010; Garfat, 2003; Garabaghi, 2010), and I take this concept of relationship as both important and necessary. I want to grapple with the messiness of relationships and suggest that relationships become in the form of entanglements, and thus lack clarity (see K. Skott-Myhre, 2012 for a similar project). What do relationships afford in the slippery times in which we all live out our mundane day-to-day lives? Who is in relationship with whom? What kinds of subjects are created through these relationships? How messy are these relationships? How do I live in these relationships?

Haraway (1997) challenges me to engage with these questions through thinking and remaking encounters in actual, situated worlds. By situated knowledges, she refers to knowledges that are "reliable, partially shareable, trope-laced, worldly, accountable, noninnocent" (p. 138). Situated knowledges are about partial connections and mediated positions. This positioning "implies responsibility for our enabling practices" (Haraway, 1991, p. 193). Through the practice of situated knowledges, I join many people and things, but without claiming to be others: "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (p. 193). Haraway (1991) defines objectivity or rational knowledge as engaged knowledge that is always situated somewhere. She notes that it's impossible "to be from everywhere and so nowhere, to be free from interpretation, from being represented, to be fully self-contained or fully formable" (p. 196). Instead, she says that objectivity "is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among 'fields' of interpreters and decoders" (p. 196). I like when she reminds us that "rational knowledge is power-sensitive conversation" (p. 196).

In the spirit of situated knowledges, in this chapter I adopt a diffractive and interrogatory methodology in which the goal becomes to interfere and shift patterns (Haraway, 1997) in conceptualizations of relationship in child and youth care. Diffraction, a term from physics, forces light apart so that we see the different wave lengths—in other words, the constituent parts of light. By forcing these apart, we can see that things are much more complex than when we take a reflective stance. Working diffractively can help to move

us away from the fixity that may arise when reflection is enacted as self-expression, which tends to "hold the world at a distance" and maintain boundaries (Barad, 2007, p. 87). In this chapter I attempt to produce something different, not "a reflection of the same displaced elsewhere" (Haraway, p. 16), as I work diffractively with relationships. I want, as Haraway (1997) says, to see the action in relationships-in-the-making.

Our 'All-Too-Human' Relationships

In Haraway's most recent text, *When Species Meet*, she humorously and seriously asks, "Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog" (2007, p. 3)? Following her lead, I ask, perhaps not so humorously, Whom do I touch when I touch Minecraft? What worlds materialize in this game that intrigues my son? What humans and nonhumans materialize in these worlds?

I find Haraway's conceptualization of relationality a productive space for thinking about relationships. When she refers to relationality, she deliberately shifts common understandings of specific entities/categories coming into a relationship: Everything is intertwined and categories/entities are relational, she notes. Following physicist Karen Barad (2007), Haraway (2007) sees potential in the term intra-acting because it involves "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (p. 33). Barad distinguishes between interaction and intra-action, highlighting the productive aspects of relations: "In contrast to the usual 'interaction', which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action" in their mutual entanglement (p. 33). Thus it is through intra-action that particular material articulations of the world become meaningful.

In this conceptualization of relationality, Barad (2007) and Haraway (1997, 2007) not only suggest that subjects emerge in intra-action with others (for example, categories such as children and adults emerge in the relating[1]), but they provocatively suggest that we not limit our discussions about relationships to human partners. Here is Haraway (1997) speaking on the need to resituate our relationships with the world:

> Property is the kind of relationality that poses as the thing-in-itself, the commodity, the thing outside relationship, the thing that can be exhaustively measured, mapped, owned, appropriated, disposed… [However] I insist that social relationships include nonhumans as well as humans as *socially* (or what is the same thing for this odd congeries, sociotechnically) active partners. All that is unhuman is not un-kind, outside kinship, outside the orders of signification, excluded from trading in signs and wonders. (p. 8)

These words are important when we live in a world of constant technological advancements and contradictions. Braidotti (2006) notes that, "given the fluid, internally contradictory and cannibalistic nature of advanced capitalism, the social and cultural

---

[1] Writing in child and youth care, Skott-Mhyre (2008) brings to our attention that the boundaries of categories such as child, youth, and adult become blurry when we think of them as relational. Furthermore, these categories do not necessarily precede the relationship, but are effects of relationships.

critic needs to make innovations in the very tools of analysis" (p. 61). These analyses, she notes, need to cut across disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, I invite child and youth care to engage in the processes of crafting relationships with disciplinary entities (and even to dismantle these entities) and, of course, to engage in thinking about relationships as political and cultural vehicles, as Braidotti suggests.

