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MAPPING EMERGING CHILDHOODS AND
JUSTIN BIEBER FAN CULTURE

A Dissertation in
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation emerges as an experiment in thinking about children and their encounters with popular culture. I am particularly interested in the ways in which children’s encounters with other bodies and materials produce transformations that allow them to transcend representational images of childhood. Drawing from the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I take up this dissertation as an ontological project as I consider the potentials of childhood. That is, I work to conceptualize childhood as emergent, relational, and non-teleological. My dissertation research involves very specific contexts of children’s encounters with popular culture. I consider participant observation research data from two Justin Bieber concerts and a university art program to think about the disparate ways in which children engage with and what emerges from their relationships with Bieber fan culture, in particular. I also consider a YouTube video of a young fan of Justin Bieber as I think about the productive flows of desire that create ephemeral, contingent subjectivities.

Additionally, I work through the entanglement of my own fandom and my uncertainty as a researcher as I deliberate on the affective potential that emerges in encounters among bodies and materials. In all of these deliberations, I plug in Deleuzoguattarian concepts such as nomadism, affect, desire, and becoming as I think about the difference that is produced in the assemblages of which children, fans, and researchers are a part. Finally, I consider what a reconceptualization of childhood might mean for relationships with children in classrooms. Drawing on a project that emerged in my own second grade classroom, I reconsider Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophies in order to think about the ways in which relational and affective pedagogy might honor
what it is that children are interested in, what their encounters are capable of, and what they are becoming.
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“We don’t set out to save the world; we set out to wonder how other people are doing and to reflect on how our actions affect other people’s hearts.”

- Pema Chödrön

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For Karen and Buzz.
CHAPTER 1: PASSIONATE ENCOUNTERS

“Please don’t go, girl. You would ruin my whole world. Tell me you’ll stay. Never ever go away.” The lyrics of the New Kids on the Block (NKOTB) 1988 ballad fill the air as Jordan Knight pulls Barbie close to his body. Barbie slides her hand under Jordan’s plaid button-down, grazing his bare chest as she helps him out of his shirt, tossing it on the ground next to her convertible. She lifts her head and gazes into his eyes. Their bodies quiver in anticipation; the little space between them is filled with energy, like an electrical charge coursing through and between their bodies. Jordan and Barbie hold this somewhat awkward embrace, their hard plastic bodies making it difficult to wrap their arms around one another, as he leans her against the side of her pink convertible, her breasts pressed against his bare chest. Barbie’s mind begins swimming as she is trapped by Jordan’s grip and the music. She becomes entangled in that moment, as undetectable forces create a moment of palpable passion. Barbie and Jordan kiss and their bodies seem to become one as the moonlight shimmers off their skin.

Okay, the light of the moon is really the glow from my desk lamp and the bright afternoon sun shining through the windows makes the desk lamp sort of a moot point anyway.

I tuck my body a little further behind my open bedroom door, dragging Jordan, Barbie, and the convertible along with me. After all, I am the one choreographing this display of romantic affection between my dolls in the secret space between the door and the gumball pink wall of my bedroom. Barbie, Jordan, and I are safe here because I see through the crack into the hallway; if my mom or my brothers walk by, Barbie can jump
in her car or Jordan can run for cover under my bed. This moment of passion between them is for me; I am not sure that the others would understand.

The other members of NKOTB lay on the floor, close to an open shoebox that overflows with Barbie doll-sized apparel and my miniature Major League Baseball hat collection. Sometimes, Jordan becomes Jay Bell, shortstop for the Pittsburgh Pirates. On the walls of my bedroom, posters with pictures of the members of the band hang equally spaced apart, among pictures of Bobby Bonilla, Bell, and Barry Bonds, members of the 1989 Pittsburgh Pirates professional baseball team. My favorite t-shirt bears pictures of the players’ faces alongside buzzing bumblebees, as their fans know them affectionately as “The Killer B’s.” I do not have any t-shirts featuring the New Kids on the Block, but the comforter on my canopy bed has a large picture of the band members and on it. Most weekends, my mom and I work together on my NKOTB jigsaw puzzles.

Listening to their music in my bedroom and staging scenes with my dolls is what I like to do most with NKOTB. When I am sure no one is around, I raise Jordan in the air, my fingers wrapped tightly around his legs. I lift him so that we are eye level and sometimes I tilt my head and slowly bring his lips to mine. In that moment, the romance is gone; his lips are hard and cold and I am pretty sure that this is not what real kissing feels like. I suppose that I know how ridiculous this might look, but the possibilities of kissing a boy excite me - I can feel my face turn flush as I imagine his lips to be soft and warm - and as an eight-year old, my Jordan Knight doll is the best I can do.

