

## NOMADIC YOUTH CARE

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**Abstract:** It has been argued that the field of child and youth care is founded on a relationship. Generally, this relationship has been posited as being between two identifiable subjects, a worker and a child or youth. In this paper, I will argue for both a different theoretical framework and significant rethinking of the human individual as the central player in a relation of care. In recent writings on feminist thought, several authors have proposed what they have termed *nomadic feminism*. This work focuses on developing a theory of the human organism that is no longer centered in a binary with nature. What if we began to see care as an interdependent bringing together of all elements in our environment? What if we began to think consciously about the mingling of human and non-human form as platform for experimentation? What might happen if we broke down the rigid distinctions between staff and youth, neighborhood and agency, male and female, gay and straight, our racial and ethnic identities, not so much to abandon them but so as to open them to experiment, to see what bodies can do together?

**Keywords:** child and youth care, feminism, identity, professional boundaries, youth-adult relations, ethology in psychology, holism, nomadic feminism

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It has been argued that the field of child and youth care (CYC) is founded on a relationship (Fewster, 2010; Garfat, 2003; Garabaghi, 2010). Generally, this relationship has been posited as being between two identifiable subjects, a worker and a child or youth. In the professional writing about the field, the quality of the relationship and the practices associated with various, and sometimes contradictory, views of what constitutes quality have been explicated and examined (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 2006; Garabaghi & Phelan, 2011; Krueger, 2005). The identities and ethical compositions of the subjects involved have been scrutinized and proposals made about what kind of child/youth/worker might maximize the relational aspects of care (Garfat, 2003; Garabaghi, 2010). Practice standards, ethical codes, and professional training have been developed and deployed to produce an optimal worker who will, in turn, have a relationship that will produce an optimal child or youth (Mattingly, Stuart, & Vandervan, 2002). Within this set of practices and descriptions there have been some key theoretical perspectives that frame and support the child and youth care relational project. Among others, key conceptual frameworks would consist of theories from developmental psychology, humanism, and phenomenology (Garabaghi, H. Skott-Myhre, & Krueger, in press). Each of these in turn has been focused on the individual human subject as the central interest of child and youth care.

In this paper, I argue for both a different theoretical framework and significant rethinking of the human individual as the central player in a relation of care. As a feminist psychologist with a background in youth work, I have long been troubled by the ways in which the developmental tasks of the child or youth have been framed within a series of binary either/or conceptualizations. Some of these include, child and adult, child and adolescent, male and female, gay and straight. Several feminist theorists such as Erica Burman (2008), Rosi Braidotti (2006), and Bracha Ettinger (2006) argue that these binary formations derive from a specifically masculinist point of view. They argue that the male gaze is constructed on what Lacanian psychoanalysts term the logic of the phallus. In phallic logic, the father's body is the ideal body against which all other bodies must be measured. Since the father in question is historically a heterosexual, able-bodied, white male, lack is defined as any body that is not white and male. The fact that the white male body has held such force has had serious historical implications for anybody who lacked the attributes ascribed to the great white father. This would include women, of course, but also all people of color and non-heterosexual subjects as well; this latter group, because of a perceived feminization of their sexuality.

While this Lacanian phallic logic might be argued as outmoded psychoanalytic theory that doesn't really apply to the emerging field of evidence-based care, I would suggest that it actually still has a profound impact. Developmentally, children are still perceived as lacking adult maturity and decision-making capacity. That girls must continue to find ways to integrate themselves into a male-dominated social structure, that feminism and female-centered approaches to child and youth care are still marginalized, and that race, sexism, homophobia, and a direct acknowledgement of power relations remain of marginal concern in much of our training curricula. Traditional hierarchies of power and discipline remain the standard for structuring institutions and disciplining

young people to adapt to a male-dominated social structure continues to be the goal of most programming.