The issue of technology is an interesting one to look at as we find ourselves in constant relationship with it. Even as I write this chapter, for example, I craft relationships with the computer as I type these words. These relationships are made even more complex as we encounter messages in the media and in academia that call for us to reduce children's "screen time" or merely to "disconnect." A few weeks ago I watched, with my students, a CBC documentary that analyzed youth's brain patterns as they used their cell phones. The researchers featured in the documentary noted that the relationships youth are having with their phones may have problematic consequences for them. That same week, my son's school newletter instructed: "Reduce children's screen time unless it's for educational purposes." Are there good and bad relationships with technology, then?

There is no doubt in my mind that new relationships and ways of relating are being shaped right in front of our eyes/Is. The calls to be suspicious of technology in children's lives are important, and ignoring them could be dangerous. However, submitting to a simplistic critique and dismissal of the evils of technology can be equally risky. Haraway (1997) suggests that we instead become "suspicious, implicated, knowing, ignorant, worried and hopeful" (p. 3). I have learned to live in the tensions she proposes: I was raised in a Catholic home in the midst of repressive Argentinean governments; I am an immigrant in multicultural Canada, which keeps its colonial histories well hidden; I trained as an early childhood educator where we learned to simplify the complex worlds through which children learn; and I later became educated in poststructural, feminist, and postcolonial theories that taught me to read and write without a truth.

In a world in which technology is more than just playing video games, we have no choice but to become implicated in it and attend to all the troubles these explosive technologies engage us in (Haraway, 1997). To make my point clearer, I quote the description of an upcoming text by Chris Melissinos, *The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect*, in which the publisher outlines the reach of these games:

> In the forty years since the first Magnavox Odyssey pixel winked on in 1972, the home video game industry has undergone a mind-blowing evolution. Fueled by unprecedented advances in technology, boundless imaginations, and an insatiable addiction to fantastic new worlds of play, the video game has gone supernova, rocketing two generations of fans into an ever-expanding universe where art, culture, reality, and emotion collide. (Random House, 2012, para. 1)

With the intention of becoming implicated in my son's relationships with technology, I join him in the world of Minecraft, a space for creating and destroying worlds. A very postmodern experience, wouldn't you say? I should mention that I am not a gamer, but I am a close observer. To this space, I bring questions without straightforward answers and, at times, without answers at all.

Computer games such as Minecraft become what Haraway (1997) refers to as knowledge-making technologies. She suggests that "knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention" (p. 36). I take these words as my invitation to ask, "What are the collisions, entanglements, and associations that story the worlds and friendships that are carefully crafted *with* these games as nonhuman companions?" I am not interested in describing what exactly happens to the children engaged in these games, nor in outlining everything that might be going on in this game, nor in creating a project where the game is "truthfully" described.[2] Rather, I am intrigued about what might happen when we think *with* these nonhumans as companions in relationships. I am intrigued about what these games enact and reenact, to use Katie King's (2012) terms. What stories are told? How are they told? What kinds of relationships and modes of relating emerge through human-techno world crafting, at what costs and to whose benefit? What connections, inclusions, and exclusions are created? More importantly, what relationships are enacted and reenacted through playing these games?

Minecrafting

While I am writing this paper, I watch my son across the room playing Minecraft. For the last four months, he and his friends have been enthusiastically crafting friendships and worlds as they play and vigorously (at times, violently) discuss their related worlds in Minecraft. Survival, creations, treasures, mobs, possessions, and enchantments become entangled in the worlds they create, live, and travel. I become troubled by what is in the midst of the comfort, obsession, and joy I sense as they play and discuss this (gendered, racialized) game of conquest through nonviolent means. It is no doubt a place of discomfort, but also a place of productive undoings and redoings.