It is the private space of my bedroom where I can become entangled with NKOTB as I am girl, boy band fan, director and choreographer of a PG-13 rated rendezvous, baseball team manager and statistician, and daughter of very conservative parents whom
I am convinced would haul me off to church and pray for me out loud at dinner if they knew I was hiding behind my bedroom door and making out with my dolls. I am also a devoted member, though not necessarily by choice, of my Southern Baptist Church and Sunday School, a compliant daughter and devoted sister, a well-behaved student who strives to please her teachers, a bookworm, and a quiet friend who is more comfortable following than leading.

Who I am, what I am feeling, and the ways in which I am speaking and thinking about myself and others seem contingent not upon myself alone, but by the things that are around me at the time and other influences of which I may or may not be aware: my Barbie dolls, books, teachers, members of the community, baseball games, music, brothers and sister, ministers, Sunday dresses and hairstyles, classmates, and on and on. I am not just me. I am me and a lot of other things, too; a complex entanglement of the bodies, materials, ideas, thoughts, and emotions that comprise my assemblage. I am a passionate eight-year old becoming.

*****

The memories of my childhood encounters with NKOTB and the Pittsburgh Pirates emerged time and time again in my six years as an elementary school teacher. During my first year of teaching kindergarten, one child negotiated multiple relationships with popular culture throughout the school day. He was in some moments Buzz Lightyear, flying down the hallway with his wings stretched behind him, zooming past the line of his classmates walking quietly to the restroom. In the cafeteria, he was frequently Spiderman, casting his web across the large room to entrap me in the silk that shot out of his fingertips. When he wrote his name, he was Wolf. I did not know who
Wolf was, only that sometimes Wolf was also Buzz Lightyear, that sometimes he was Spiderman, and that at one point the school psychologist told me that she was worried that he was too out of touch with reality. What was happening for and with this child as he embodied and became these cartoons/superheroes/animals from one moment to the next? What did his relationships with Buzz Lightyear, Spiderman, and Wolf do for him? How did I, his classmates, our classroom space, and even the school psychologist become parts of those relationships?

At recess, I observed girls and boys transform wooden platforms meant to be a place to stash lunchboxes and coats into a stage for what appeared to be high-energy concerts and singing and dancing competitions. There the children choreographed and performed acts reminiscent of scenes from *High School Musical* and *American Idol*. The children seemed to obsess over the music, the actors and actresses, and the contestants.

One year in my classroom, many of the girls swooned over the Jonas Brothers and images of the boy band appeared on backpacks, lunchboxes, and notebooks. Late in my elementary teaching career, children became very interested in Taylor Swift; I often overheard young girls singing her songs, talking about her boyfriends and her cats, and hoping for opportunities to see her in concert.

A particularly poignant moment during my last year of teaching occurred during dismissal one afternoon. It was a rainy day and the children remained in the classroom longer than normal as they waited for transportation home. Some drew in their notebooks to pass the time. As a class, we had become fascinated with a computer game called *Poptropica* and the children frequently doodled avatars and scenes from the game on any blank surface they could find. Others sat together and flipped through books,
while a few children used the slates they kept in their desks to “play teacher”, quizzing one another on math facts and sight words. “Would you like me to turn on some music?” I asked and amidst the requests for specific songs and singers, one voice rose above the rest.

“Miss Sherbine, please just don’t play Justin Bieber,” one girl begged, “He’s just so annoying!” I did not know much about Bieber at the time as he had only been popular in the United States for about a year and the only song of his downloaded on my iPod was Baby. A cacophony of strong opinions about Bieber and his music quickly filled the room. Perhaps it was because it was the end of the day, I was tired, and I wanted to drown out the chatter with music or perhaps because I was curious to see the reaction if I did play Bieber’s song, I selected Baby from my playlist and pressed play. I turned around in time to see the original Bieber dissident gasp as a smile spread across her face. She wrapped her arms around two friends standing close by as the three familiar introductory chords filled the air and while most of the children continued to draw or read together or doodle, the trio of girls proceeded to hang onto one another as they danced and sang along with the music. Why would a child be so adamant about me not playing a specific entertainer’s music and then display such pleasure in hearing it alongside her friends? Were there other ways that these girls encountered Justin Bieber, in addition to their classroom performance?

Representations of Childhood and Fandom

These questions returned and new ones emerged during the first year of my doctoral work when I sat in a dark movie theater watching Justin Bieber: Never Say Never alongside my adviser. I wondered about the representations that emerged in the
film as I encountered images of children, mostly girls, who screamed with excitement. “I just love pretty much everything about him. He’s cute, he’s awesome, and I just love him so much,” exclaimed one girl, who appeared to be approximately eight years old, waiting outside a concert venue in Toronto clutching a handmade sign that read, “I [heart] U, Justin: I’ll be Your ‘Baby’ 4-ever.”¹ There were countless squealing mobs of girls some of whom appeared to be as young as three holding posters, forming hearts with their fingers, and bursting into tears, seemingly at the mere thought of Bieber. “I think about him,” pondered one girl in the film, “like, ninety-nine percent of my life.” As she tossed her head back and squealed, her friends sitting on either side giggled and covered their ears.