Indeed, if we examine the current CYC competencies for the United States (Mattingly et al., 2002), we find a call for compliance with dominant social norms and laws premised in terms redolent with modernist colonial conceptual frameworks and language. In a section entitled “Performance of organizational duties”, child and youth care workers are advised to “know and conform to work rules relating to attendance, punctuality, appearance . . . and workload management”. This might well seem like common sense; after all, we work for an organization that has rules and expectations and as employees we are subject to those rules.

However, this apparent common sense actually obscures a form of disciplinary apparatus inherited from both industrial capitalism and the European colonial project. Punctuality as a competency for CYC workers is actually not a simple matter. Cesare Casarino (2003) argues that one of the first and most essential steps to ensuring the domination of capitalist logic and the interests of the capitalist ruling class was regulation of time. In the development of early industrial capitalism, regulation of time was an absolute necessity in transforming the rural peasantry into industrial workers. Clock time – for a discussion of the clock and the classroom, see Pacini-Ketchabaw (in press) – had to be introduced to people for whom time had been defined by the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun and the rhythms of crops and animals. If farmers were to be turned into factory workers, then the body must be trained to work according to the regimented time of the assembly line as opposed to the contingent time of agriculture. Industrial time spread beyond the realm of the factory into all aspects of society. In a very short period of time, people went from telling time by the rhythms of nature to telling time by the clock (Casarino, 2003). In addition, the model of the assembly line, or what became known as Fordist production, began to structure non-industrial sites such as the school, the clinic, the family home, and the hospital (Foucault 2003; Gramsci 1971).

The hospital is of particular interest in terms of the CYC competencies since the primary organizational settings for CYC, such as residential care, are modeled after the shift work of the hospital. The model of the hospital derived from Fordism is based on a logic that defines patient care on par with assembly line production: get the patients in and out as quickly and efficiently as possible. To these ends, the staff becomes health technicians who bring specialized skills to bear on the bodies passing along the assembly line. Processing of human bodies is designed to bring them into compliance with normatively established standards of “health”. The question then becomes: Is the processing of bodies the best and most effective model for a relationally built field? What happens to both the staff and patient or the worker and the youth when the relational gathering place is driven by notions of efficiency and scheduling? Can we imagine work without the clock? What if our relationships with young people engaged more organically without the hierarchical demands of the shift and accountability to punctuality? Whose needs are being met by a corporatized model of time being imbedded in the competencies expected of CYC workers?

The same Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP) set of competencies calls for, “personal appearance and behavior [that] reflect an awareness of self as a representative of the organization” (Mattingly et al., 2002, p. 24). Once again, we have a rather odd incursion of the corporate needs of the organization into the worker’s performance of the body. In this case, workers are being asked, as a basic competency, to account for their dress as an expression of self in terms of the organizational identity of the agency.

The postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1979) writes about the double effect of colonization on both the colonized and the colonizer. He draws our attention to the demands made by whiteness on the dress, habits, and affects of those operating on behalf of the colonizing force. He suggests that in order to differentiate themselves from those being colonized, the colonial functionary must discipline his body to the regimen of cultural authority. He suggests that this is at some cost to the individuality and subjectivity of the colonizer.

In this competency, we are being told that in order to be a competent CYC worker, we must subject our very physical appearance to the demands of the organization. Leaving aside the questionable claim in this competency that an organization can have an identity that can be demonstrated through an expression of self, this conflation of self and organization is deeply disturbing. One might wonder what happens to relationships when the very expression of the self of the worker becomes one with the identity of the organization. Does this mean that the youth and children are having a relationship with the worker or with the organization?