Collisions, entanglements, associations, and boundless imaginations are at the heart of crafting and recrafting worlds in Minecraft. Designed in 2009, Minecraft is "a sandbox construction game" (Minecraft, 2012, para. 1) that characterizes itself as taking an open-ended approach to computer gaming. One engages with it in the way one wants to engage; to begin, one simply creates an avatar. With no official tutorial (Moore, 2011), its wiki acts as the "ultimate source on information about Minecraft" (Minecraft, 2012, subtitle). The game involves "players creating and destroying various types of blocks in a three dimensional environment" (para. 1). Yes, blocks—the game graphics are based on LEGO™ blocks. Moore (2011) notes that games such as Minecraft extend the imaginations of designers, manufacturers, and players:

> The process of becoming a Minecraft 'player' extends well beyond the cybernetic interface of interactions with the game and the potential lusory attitude experienced while playing the game and features in the play of Minecraft ... a gamer subculture and participatory media activity that emphasizes a mobility of play as an experience of change and innovation. (p. 381)

---

[2] There are many interesting texts that address video and computer games. For examples, see Tobin (2004), Taylor (2006), and Nardi (2010).

I join my son and his friends and create an avatar.

Avatars: Under, Above, and Inside the Skin

The default avatar is dressed as a "normal" boy. As a feminist well aware of poststructural deconstruction, I protest. "I want a different character," I tell my co-players. "You need a different skin," they quickly reply.

Of more than 500 possible avatars in Minecraft, some of my options include the following: Cute Girl, Girl With Pink Hair, Nice Girl, and Bubble Gum Cutey. My fellow gamers easily shed their skins and inhabit other avatars. I choose to stay in my default skin and the trouble it produces for me. I am intrigued about the ways in which relationships to identities are crafted through skins. How do skins move us? How do skins come to matter in crafting relationships? How do skins permeate and transport relationships?

Skin is about both boundaries and permeability (Flannagan & Booth, 2006); thus it provides a productive space to think *with* about relating. Australian artist Melinda Rackham (2006), in an essay titled "Safety of Skin," asks questions that resonate with my ongoing discussion of modes of relating:

> Where is the kernel or seed of the self when the body is composed of pixels? Are the ethereally coded soft bodies we inhabit in machine-produced data space different from the flesh bodies we inhabit offline? What is intrinsically unique about us as individuals when we are re-presented virtually? Without a hard shell, could it be possible to remain untouched and unmodified when we inhabit electronically constructed lifeworlds? (pp. 51–52)

These questions are posed to human-form avatars; in other words, Rackham interrogates the all-too-human presence in online gaming. Is there something here that we in child and youth care can learn? What kinds of avatars inhabit the field of child and youth care? How are our relationships with them crafted? How malleable are our coded skins? What skins do we touch and permeate? What kinds of worlds do we create, and how do we relate to those worlds?

The skin, Imperiale (2006) writes,

> is not a straightforward simple surface that covers our interiority. Rather, the skin is an organ, divided internally into differentiated and interpenetrating strata. The skin or the surface of the body is a surface of maximum interface and intensity, a space of flux, of oscillating conditions. The 'surface' is more slippery than it might first appear. Questions regarding the surface of the body, it turns out, are not superficial but quite profound. (p. 265)

As "the ultimate site for negotiating our relationship with the world" (Flannagan & Booth, 2006, p. 3), skin acts as a habitat and house, but also as "a significant border, marking age, gender, and race" (p. 1). We cannot deny that artifacts such as computer games and computers themselves "form skins around us through screens and projections

onto surfaces" (p. 2). Haraway (1991) asks, "Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (p. 178).

To this I would add, "Why do relationships in child and youth care end at the boundaries of a self? Why do they so rarely account for bodies and corporeality, or for the skins that are implicated in relationships? Can we get under the skin of child and youth care? Is it the messiness of bodies, the slipperiness of skin that troubles us and halts our engagement with them?"