Sitting in the theater, and during my numerous viewings of the film since then, I have wondered about these representations of the fan-girl. The images of the squealing, crying, out-of-control obsessed fan flashed on the screen seemed all too familiar. I had heard stories from my mother about Beatlemania in the 1960s, during which primarily girls and women lined streets holding signs and banners as they anticipated the arrival of the British rock band, The Beatles. In subsequent decades, photographs of similar displays of fandom emerged on the covers of newspapers and magazines. In the 1970s, David Cassidy was coined a teen idol and had a loyal legion of fans. In the 1980s and 1990s, many pre-teen and teenaged girls were enamored with boy bands such as NKOTB, N*Sync, and The Backstreet Boys. Henry Jenkins (1992) writes of the discursive constructions of the hysterical female fan that are:

¹ These scenes of fanaticism that take place outside concert venues are depicted in the opening scenes of the documentary film, Justin Bieber: Never Say Never, which was released by Paramount Studios in 2011. ‘Baby’ was Bieber’s first number one hit and is rumored to be the highest-certified single in history.
Manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls who try to tear the clothes off the Beatles or who faint at the touch of one of Elvis’s sweat-drenched scarves, or the groupie servicing stars backstage after the concert in rockumentaries and porn videos. (p. 15)

Justin Bieber is a part of a resurgence of boy bands, a growing popularity that also includes One Direction and The Wanted. Despite whatever seems to be the object of fandom, however, the resonant images of the fan-girl constructed and distributed by the media create “a typology and meaning in the collective public discourse” (Pressler, 2010, p. 16) of what it means to be a fan.

In similar ways, representations of what it means to be a child have emerged over time. While there is some debate about the chronological span of childhood, most dominant representations suggest that it is a time separate from adulthood, during which the child is growing up to be an adult. Sorin (2005) describes the three historically dominant images of the child:

The innocent child who comes into the world as a ‘tabula rasa’ (blank slate) to be gently acculturated by omniscient adults; the evil child, a product of their parents’ intimacy, who must have the evil beaten out and replaced by good; the ‘miniature adult’ who lives and works alongside adults who are essentially the same, but larger versions of the child. (p. 13)

There are many other images of childhood as well. Among these include the construction of the noble/savior child, who is independent and takes care of others, including adults, as s/he serve as a mediator and peacemaker. Views of the agentic child run counter to images of an innocent or powerless child and understand childhood as a time when
children “make sense of their world through active interaction with it” (p. 18).

Conceptualizations of childhood certainly overlap, interact, and influence the ways in which we understand children and their encounters with popular culture. But they also stand as representations for what childhood is and create fairly fixed notions of who we understand children to be (see Buckingham, 2011; Pressler, 2010; Sorin, 2005; UNESCO, 2010). As Crockett (2013) suggests, “so long as we think [about girls, about childhood, about fan culture, about philosophy itself] according to a pregiven image of thought, we are stuck in a representational mode of thinking” (p. 42) - a mode of thinking which restricts us from considering new possibilities of childhood and children’s encounters. In this way, representation “subdues” our thinking (Roy, 2004, p. 20) by:

[Failing] to capture the affirmed world of difference. Representation has only a single center, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything but mobilizes and moves nothing. (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 55-56 in Roy, 2004, p. 20)

*Emergent Childho asphalt Bieber Fan Culture*

In this dissertation, I work to move beyond representational thought as I engage with new possibilities of childhood and fandom through reconceptualizing childhood as emergent and, specifically, as emergent in relation to Bieber fan culture. Influencing these considerations is the work of prominent scholars who consider a myriad of ways in which children, youth, and adults encounter popular culture. Jenkins’s (1992, 2006) extensive work in developing ideas around participatory culture emphasizes the complexity of the relationships between the public and popular culture. He asserts, as do others (see Buckingham, 2011), that views of popular culture consumption often lead to
constructions of the fan as victimized, manipulated, and at times, frenzied. These perspectives emerge in regard to images of the child as one who is to be protected from the influences of consumer culture and, thus, neglect to consider consumption as a dynamic, relational, and often unpredictable “networked practice” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 255). My efforts are also informed by Dyson’s (1997, 2003) ethnographic research in early childhood classrooms. She considers the ways in which children appropriate images, language, and texts from popular culture as a means of creating their own childhoods through the negotiations of their identities and social groups. Dyson’s work guides me in rethinking Buzz Lightyear-Wolf-Spiderman, who drew from popular culture daily in his kindergarten interactions and play to create new and dynamic opportunities to be a child in the relational field that included our classroom and school.