Judith Butler (1990) suggests that the self is not derived from an essential identity that can be expressed from the inside out. Instead, she proposes that the self is a performance constructed of the social elements that produce and are produced by the body. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) similarly suggests that the self and its habitual performances are historically derived out of the specific historical conditions of a given society. Foucault (1979) discusses this in terms of the way that the body is inscribed with the habits and beliefs of one’s own age. He also suggests, however, along with Butler (1990) that resistance to dominant forms of power are to be found in deviant performances of the body. Indeed, authors such as Dick Hebdige (1979), Lauraine Leblanc (1999), Stuart Hall and Toni Jefferson (1975) suggest that fashion and dress can constitute important political statements about class and gender. What are the implications for CYC power relations when the dominant professional discourse in our field takes the highly paternal position that workers should accommodate their clothing and style to the needs of the organization? What is the message to young people about their force and power in the world? What is the message about accommodating oneself to the array of dominant force and corporate identity?

Finally, the competencies outline a set of prescriptions for what constitutes an appropriate relationship. The competencies begin by stating that appropriate relationships should involve professional boundaries. What are these boundaries? They include, “describing own needs and feelings and keeping them in perspective when professionally

engaged” (Mattingly et al., 2002, p. 24). Again, this seems reasonable on the surface. It is important to be able to identify what one wants or needs from the work and what feelings one is experiencing while working so as to be able to manage them.

However, Foucault (1979) points out that one of the central defining modes of disciplining and creating what he called docile bodies, or those bodies available to exploitation, was the demand to reveal and confess. To place as an expectation, competency within the organizational disciplinary structure we have described above, a demand for identification of needs and feelings is to make the body available to organizational discipline of both affects and desires.

This disciplinary practice becomes clear when we see that these feelings and desires are to be kept in perspective. Whose perspective this is becomes critical here. Who decides what an appropriate perspective is? Obscured here is an implicit valuing of objectivity and distance as an important set of competencies. This is a subtle introduction of the values of scientism that feminist authors, such as Sandra Harding (1991), find to be masculinist and at odds with both indigenous and feminist forms of knowing. It also places an immediate disciplinary restraint on the formation of relationship. One must not become too involved, too close, or too emotionally sensitive to the young people in one’s care. If we were to draw on the colonial vernacular, we might talk about this as the necessity to avoid “going native”.

Indeed, the competencies go on to call for ability to model professional boundaries and to, “separate personal from professional issues” (Mattingly et al., 2002, p. 24). This call to separate the personal from the professional through the creation of boundaries is once again a veiled introduction of colonial practices. Foucault (1979) points out that one of the hallmarks of the colonial project was the introduction of what he called *biopower*. Biopower is the ability to designate different forms of life, including different groups of people, by their biological characteristics. This ability is premised in the capacity to create taxonomies of difference or the ability to create criteria by which one thing can be distinguished from something else. The trick here is to be able to claim that the distinction is not simply subjective, random, or culturally based, but true and objective. These taxonomic practices led to a proliferation of problematic distinctions and practices. Some of the more dramatic include the construction of racial categories leading to slavery and colonization, the development of theories about genetic superiority with genocidal results, hierarchical distinctions about gender that disenfranchised and sexually subjugated women, and taxonomies of sexuality that pathologized non-heterosexual identities and practices (Foucault, 1994).

The practice of taxonomic distinction was also used linguistically and geographically within the construction of the colonial project. The division of land masses into countries and states was premised on the same kind of logic. Indeed, postcolonial authors such as Homi K. Bhabha (1990) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) have noted that the creation of boundaries as a way of dividing people and geographies is highly problematic. They propose that these divisions are not simply acts of state politics but are also acts of creative subjectification (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) or interpellation

(Althusser, 2001). The creation of geographical, racial, or ethnic divisions is taken on by the subjects whose land or identity is being bounded. Indeed Deleuze and Guattari propose that geography and the identity of a people are deeply intertwined. When the sense of the land and one's connection to it is redefined, one's identity is similarly disturbed. Indeed, one might argue that the very act of bounding things as a political act of force extends from the geopolitical to the personal.