Crafting Worlds of Colonial Empire

The Minecraft wiki (2012) tells me that my "avatar can destroy or create blocks, forming fantastic structures, creations and artwork" (para. 1). The game can be played "across the various multiplayer servers in multiple game modes" (para. 1). The simplicity of the game is brilliant. Its complexities bring communities together to find out its boundless possibilities.

I enter what Braidotti (2006) refers to as "the ethical temperature or fibre of our era, also known as the technologically driven historical phase of advanced capitalism" in which paradoxes, however, "multiply all along the way" (pp.1–2). I search for raw resources: iron, coal, stone, diamond, gold, leather, fire, dust, wheat, mushrooms, sugar cane, and more. Each material has certain temporal and spatial durability, and each provides a different kind of protection. I accumulate capital in the form of resources, and I can mold this precious capital into things that improve my situation through a kind of hoarding. With all of these raw resources in hand, I follow recipes to craft tools—or weapons, depending on how you see it. I need these tools and weapons to survive, to protect myself. I'm on my own in the complex web of a larger community in which everyone works individually for their own good. Working to avoid the mobs and monsters that might show up in the middle of the night, I create a house and craft my possessions to protect myself. I find many useful recipes:

wooden planks	compass	trapdoors
sticks	swords	levers
torches	bows	pressure plates
cobblestone	maps	doors
glowstone	clocks	jukeboxes
wool	shears	dispensers
bookshelves	arrows	cookies
clay blocks	helmets	music players
brick blocks	chestplates	discs
stairs	boots	cakes
shovels	leggings	fences
pickaxes	rails	books
buckets	minecarts	beds
fishing rods	boats	signs

And then there are multicoloured dyes and multicoloured wools, among many more recipes.

The game is clearly about acquisition. How much stuff can I accumulate? And how can I use my accumulations to tear others down (including the friends I am playing with in a closed server)? Along the way, we look not only for ways to improve our livelihoods, but also for cheap ways to get what we need (or should I say what we *want*?). An online guide to crafting Minecraft recipes reminds me that "many of the items you craft in Minecraft can be visualized … so try not to over think things" (Minecraft Crafting, n.d., para. 5). Here is its simplicity: it is commonsense. But I am also reminded that "to craft an item, resources must be placed into a crafting grid from my inventory [or crafting table for crafting more complex items] in a specific pattern to create a particular item" (para. 3). Models, grids, inventories.

Tools such as inventories, grids, models, and competencies (readers in child and youth care will know what I am referring to) function towards enclosing identities (Haraway, 1997) and eventually shaping specific relationships. They bring us clarity, reliability, purity, and freedom from bias; they allow us "to get on with the job" (Haraway, 1997, p. 136). They are about spatialization "as a never-ending, power-laced process engaged by a motley array of beings [that] can be fetishized as a series of maps whose grids nontropically locate naturally bounded bodies (land, people, resources—and genes) inside 'absolute' dimensions such as space and time" (Haraway, 1997, p. 136). Once the resources are enclosed into identities, they are ready for "further exploration, specification, sale, contract, protection, management, or whatever" (p. 136).

Living in a land that was violently taken from Indigenous peoples by European colonizers, I cannot ignore the relationships that are created through inventories, grids, and models, including the objects and subjects that are crafted through relations labeled in the name of rationality and progress. I refer to the colonial, imperial project in North America. Indigenous peoples have suffered the devastating consequences of decades of colonial and imperial practices and policies that used spatialization as their tools (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). These tools allowed the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands, the disintegration of families, the creation of reservation systems as lands were apportioned, and, even more powerfully, the stripping from Indigenous peoples of their languages and knowledges (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). In other words, through tools such as models, inventories, and grids, we engage in processes of marginalization and dehumanization of ways of knowing, being, and doing (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). I want to learn from these terrible and very real histories of conquest. As my game moves on, I continue to gather resources to place them in my grid. I find diamonds, but first I need to deal with the lava pool.