This dissertation both is and is not about Justin Bieber culture. In an important sense, this study of Bieber fan culture might be understood as offering a way of thinking more generally beyond or differently than the usual representations about children’s encounters with popular culture. In that vein, I ask how we might think beyond the representations of the fan-girl – regardless of the material of that fandom (e.g., Bieber, The Jonas Brothers, NKOTB) -- to consider what might be emerging between, among, and to the fans’ bodies and the fans as a body. I consider the emotional displays, the passion that seems to unfold through the earsplitting squeals and the tingly sensation of kissing a plastic member of NKOTB. I ask the general question of what is happening in the passionate encounters between girls and popular culture.

At the same time, Bieber culture puts very specific ideas, images, and practices in motion and its specificity cannot be disregarded. From the early onset of his popularity,
Justin Bieber has been known for the attention that he gives his fans at concerts, handing out tickets to those waiting outside concert venues and surprising fans with backstage passes. He also attends to fans via social networking sites like Twitter and Instagram. Indeed, his Twitter biography reads, “My love pours out on the ones who have been there since the beginning. I will be forever grateful. Beliebers are the strongest, most compassionate people”\textsuperscript{2}. Bieber frequently responds directly to fans on the Internet and at the conclusion of his concerts, gives credit to his fans for helping him become a global celebrity. Often fodder for tabloid news websites, Bieber is also known to respond publically to his critics and in doing so appears to mobilize his fans as they come to his defense. All to say, there is a unique accessibility between Bieber and his fans that seems to reinforce their sense of loyalty and devotion to him and because he is a mainstay in media reports, his fans may have a sense that they “know” him, thereby strengthening those attachments.

\textit{Deleuzian Encounters}

As much as this dissertation is an exploration of childhood in relation to girls’ encounters with Bieber fan culture, it also demonstrates my intense studies for the past four years of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Many of the questions that emerged for me during and after watching the Justin Bieber film were inspired by the writings of Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, and Deleuze and his student, Claire Parnet. Only weeks before my movie theater encounter with Justin Bieber and his fans, I had joined a reading group that was deeply engaged with Deleuze and Guattari’s \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia} (1987). There was much about the

\textsuperscript{2} Accessed from \url{https://Twitter.com/justinbieber} on January 9, 2014.
philosophers’ writing that appealed to me, particularly their “nomadic thought,” which, as Perry (2013) suggests is “positioned in contrast to representational thinking and in this way rejects the notion of unified thinking” (p. 94). The nomadic thinking that emerges in this dissertation is my project in wondering in an effort to engage with new and different possibilities of how children might live and of how we might live with them.

Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) summarize Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical project thusly:

For Deleuze and Guattari, the aim of philosophy is the creation of concepts which enable something new to be thought or felt. Such concepts have the power, when inserted into concrete fields or assemblages, to produce a change in that field; a change which may in turn lead to other, potentially revolutionary changes.

(p. 2)

In my study of Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, I found myself poring over concepts like the rhizome, the nomad, assemblage, becoming, and desire in an effort to understand, only later to have my understandings upended by new articulations of the concepts in new contexts - in the assemblages of Deleuze and Guattari’s essays, conversations, in the reading group, and in my field notes and research jottings. This upending emerged from an attempt to think about and employ concepts as Deleuze and Guattari intended them to be employed. But what I missed in those initial readings is the important notion that philosophy is not meant to define and employ concepts with predetermined intention. Rather, a Deleuzian philosophy is one that plugs in concepts in an attempt to move beyond their signification so that we might think differently about what emerges in the encounters of in childhood, in fandom, in qualitative research, in our daily lives, and
As Davies (2009) suggests, “Deleuzian concepts are intended to unsettle old ways of thinking, inviting us to engage in life as a series of encounters that unfold into the not-yet-known” (p. 13). The philosophical task of creating and inventing new concepts (Bogue, 2003; Buchanan, 1997b; Semetsky, 2006) is one that creates space to reconsider childhood and the ways in which girls encounter Bieber fan culture beyond familiar representations. Extending and experimenting with Deleuzian concepts creates new encounters which allow me to disrupt what I remember about my own fandom as a child, what I assume when I view and review the footage of fan-girls in the Justin Bieber film, and what I observed and encountered during participant observation research in a university art program and at Justin Bieber concerts.

Entangled with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of concepts is their emphasis on a positive ontology - one that attends to the immanence of life by “[affirming] the possibilities of becoming something else” (Sotirin, 2011, p. 117). For Deleuze, this *something else* is difference; not difference in opposition to anything, but difference in itself (Crocket, 2013; Hughes, 2009). “Real difference is a matter of how things become different, how they evolve and continue to evolve beyond the boundaries of the sets they have been distributed into” (Williams, 2003, p. 60 in Davies & Gannon, 2009, p. 17) through encounters in ever-changing assemblages. This difference moves beyond representation, noticing and attending to the heterogeneity that comprises who we are becoming individually, as social bodies, and as a society.