In terms of the demands of the competency above, the call for professional boundaries becomes a political call for collusion in the ongoing project of defining the terms and conditions of what one can do and where one can go. It is a disciplinary act that asks, once again, that the worker give over their sense of personal boundaries to those defined by the profession or agency. Unquestionably, this mandate for personal boundaries is designed to control workers who might violate the boundaries of young people in dangerous and damaging ways. However, like the previous competency, this is an extremely paternalistic and juridical response to a small number of workers. Like the *no touch* policies instituted by some schools and programs, the call for bounding oneself operates at odds with the construction of actual relationship.

Bhabha (1990) and Anzaldúa (1999) call for the hybridization of boundaries. They suggest that it is borders and not boundaries that are what is interesting in the work. It is at the border between ourselves, young people, the community, and other workers that new possibilities emerge. It is the creative tension of the border and the space between subjects that has a high degree of possibility. To hybridize is to mix the categories found at the border. It is to violate the sanctity of pure cultural or social identity and find what Deleuze and Guattari call "a people to come". This is the promise of youth-adult relations freed from the stifling constraints of organizational, professional, corporatized boundaries. Deleuze and Guattari challenge us to quit defining ourselves, quit knowing who we are, quit associating ourselves with strict definitions and instead experiment in the border space between us and others. This is what will be discussed later as the process of *becoming*.

However, what is more significant for me than any of these concerns with the particular competencies of our field is the pervasive conceptualization of *lack* as a driving force in our work. Even the most progressive work on girls, race, and homophobia tends to advocate for these identities on the basis that they lack access to dominant structures of privilege and domination. In other words, we have not yet developed a politics of care focused on *difference* as a source of social transformation. I argue that the process of phallogentrism constitutes a social diagram that favors centering particular attributes and identities in order to give them social force.

For example, the anthropocentric positioning of the human as the central concern of social justice has marginalized all other life as of secondary concern. The results of this can be seen in contemporary events as species become extinct, the environment becomes increasingly toxic, and catastrophic events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, oil spills, and nuclear accidents become commonplace events. The binary logic that separates humans from their environment, children and adolescents from

adults, homosexuals from heterosexuals, and women from men is increasingly dangerous and its two central identities – human and male – may well be finished as useful social forms.

The field of child and youth care may be one of the places where we can begin to challenge these binary forms and rethink the role of developmentalism and humanism. By challenging these binary forms we might begin to propose a new phenomenology of the subject that frames experience not as a function of the individual but as the lived experience of life itself as it is manifested through the human organism as a part of a much larger whole.

One way we might approach a new phenomenology of the subject is to consider theoretical approaches to care that are premised in either binary formations or phallic logic. This would mean exploring theories of care that would be inclusive and multiple in orientation. It would also imply the decentering of any particular form of life in favor of a politics of life itself.

In recent writings on feminist thought, several authors have proposed what they have termed “nomadic feminism” (Braidotti, 2006; Ettinger, 2006; Gatens, 2000). This work focuses on developing a theory of the human organism that no longer centers it in a binary with nature. Instead, they suggest that the human organism, “is neither wholly human, as a person, nor just an organism. It is an abstract machine, radically immanent, which captures, transforms and produces inter-connections” (Braidotti, 2006, para. 23).

To help understand the concept of nomadic feminism I will take it one idea at a time. The first idea is that the human organism is larger than any description we can give of it. When we say that it is human, we accept a set of definitions that limits the organism to certain concepts of what it is to be human such as to be a person. A person, in this sense, is separated from other persons by the boundaries of the human body and also by what we term to be the personality and social identities associated with the person. The person as a human is separated from animals and nature and in some schemas is purported to be in charge of nature or, in another version, a steward of nature. In some thinking, nature is there to be used by the person/human for her or his own purposes.

These descriptions have what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call an ordering function. That is to say, these descriptions order the world by telling us what our place is in it and by telling us what our behaviors should be. For example, a human is superior to animals and should either care for them or exploit them for food, clothing, entertainment, and so forth. Therefore, human is not an animal and must not behave like an animal. Think about how much of this kind of thinking drives our interventions with young people in terms of teaching them how to behave like human beings and not animals, how to take advantage of their environment and seek to control their circumstances.