Indigenous scholars Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson (2000), working at the University of Saskatchewan, tell us about this violent way of appropriating resources within the context of education. They speak of the cognitive imperialism of education, noting that Eurocentric curricula "teach that knowers are manipulators who have no reciprocal responsibilities to the things they manipulate" (p. 88). Writing with situated knowledges, Battiste and Henderson (2000) tell us about other ways of relating that rely less on manipulation, possession, and dispossession:

> From the beginning, the forces of the ecologies in which we live have
> taught Indigenous peoples a proper kinship order and have taught us to

have nourishing relationships with our ecosystems. The ecologies in which we live are more to us than settings or places; they are more than homelands or promised homelands. These ecologies do not surround Indigenous peoples; we are an integral part of them and we inherently belong to them. The ecologies are alive with the enduring processes of creation itself. As Indigenous peoples, we invest the ecologies with deep respect, and from them we unfold our structure of Indigenous life and thought. (p. 9)

I see these relationships as generative rather than destructive, relationships that avoid all-embracing forms of relating, that grow through complexities, and that are always historically situated. Can we learn from these ways of relating *without resorting to capturing and appropriating knowledges*? What does it mean to be in relationship with knowledges? I continue to read Battiste and Henderson's (2000) text *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage* as a challenge to our modernist perspectives about relating to knowledges. Providing, as they note, "a limited example of the transmission of knowledge," Battiste and Henderson talk about Mi'kmaw traditions on relationship:

The Mi'kmaw language embodies relationships. How we are kin to each other is far more important than how much material wealth we have accumulated. How we treat one another and how our lives unfold within a community are more important than the amount of education or the kinds of jobs we have. So within the philosophy of the Mi'kmaw language are the notions of how we should relate to one another and how we can retain those relationships. (p. 89)

What is our relationship to knowledges in child and youth care? Which knowledges do we privilege and which do we silence? What knowledges could we generate?

Conquest

I come back to my avatar after two days of being away from the game and find my house destroyed. Someone has smashed the floor and walls I built with crafted resources; it was blown up and robbed. I must now rebuild a new house in unknown territory. As I attempt to understand why this happened, my fellow gamers explain to me that we have not yet set up the land claim function in the server. No land claims equals freedom to take whatever we want. Yes, this is a game of conquest!

Advanced capitalism, "the ethical temperature or fibre of our era" (Baidotti, 2006), very much dictates these kinds of relations to land. Land is there to be exploited and managed; we delineate "the boundaries of land that can be possessed and juridically administered through the institutions of property, title, and contract" (Haraway, 1997, p. 137). Battiste and Henderson (2000) tell us about a different understanding of relationship to the land in this insightful example:

A very young apprentice hunter travels the land with an experienced older hunter. Learning by observation (rather than by words) what cues to use in forecasting the seasonal and daily movements of wildlife, the hunter ensures success in the hunt when animals can be intercepted reliably and with a minimum of effort. Many factors, such as time of day, temperature,

> humidity, the distribution of forage plants, and the movements of other species are experienced directly under varying conditions until the pupil begins to think, unconsciously, like the prey. (p. 45)

This is a relationship of reciprocity and deep knowing (being with/in the land), where the land (including animals and plants) disciplines each towards the other. All partners matter; all partners provide for and take from each other. Land is much more than property: "Heritage is learned through a lifetime of personal experience traveling through and conducting ceremonies on the land" (pp. 253–254).

What are our relationships to nonhuman others in child and youth care? How do we claim and declaim lands? What relations to lands do we privilege? Which ones do we forget and eventually silence?

Before ending this section, I want to comment on the relationship I have crafted above as I write this chapter thinking *with* Indigenous knowledges. This is my attempt to work against relativism (another form of relationship, by the way). I am working with the practice of situated knowledges, an alternative to relativism (Haraway, 1991). Haraway (1991) says: "The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology. Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" (p. 191). There are, of course, many dangers in this practice of situated knowledges. It is not innocent. Writing *with* Indigenous knowledges, as I have done above, is "neither easily learned nor unproblematic" (p. 191). In this there is "a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions" (p. 191). I am trying to find ways of relating that are not violent. My approach to thinking with Indigenous knowledges relies on my belief that these knowledges "seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world" (p. 191) because they are located and responsible knowledge claims, not just claiming to be everywhere. This is not to say that there are not unmediated or passive ways of seeing (Haraway, 1991).