Deleuze’s concept of difference allows me to consider the ways in which children play with and perhaps extend beyond the boundaries that appear to be set for them by
popular representations of childhood and children’s engagements with popular culture.

Working through my appropriations of Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, in this dissertation I reconsider the multiple encounters of the Bieber fan-girl not as reifications of already in place representations, rather as processes that produce possibilities for new and different ways of being and new realities that are immanent in each moment and dependent upon ever-changing assemblages of the girls’ bodies, the social body, and materials and technologies with which the girls interact. As O’Sullivan (2006) writes:

An object of recognition is then precisely a *representation* of something always already in place…The encounter then operates as a rupture of our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities. It produces a cut, a crack. However this is not the end of the story, for the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently. (p. 2)

I find the contemplation of the encounter as a *rupture of our habitual modes of being* to be quite profound; encounters have the potential to be disruptive as they create new possibilities for experiencing, being in, and thinking about the world. Encounters are not straightforward. They overlap, connect and perhaps disconnect, and intersect in unexpected ways, emerging and reemerging anew in different contexts and with variable bodies.

This emergence of encounters and what is produced within them disrupts popular representations of girls and their relationships with Bieber fan culture and as Masny (2013) writes, these “disruptions bring on transformation, becoming” (p. 339). I am transformed as a fan myself as I become aware of - even if I do not fully understand - the
complexities of my Barbie doll play. I am transformed as a qualitative researcher who encounters children engaging so passionately with things and ideas that matter to them. The disruptions in what I think I know transform me as a writer as I entangle myself with the possibilities of qualitative research and fan culture. And there is transformation for Bieber fan-girls themselves. Drawing on Spinozan philosophy, Deleuze and Parnet (2007) described how individuals are composed of disparate parts, enabling them to function as multiplicities, and elaborate on the potential of encounters to affect the body:

   Each individual is also himself composed of individuals of a lower order and enters into the composition of individuals of a higher order. All individuals are in Nature as though on a plane of consistence whose whole figure they form, a plane which is variable at each moment. They affect each other insofar as the relationship which constitutes each one forms a degree of power, a capacity to be affected. Everything is simply an encounter in the universe, a good or bad encounter. (pp. 59-60)

In this dissertation I take up the transformations that emerge in these good and bad encounters and consider the affective becomings that are generated when bodies and materials come into relationship with one another, not necessarily in an effort to make sense of them but to consider the possibilities of what might be produced in encounters between the familiar and unfamiliar.

   Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) and Deleuze and Parnet’s (2007) descriptions of transformations as becomings emerge in rhizomatic encounters and serve as a conceptual shift away from representational, static notions of being. There is uncertainty and nonlinearity in the connections that are created between children, Justin Bieber, his
music, song lyrics, social networking sites, secret bedroom spaces, my research, and on and on. This uncertainty that is inherent in Deleuze’s positive ontology eludes interpretation; it is not a matter of what girls’ encounters with fan culture mean or what my encounters as a fan and a researcher mean, but what is produced in those encounters; what might these rhizomatic encounters in fan culture do?

The Rhizome & Mapping New Possibilities

One of the most important concepts developed in Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking and writing is the rhizome and to take up their positive ontology is to recognize that encounters always carry the potential to be rhizomatic. Posited in opposition to an arbolic, tree-like hierarchical system of organization that constructs binaries and seeks to define and categorize, the rhizome is comprised of lines that connect, rupture, and reconnect in often unexpected or unanticipated ways (Leafgren, 2009). Hagood (2009) describes the rhizome as “a tuber that spreads from horizontal, bulbous underground shoots and flourishes in unforeseen and unpredictable directions” (p. 39); rhizomes are not absolute, determinate, top-down structures. Rather, rhizomes involve movement, connectivity, intensity, and change. Bogue (1989) elaborates:

Rhizomes...are...non-hierarchical, horizontal multiplicities which cannot be subsumed within a unified structure, whose components form random, unregulated networks in which any element may be connected with any other element. (p. 107)

A rhizome can be thought of as a network of lines that spread outwards, rather than upwards, and that connect disparate, heterogeneous elements. These connections and what emerges from them are often unanticipated, which is one reason why rhizomatic
thinking, writing, and becoming is so exciting; there is an element of experimentation in considering the ways in which transformative connections occur and, more importantly, what is produced in the movements of those connections.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described the lateral nature of the rhizome as a system of lines that are dependent on one another and that “encompasses change, complexity and heterogeneity” (p. 120). There is no beginning or end to the rhizome; it is about middles and as Alvermann (2000) suggests, “it is by looking at middles that we begin to see how, in perspective, everything else changes” (p. 116). In other words, rhizomatics entails a consideration of the in-betweens, the movements and flows that propel encounters between children and Bieber fan culture and create space for the emergence of difference.