The description given above of what it means to be human and to center the human outside nature is what nomadic feminists, following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), would call an *abstract machine*. That means a way of producing, the way a machine

would produce a subject, as an abstract set of ideas. It can be quite disorienting to begin to think this way, because it challenges so much that we take for granted and value such as our view of ourselves as individuals. The proposal is that the human organism is simply a description. The idea of the human is simply that – an idea. The supposed fact that it is a discrete organism is again just an abstract idea. It can be argued that it is an idea with tremendous force that captures us and produces us in ways that limit our creative possibilities as an expression of life itself. However, we are also told that such a machine produces interconnections. If these interconnections occur on the field of life itself, then the human organism might be said to have far greater capacity than just that originating within itself.

But what is life itself and what does it have to do with care? To understand this question we need to understand life as encompassing everything, including the form we call the human organism. Such a system that includes everything is called an immanent form. It is a system that has nothing outside of itself and so everything is an expression of it. The concept of immanence has received recent attention in feminist writings by scholars and psychoanalysts such as Ettinger (2006), Gatens (2000), Braidotti (2006), and Lloyd (1994). Gatens (2000) refers to immanence in her writing on feminism as a kind of experimental project that has the force to elude dominant forms of social control as, “nature . . . conceived as immanently self-governed”. It is nature without an outside sovereign force to define or order it. Drawing from both Deleuze and Spinoza, she states that it is a form of ontology that is monistic and, “inclusive rather than disjunctive” (p. 60). Put differently, nothing is excluded and all aspects of nature are mutually productive. Gatens (2000) reads Spinoza as conceiving of the human body as part of an interconnected web of life in which each body holds its difference from other bodies in terms of its singular attributes of intensities and composition. The human body is what Spinoza calls a complex body composed of a multiplicity of other bodies. Such a body, Gatens (2000) tells us, “can never be viewed as a final or finished entity . . . [it is] a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity” (p. 61).

This multiplicity of bodies together is composed according to their ability to express their idiosyncratic and singular capacities. In this sense, an immanent system focuses on the given capacities of any composition of bodies rather than on any sense of lack. Immanence is, therefore, composed of what exists rather than what does not. Included in this, however, are all virtual forms as well as all instantiated forms. Accordingly, immanent systems are constantly assembling and reassembling the component bodies so as to express the infinitude of virtual possibility. Hence, the body is an ongoing experimental site of virtual expression.

Imagine if we began to think about our agencies and centers of care in this way; if we began our staff meetings with a discussion of all of the possible combinations of bodies and the capacities inherent in our setting including the richness of capacity that is the children and youth, the neighborhood, the plant life, the animal life, the flow of life into and out of the institution. What if we began to see care as an interdependent bringing together of all elements in our environment and if we began to think consciously about the mingling of human and non-human forms as a platform for experimentation? What if

we broke down the rigid distinctions between staff and youth, neighborhood and agency, male and female, gay and straight, our racial and ethnic identities, not so much to abandon them as to open them to experiment, to see what bodies can do together?

So much of what we do is driven by a sense of lack. We begin with the idea that there is a need. In other words, we assume lack from the very beginning. We accept that the children and youth who come to us have a need that is unfilled. If we isolate an individual human organism at a particular moment in time and assess only her or his need and our capacity to meet that need then, of course, we will see that organism as needy. This is what Spinoza called inadequate knowledge. Inadequate knowledge is the failure to see how all life is interconnected in what Braidotti (2006) calls, “symbiotic interdependence” (para. 23). Put differently, it is the failure of seeing the body as inseparable from the web of life both in the actuality of the moment but also in the virtual possibility of what has not yet manifested.