What kinds of relating are generated in child and youth care through romanticization and/or appropriation of knowledges? How does relativism creep in, and what are its consequences? How can we inhabit worlds without claiming to be the other?

Relating: Undoings and Redoings

To end the chapter, I return to Melinda Rackham's work—specifically to her "soft-skinned e_scape" called *empyrean*, in which she puts colonial enterprises into question—to provoke new forms of relating. As Rackham (2003) describes it,

> *empyrean* is the zone of electronically constructed 3 dimensional space, a virtual geography populated by textual entities, where reality is a trace, a flicker on the screen.

> *empyrean* is a parallel (sic) universe, an etheric arena beyond space and time—the hungry void of potentiality. it is the place of emptiness where all things are possible, the realm of the spirit, embracing the folds of the soul.

empyrean is a world of gaps and intervals, fluidly traced by interactions with others, rather than rigidly mapped by terrritorialising agents. this soft nothingness, this zero space is transversed by in-tensions, relations, attractions, and transitions between energetic avatars.

here we are softly embodied avatars, navigating thru a series of scapes without the regular markers of order and normalcy. there is no horizon to orient oneself. there is no up or down. here in-tensions and strange attractions make sense of otherworldly, yet oddly familiar domains. (paras. 1–4)

I see in the space Rackham describes some possibilities for a world in which boundaries are blurred and the kinds of encounters Haraway refers to in the opening quote can materialize in interesting ways. Can such a "world of gaps and intervals, fluidly traced by interactions with others," interfere with the patterns of child and youth care? What kinds of worlds can materialize through these encounters? Can we begin to deterritorialize the mapped relationships we are familiar with in child and youth care? In my view, *empyrean* provides a productive space in which to investigate "the colonization of the virtual— confronting the re-creation of urban spaces and the pioneering metaphor that has infested the web as users try to remake online virtual space as a poor imitation of the real" (Rackham, n.d., para. 3). This is a space that has no attachments to "reality" offline—a space "of hungry voids, of gaps and environment, which has no horizon line to anchor oneself against, and no attachment to offline hard space" (para. 3). Unlike a space of representations that already determines the kinds of relations ahead of time, in *empyrean* there are no pathways to follow; one just needs to "feel" one's way through it using one's senses. However, this is not an innocent space; it brings with it "in-tensions and strange attractions" (para. 3)

Briefly inhabiting the worlds of Minecraft and *empyrean* has allowed me to engage in relationships with technology, lands, bodies, and their discursive practices, encountering those nonhuman actors that mingle in child and youth care. Working diffractively with relationships in this chapter provided a way for me to acknowledge the multiple, complex, and troubling layers of relating that exist in our contemporary politics. Through these encounters of inhabiting, visiting, and interfering, I have also aimed at crafting and uncrafting new, yet oddly familiar, modes of relating with/for/in child and youth care. These attempts have been made in the form of inquiries and interferences, and not as a final telos. I find it necessary to refuse the need to provide practice applications. Yet, for me, practice is about asking questions (that might not have concrete answers). This, then, is my contribution to practice. I have asked:

- What might child and youth care become when we take human-nonhuman encounters seriously?

- What kinds of avatars inhabit the field of child and youth care? How are our relationships with them crafted? How malleable are our coded skins? What skins do we touch and permeate? What kinds of worlds do we create, and how do we relate to those worlds?

- Why do relationships in child and youth care end at the boundaries of a self? Why do they so rarely account for bodies and corporeality, or for the skins that are

implicated in relationships? Can we get under the skin of child and youth care? Is it the messiness of bodies or the slipperiness of skin that troubles us and halts our engagement with them?

- What is our relationship to knowledges in child and youth care? Which knowledges do we privilege and which ones do we silence? What knowledges could we generate?

- What are our relationships to nonhuman others in child and youth care? How do we claim and declaim lands? What relations to lands do we privilege? Which ones do we forget and eventually silence?

- What kinds of relating are generated in child and youth care through romanticization of knowledges and/or appropriation of knowledges? How does relativism creep in, and what are its consequences? How can we inhabit worlds without claiming to be the other?