This dissertation is a rhizomatic project in which I map multiple encounters between girls, Justin Bieber, fan culture, and representations of childhood across various spaces, including an art studio, YouTube, and concert venues. As a rhizome, the dissertation:

- Is open and connectable in all to its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, and susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, and adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 11)

In this way, there are no specific entry points or conclusions in this dissertation, so potentially any of the chapters could be a starting point. There are at times reiterations of ideas and concepts that I plug into new assemblages and contexts. As a map, my movements through Deleuzoguattarian philosophy and my considerations of childhood
spread outwards and back, rather than toward any specific destination. It is through rhizomatic mapping that the encounters between and among girls and the materials and bodies they encounter might be considered in terms of uncertainty, experimentation, and productivity (O’Sullivan, 2006). Mapping looks for newness - the difference - that emerges from one moment - from one encounter - to the next, rather than an interpretation that might return us to representations of being.

Tracing, though not set in binary opposition to mapping, is an analytical tool that considers the already in place representations of girlhood, fandom, and qualitative research. As Hagood (2009) writes, “tracings are important because they show deep structures that ground ideas and that are always at work, while maps point to fissures, illustrating the instability, flow, and movement of ideas in different directions” (p. 40). Tracings, then, show the reifications of what it means to be child and fan and researcher, whereas mappings show the becomings of these bodies in the various assemblages of which they are a part. It is not a matter of creating a rhizomatic map or a tracing in an effort to think about childhood and encounters with fan culture. Both the generation of a cartography of fan-girls’ encounters with Bieber culture and a consideration of the preexistent conceptions of girlhood and fan culture create space to think differently about girls’ relationships with fan culture; rhizomatic mapping allows for certainty to be shattered (Mac Naughton, 2005).

O’Sullivan (2006) writes, “we might say that we are caught, as beings in the world, on a certain spatio-temporal register: we ‘see’ only that we have already seen. We see only that which we are interested in” (p. 47). At the heart of this dissertation is an effort to see beyond that which we have already seen in attempt to shatter our own
knowing about the ways in which girls encounter fan culture and the childhoods that emerge in those encounters.

Research events and the rhizomatic connections that emerge between them in this dissertation are middles, at times intersecting, rearticulating, and perhaps contradicting one another. A rhizomatics of girls’ encounters with Bieber fan culture is a complex endeavor; one that attends to the tentativeness of the relationships themselves and the potential that emerges in those relationships. In sum, my plugging in of Deleuzoguattarian concepts is an effort not to interpret the relationships among girls and Bieber culture in terms of what they mean, for this reduces the relationships to signification, nor is it an effort to definitely proclaim that one thing or another is or is not emerging in those encounters. I am not trying to dispute or overturn or overwrite earlier feminist or cultural studies perspectives on childhood or girls’ fandom. Rather, this project in rhizomatics creates space for me to consider, what else might be happening in these encounters?

Dissertation Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I engage with rhizomatics in order that (1) the productivity of Deleuzoguattarian concepts might be illuminated by my research and (2) the difference that emerged in the encounters highlighted by my research might be illuminated by Deleuzoguattarian concepts. In chapter two, I consider the uncertainty and tentativeness of becoming a qualitative fan-researcher. Drawing from excerpts from my field notes and reflecting on my own Justin Bieber fandom, I think about unexpected encounters that created liminal spaces in which I negotiated the relationships with children and materials that I came into over the course of my research. I conceptualize
my research as a nomadic adventure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; St. Pierre, 1997, 2000), which provided opportunities for me to be open to the affective intensities that moved through the assemblages that I was a part of, disrupting what I thought it meant to be a participant observer and creating new possibilities for emerging in relational research.

In chapter three, I connect with becoming and assemblage in order to think about a viral YouTube video that features a visibly upset young girl named Cody, who sobs and pleads for Justin Bieber, as she interacts with a video camera, her sister, and her mother. In a close consideration of the ways in which bodies and materials assemble and are assembled in the video, and in responses to the video, I map the Deleuzoguattarian conception of desire as productive flows, which connect bodies in frequently unexpected ways and create opportunities for new affects, emotions, realities, and ideas to emerge. In reimagining desire through a Deleuzoguattarian lens, I think differently about the ways in which Cody emerges in her encounters with childhood, family, fan culture, and YouTube (Buchanan, 1997b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, 1987; Deleuze & Parnet, 2007; Jordan, 2005).

In chapter four, I consider two vignettes, in which I describe rather disparate ways that children engaged with Bieber fan culture. The first involves the encounters of an eleven-year old who created comics depicting a multiplicity of deaths for Justin Bieber. The second vignette emerges from my research at concert venues and explores the relationships between a thirteen-year old girl and other fan-girls in the hours leading up to a Justin Bieber concert. I consider the encounters described in both vignettes with the concepts of becoming and machinic assemblage as I map the movements and flows
within the relational fields of an art studio and a concert venue as producing new possibilities for ways in which a becoming-child and becoming-fan emerge in relation to other bodies, materials, and varying contexts.