I am reminded of the story of Michael Lewis as told in the film, *The Blind Side* (Hancock, 2009). In the film, Michael is portrayed as a desperately needy foster child who is taken in by a wealthy, white family and given the resources and opportunities to become a professional football player. It is a powerful story and one that validates, for many of us as child and youth care workers, our mission to help the needy by providing the missing elements of their lives.

Recently, however, Michael Lewis wrote his own story and went on a speaking tour. In his own story, he points out that there was something crucial missing from the account given in the movie. What was missing, he said, was the drive he always had to both survive and take advantage of every opportunity presented to him. This drive is what the nomadic feminists would call desire, or the force of becoming.

Braidotti (2006) defines becoming as, “un-programmed . . . mutations, disruptions, and points of resistance. Their time frame is always the future anterior, that is to say a linkage across present and past in the act of constructing and actualizing possible futures” (para. 29). In Michael’s case, the force of his own becoming transgressed his past and took advantage of its unique elements to create disruptions of other’s expectations, to create mutations of the anticipated racial relations of being placed with a wealthy white family, and to create points of resistance to any barrier that stood in the way of his ability to discover his capacities. This becoming force did not allow for any form of static or traditional identity within the social formations available to him as a poor black youth, a foster youth, a homeless youth, and so on. Instead, there were “unprogrammed” becomings that occurred as he traversed the terrain of other bodies in such a way as to discover in his interactions with them his capacities for transformation. In this sense, the question of need is no longer to be seen in the conventional sense of lack. Instead it configures itself as the need to become.

To begin to reorient our thinking beyond the traditional frameworks of *development*, *human*, or *lack* so that our systems of care might engage the immanent force of becoming, it would be useful to think as psychological ethologists rather than

psychological developmentalists. Gatens (2000) tells us that ethology is not so much interested in what things are in terms of category or definition. Rather, it is interested in how things are composed in terms of “affects and powers” (p. 60). That is to say: What is the capacity of an organism to be affected by things and other organisms and what are its capacities when affected? In this sense, the ability to separate and distinguish one body from another is of less interest than the ways in which different bodies come into contact with one another and form compositions. Therefore, as Gatens (2000) puts it:

An ethological evaluation will not select subjects, animals, or persons categorized according to species and genus, but rather will individuate according to principles of composability, sets of fast or slow combinations, the range of affects and degrees and affectability. (p. 61)

As ethologists, we would be more interested in the capacities a body has for certain velocities and intensities than how it might be categorized according to an outside set of standards or measures. Ethology, as defined by Gatens, is interested in how bodies interact as dynamic, ever-fluxuating systems. It assumes that each body is composed in a relation with other bodies, each eliciting unique and idiosyncratic capacities for expression in both thought and physical acts. Gatens (2000) proposes that, “ethology does not impose a plane of organization but rather posits a plane of experimentation, a mapping of extensive relations and intensive capacities that are mobile and dynamic” (p. 61). Ethology, therefore, is a mapping of an immanent system in which all elements are part of single system that are differentiated in the unique way that each body expresses that system. From an ethological point of view, it is impossible to separate bodies from each other into taxonomies, hierarchies, or categories. All bodies are dynamically interconnected but radically distinct in their own mode of expression. What becomes important here are the border spaces between bodies in which becoming occurs.

Gatens (2000) tells us that each body is always part of a more complex body. This is true from the atomic particle, to the molecule, to the organs of the body, to the complexity of the human form. These organic bodies can then form complex assemblages with their environment including other life forms, technological forms, architectural forms, and conceptual frameworks to create composite forms such as residential care, street-based outreach programs, shelters, schools, families, and so on. These compositions always strive to persist as long as possible in a stable form. However, such stable forms, as we have noted above, rely on the capture and retention of experimental becomings. Gatens states that:

From the point of view of the individual, such composites may be harmonious and joyful or conflictual and sad. When two or more bodies combine, harmony assumes that the kinetic particularity of each body is respected and that the new composite leads to an enhancement of the powers of each. Anything else will amount to either incompatibility or the capture of some bodies for the benefit of others. (p. 65)

As a psychological ethologist, the primary question becomes: In what way might we create institutions that enhance the powers of each body rather than producing self-valorizing systems that only reproduce themselves through the capture of other bodies? In other words, how might we organize the composite body that is a residential facility as a space of maximum experimentation in both thought and action? One possibility is to think of our systems of care as border spaces of mutual co-production. This view of care as a border space returns us to the issue of phallogentrism in the work of Bracha Ettinger (2006).