Perhaps relating is simply about being in question and always accounting for the familiar and strange companions that inhabit these relationships. More importantly, crafting relationships through these questions has called me to confront our histories, humanisms, dominant knowledges, and core identities. In other words, to face these debilitating forms of relating that are so common in our times.

In my view, confronting these truths is necessary in child and youth care as we become accountable to "the differently situated human and nonhuman actors and actants [whose interactions] materialize worlds in some forms rather than others" (Haraway, 1997, p. 130). I do not know what new forms of living might entail, but I engage with this challenge as an approach to ethics and practice that I want to experiment with. What ways of relating are emerging in front of our eyes/Is? How do we respond responsibly as we gestate in "the ethical temperature or fibre of our era"—advanced capitalism? Conquest, hostility, and mutations are crafted in my relationship with Minecraft—but not, I hope, in relations in child and youth care.

References

Barad, K. M. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. Y. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon, SK: Purish.

Braidotti, R. (2006). *Transpositions: On nomadic ethics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Braidotti, R. (2011). *Nomadic theory: The portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

de Finney, S., Gharabaghi, K., Little, J. N., & Skott-Myhre, H. (in press). Conversations on "Conversing in Child and Youth Care." *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies, 3*(2/3).

Fewster, G. (2010). *Don't let your kids grow up to be normal*. UK: Influence.

Flanagan, M., & Booth, A. (2006). *Re:skin*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Garabaghi, K. (2010). *Professional issues in child and youth care practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Garfat, T. (2003). *A child and youth care approach to working with families*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1997). *Modest_witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_Onco Mouse™: Feminism and technoscience*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (2006). *When species meet*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Higgins, S. (2001). *Empyrean: New media notes*. Melinda Rackham interviewed by Saoirse Higgins. Art Bulletin, 18(98), 23–25. Retrieved from: http://www.subtle.net/archive/artbull.html

Imperiale, A. (2006). Seminal space: Getting under the digital skin. In M. Flanagan & A. Booth (Eds.) *Re:skin* (pp. 265–292). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kind, S. (2010). Art encounters: Movements in the visual arts and early childhood education. In V. Pacini-Ketchabaw, *Flows, rhythms, and intensities of early childhood education curriculum* (pp. 113–132). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

King, K. (2012). *Networked reenactments: Stories transdisciplinary knowledges tell*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Minecraft. (2012). Retrieved March 24, 2012, from the Minecraft wiki: http://www.minecraftwiki.net/wiki/Minecraft_Wiki

Minecraft Crafting. (n.d.). *A guide to all Minecraft recipes*. Retrieved from: http://www.minecraftcrafting.org/

Moore, C. (2011). The magic circle and the mobility of play. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies 17*(4) 373–387.

Nardi, B. (2010). *My life as a night elf priest: An anthropological account of* World of Warcraft. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. (in press). Acting with the clock: Clocking practices in early childhood. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education*.

Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Kummen, K., & Thompson, D. (in press). Making developmental knowledge stutter and stumble: Continuing pedagogical explorations with collective biography. In V. Pacini-Ketchabaw & L. Prochner (Eds.), *Resituating Canadian early childhood education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Rackham, M. (2003a). *Empyrean artist statement*. Retrieved from: http://www.subtle.net/archive/nabi.html

Rackham, M. (2003b). *Empyrean: soft skinned e_space*. Retrieved from: http://www.subtle.net/empyrean/

Rackham, M. (2006). Safety of skin. In M. Flanagan & A. Booth (Eds.), *Re:skin* (pp. 51–80). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Random House. (2012). *The art of video games: From Pac-Man to mass effect*. Retrieved from the Random House online catalog: http://www.randomhouse.ca/

Skott-Myhre, H. (2008). *Youth and subculture as creative force: Creating new spaces for radical youth work*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Skott-Myhre, K. (in press). Nomadic youth care. *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies, 3*(2/3).

Taylor, T. L. (2006). *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Tobin, J. (2004). *Pikachu's global adventure: The rise and fall of Pokemon*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.