I conclude the dissertation with a return to children’s encounters with popular culture in classroom spaces. I wonder about what nomadic pedagogy might entail and the ways in which attending the affective dimension of our encounters with children might create space to think differently about the potentials of school assemblages, particularly for teachers and students. Entangled with these wonderings are my efforts to think about childhood as emergent and relational, contingent upon the experiences that are immanent to the bodies and materials that have the potential to affect and to be affected by the connections that are made and remade in our encounters. This leads me to a consideration of childhood as non-teleological. I wonder about childhood in and of itself being conceived as a capacity to be open to the affective and relational encounters from which experience and new ways of becoming emerge (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007; Hickey-Moody, 2013).

Ultimately, this dissertation is an ontological experiment in which I become entangled with the tentative and uncertain, and the affects and becomings that are produced in childhood and fan culture, which when encountered amidst Deleuzoguattarian philosophies become “situations [I] no longer know how to react to, in spaces in which [I] no longer know how to describe” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1989, p. xi in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. vii). It is a shift in thinking from trying to understand what qualitative research, childhood, and fan cultures might mean toward an immanent thinking-and-becoming in my efforts to “resist the containment of interpretivism”
(Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 3) that leads back to representational thought. My goal for this dissertation is to create new connections to ways in which we might think about research and becoming with children and my hope is that this experiment might lead others to be willing to become uncertain, too, to be willing to have more questions than answers, and to engage with the aliveness that is childhood.
“This is what the inside of my brain must look like,” I think to myself as I turn on my camera and take a picture. Flashes of light change color so quickly - from red to purple to blue and back to red. It is as though every time I blink, a new hue floods the space in front of me. Yellow spotlights sweep across the arena and fireworks explode from the stage. This cannot be safe - pyrotechnics inside a building that is packed with tens of thousands of people. The crowd noise is unbelievable. The screams of the children behind me make the cilia in my right ear vibrate and, with limited legroom in the upper bowl of the Verizon Center, I am afraid that feeling imbalanced, I might topple over onto the people in the rows in front of me. There are adults on either side of me who stay in their seats. Maybe I should sit down, too. The bass gets louder and the lights seem to get brighter. I think that the concrete under my feet may be swaying. Maybe if I brace the back of my legs against my chair I will feel a bit more stable. Jaden Smith is
somewhere on the stage rapping about something, but I cannot make out the words.

Instead, I close my eyes and lift my hand to my chest. I place my palm over my sternum and feel the vibrations of this moment in my bones. My body pulsates to its very core.

There is something so exciting about these impacts of this concert on my body - the shaking, vibrating, trembling, swaying, blinding - that is so out of the ordinary and unlike anything I have ever been a part of before. I never anticipated the visceral experiences that I would encounter this evening and I wonder about the vibrations, in particular. I wonder if the children around me - with their smaller frames and closer proximity to the swaying concrete floor - feel vibrations in their bodies, too. Do they even notice the tremors or are they focused on other things? What are these affects to my body - the affects that I perceive and perhaps those that I do not - doing to and with me, a researcher at a Justin Bieber concert?

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Uncertain Encounters

The image and brief vignette above emerged from my encounters during the opening act at a Justin Bieber concert in Washington, DC in November 2012. The concert was one of two where I engaged in participant observation research in the hours leading up and during the concerts themselves. As I described in the vignette, I frequently found myself in a surprising state of disequilibrium, in terms of the ways in which my body was affected by the sensory experiences of the concerts, but also as I wrestled with what it meant to be a fan and to do fandom and qualitative research with children at a concert. If I were to sit down during the concert performance, would I still look like a fan? Did my small notebook in which I jotted my field notes make me seem
as though I did not belong? Was my Justin Bieber t-shirt enough to identify me as a fan? Did I want to be identified as a fan? A researcher? Both? Was anyone else even paying attention to me or was I just giving myself a hard time?

My wonderings about becoming fan-researcher emerged in other spaces of my research with children and Bieber fan culture, as well. In chapter three of this dissertation, I consider a viral YouTube video of a seemingly distraught child, who cried and talked about Justin Bieber with her mother and sister. The four-minute video has frequently left me confused and frustrated, and has at times led to feelings of bewilderment as I watch a mother ask questions that appeared to agitate her young daughter. Likewise, while engaging in research with a child in a university art program, which I consider in chapter four, I experienced an odd sense of uncertainty as I bumbled through interview questions, followed her around the studio space, and wondered if my responses to her statements about comics she drew, most of which depicted the death of Justin Bieber, could have been better or more productive.