In Ettinger's (2006) work we find the definition of a border space that goes beyond the binary logic of the phallus. Like much of the theorizing in the field of child and youth care, she is interested in the issue of relationship, but suggests that the primary relationship we should explore is between the *I* and the emergent *non-I* (p. 85). Ettinger argues that such a relation must be found in a non-binary plurality, specifically, in an encounter or a space between. She suggests that the model for this space is the mother's womb in which there is both the subject of the *mother* and the subject *to become*. In this space, there is an *I* and a non-*I* in mutual co-poeisis or co-becoming. She refers to this mutuality as the *becoming-m/Other* (p. 66).

This shared process of becoming Ettinger refers to as “differentiation in co-emergence and distance in proximity” (p. 19). In other words, there are two subjects that have mutually constitutive effects on one another only one is not yet, while the other is emerging into a new subject position of being mother. The two subjects share the space of the womb in very different ways and yet to common purpose. They are different in their forms of emergence and, while in intimate proximity, they sustain a distance. This productive relation, Ettinger suggests, violates the traditional definitions of subjectivity defined as distinction. The relation of *m/Other* transcends the binary constructions of inside and outside or penis versus womb and opens instead onto what she calls a “psychic event-encounter” (p. 19). This encounter is one in which a border space is produced that is in constant flux. While this border space is not comprised of clean cuts or divisions, it is also not pure assimilation of either subject. There are, instead, moments wherein “borderlines may become thresholds and passages from one to the other, may produce possible transformations, circulations, sharings” (p. 19). The process of border crossing and its productive effects is what Ettinger calls metamorphosis (p. 94). She defines this as a process in which, “limits, borderlines and thresholds conceived are constantly transgressed or dissolved thus allowing the creation of new ones” (p. 21). Metamorphosis has no capacity for domination. It is a co-creative process of mutual transformation and becoming. It does not create any one subject but what Ettinger calls “subjectivity in severality”. Subjectivity in severality means that in the process of the emerging subject we are never one but always composed of a multitude of virtual selves in constant generativity in the border space that is modeled in the womb but persists in all living relations.

What if we were to rethink the competencies for CYC according to the logic we have been outlining here? What would it mean to our practice and our identity? What elements of our current practice would we maintain and what would we leave behind?

What we might possibly consider as a first step is to acknowledge that there is no theoretical or practical certainty in what we do. There are no fixed templates, best practices, explanatory frameworks, or fixed ethical standards that can account for the richness of the encounter that occurs at the border between two subjects, each of whom constitutes an equally evocative other. This means that practice emerges experimentally in the liminal space created by the chance encounter of subjects in relationship. There are no abstract rules. There is only the necessity to pay attention to as much of what is occurring as possible, and to note especially as many of the options, possibilities, and capacities that are being opened in each millisecond of the encounter. This means letting go of attempting to control, shape, and define. Instead, the worker and the young person engage in an experimental space, as Krueger (2010) has pointed out, much like that of art or music. Like the most experimental art or music, the work becomes an improvisation inclusive of as many possible elements of the moment as possible. Not just the human elements, but also the non-human and even the non-organic. This requires a different form of self-discipline and a different set of competencies truly rooted in lived experience and not in corporate, professional, or organizational abstract reasoning. It is with hope that I offer this as a way to return the work to the land of the living, which is a space that is always opening onto the border. I am not writing of the binary border that draws a line between, but of a complex and ever shifting border of multiple dimensions full of liminality, creativity, hybridity, and expressivity. Work in such a space returns psychology and child and youth care to the realm of the relationship in all its complexity.

What does working as a nomadic child and youth worker look like? Let me begin by being clear that there is no template of practices or specific ways of thinking a child and youth care worker can learn or implement in a program or center that will facilitate nomadic child and youth care. Instead there is a constant practice of disassembling and reassembling one's thoughts and practices through the encounter with all of the elements of a given moment. In this regard, the work might be said to have more in common with alchemy, sorcery, or the shamanic than instrumentalist practices of behavior change. Such work is alchemy in the sense that the work is centered in the violation of traditional limitations of transformation; sorcery in the ancient sense of divination that exceeds the dictates of reason; and shamanic in seeking to cross into the liminal space between worlds and return with a double knowledge of the world.

Practice as shamanic, alchemical or sorcerous, however, is neither esoteric nor metaphysical. In fact, it is a concrete discipline rooted in what the Buddhists call mindfulness – a deep attentiveness to the moment. I once worked in a runaway and homeless youth shelter that had a family reunification program that utilized a team approach to working with families. The family was seen by one worker, with a team of workers observing from behind a one-way mirror. The team behind the mirror could phone in ideas and suggestions to the worker in the room or any of the family members. At a certain point in the session, the worker would stop the interview with the family and the lighting would be reversed so that the family was now watching the team. The team would then have a conversation about their thoughts and reflections on what they had observed. The family was encouraged to phone in questions about what the team was saying. The lighting was reversed again and the family was asked to reflect on what the

team had said. While using this process, the team was careful to pay particular attention to any unanticipated behaviors or statements that indicated the possibility of alternative stories that violated the narratives of pathology and dysfunction that brought them to the therapy room.

I would argue that the mirror provided a liminal space, a permeable boundary in which both the team and the family opened themselves up to a mutually reflective praxis. Switching the lighting and the roles of observation muddled the traditional hierarchy of who was the observer and who the observed. As the team and the family became more comfortable with the practices of the mirror, the composition of the team would sometimes shift so that members of the family might join the team behind the mirror to observe a conversation from a different perspective. The blurring of team boundaries also extended to the content of reflections. Indeed, the team often found themselves reflecting on their own lives and families while the family observed them. The boundaries between the lived experience of the workers and that of the family began to engage a space between them that opened itself to the creation of new stories and new ways of becoming for both groups.

The reflective practice of the mirror is an example of the metamorphosis outlined by Ettinger (2006) in which, “borderlines may become thresholds and passages from one to the other, may produce possible transformations, circulations, sharings” (p. 18). The practices of the mirror as a space of co-becoming for families and child and youth care workers metastasized across the agency influencing the way we did groups, daily planning, staff meetings, and activities. The act of jointly reflecting and deploying physical spaces in ways that enhanced our capacity to reflect became increasingly prevalent.

It should be noted that a number of staff were uncomfortable with these trends and perceived them as unprofessional and even dangerous. The challenging of traditional boundaries can be unsettling and increase the challenges of maintaining an orderly and structured environment in a given facility. The creative challenge of opening boundaries into liminal spaces requires a mindfulness that is attentive to the desires and needs for stability and structure. The womb, as Ettinger points out, is not an anarchic space. It is a space from which a certain order is emerging. In the birthing, there will be two coherent bodies emerging, a mother and an infant, not an amorphous assemblage of cells without boundary.

I end this piece on this cautionary note. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make the point that life is a constant process of deterritorializing and reterritorializing. Living force both assembles the world and almost immediately takes it apart, only to put it into a new form that it will then take apart. Deleuze and Guattari are quite clear that this is not a binary process. It is not two things that are happening or contesting one another. It is one process composed of two different elements. To the degree we can find ways to be attentive to this process in our work and our lives, liminal spaces become available to us and we can become the sorcerers, alchemists, and shamans of the mundane.

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