I do not mean to suggest that the uncertainty I experienced in my research with children was synonymous with a lack of confidence. To the contrary, I consider myself a capable qualitative researcher in terms of my familiarity with methods for engaging in fieldwork, data collection, and analysis. I became quite aware, however, of how contingent and tentative those methods were in the actual moments of research as the movements of my body and the bodies of those around me, interview protocols and recording equipment, unanticipated and ephemeral squeals and intense affects, anxieties, and frustrations altered the fields of my research from one moment to the next.
Contributing to the material, affective, and emotional contingencies of research was Justin Bieber himself. It seemed as though his name appeared in national news and tabloid headlines consistently over the course of this project and stories about him, his associates, and his interactions with his fans became part of my ongoing consideration of children’s relationships - and my own relationship - with Bieber fan culture. Bieber’s philanthropic efforts to aid typhoon victims and pediatric cancer patients, his tenuous relationship with his girlfriend, possible prosecution for alleged assault on his neighbors, speculation about his drug problems, and arrest for driving under the influence and drag racing undoubtedly influenced my perceptions of him and led me to wonder about my own identifications as a fan. There was indeed so much that emerged in the encounters of concerts, YouTube videos, university art programs, and constantly unfolding news reports that I never could have anticipated and which move me to think differently about what it might mean to engage in research with children and negotiate the complexity of becoming fan-researcher.

In this chapter, I elaborate on Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of the nomad to think about the contingencies and tentativeness in my research. I draw on Deleuze and Guattari’ philosophies because, as Ellsworth (2005) suggests, “we need concepts and languages that will grasp, without freezing or collapsing, the fluid, continuous, dynamic, multiple, uncertain, non-decomposable qualities of experience in the making” (p. 11). To conceptualize research as experience in the making is to understand that I did not enter a preexisting field of study at concert venues or in the art program or even in online spaces like YouTube and Twitter. Rather, the field work in which I engaged and the ways I engaged with it emerged and were produced in the moments of research. This seems to shatter the notion of the researcher seeking to understand or interpret an event or a behavior based on preconceived methodology or design in favor of a research methodology that is much more experiential and relational. As Mazzei and McCoy (2010) suggest, this kind of emergent qualitative research prompts “previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge” (p. 504), and is contingent on the affects and parts of the fan-researcher assemblage.

It may seem as though this chapter is a lot about me, and I suppose that it is. But it is as much about the children, the materials, the flows and intensities that created our encounters, and the affects that gave “‘color’, ‘tone’, or ‘texture’ to [the] experiences” (Grossberg, 1992, p. 57) that were produced in the spaces between child, fan, researcher, and the other parts that comprised the relational field of research. My considerations, then, are driven by post-humanist philosophies which decenter and destabilize the [human] subject; she becomes contingent and she experiments within the conflicting discourses and cultural practices from which she emerges (St. Pierre, 1997). A part of a
productive network of fluid relationships in the spaces between and among children, bodies, ideas, and heterogeneous materials, I was “emergent in a relational field” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 527) and became material that inter-related with other materials, affecting and being affected by one another in the spaces of research-childhood-fan culture assemblages (Wise, 2005; Mazzei & McCoy, 2010). Following a consideration of my own fandom as it relates to Justin Bieber specifically, I attend to the moments of affective intensity that passed through assemblages of my research and then conceptualize the ways in which a nomadic methodology created space for such intensities to emerge, creating new and uncertain possibilities for engaging in qualitative research.

“So Are You A Bieber Fan?”

As this dissertation primarily concerns childhoods in the context of fan culture, there is a need to deliberate on what constitutes fandom and popular attitudes toward fandom and to reflect on my own identifications with Justin Bieber fan culture. Jenkins (1992), who does extensive research with fan cultures, defines fan as:

An abbreviated form of the word, ‘fanatic,’ which has its roots in the Latin word ‘fanaticus.’ In its most literal sense, ‘fanaticus’ simply meant ‘Of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee’ but it quickly assumed more negative connotations. (p. 12)

Simply put, a fan is usually identified as someone who has attachments and loyalties to a person, group, or idea. But this simple definition becomes quite complex as the negative connotations mentioned by Jenkins permeate popular discourse about fandom and fan culture. The association between the “significantly affective nature of a fan’s
attachment” (Hills, 2002, p. 65) and the manifestation of emotions and irrationality prevail in discussions of fandom in scholarly research. The fan is an always-already pathological representation of the other, set apart from the “imagined subjectivity of [an ideal] rational self” (p. 5). The dichotomy between the rational subject and the emotional one dominates discussions of female music fans, in particular, who are often described as “frenzied or hysterical members of a crowd” (Jenson, 1992, p. 11; see also Baker, 2003, 2004; Fiske, 1992; Hills, 2002; and Lewis, 1992).

This brings me to considerations of my own Justin Bieber fandom. Over the course of this project, I found myself negotiating whether or not I was a fan of Justin Bieber, to what extent I might be a fan, and under what conditions my fandom might emerge. For instance, when I introduced myself as a graduate instructor at the beginning of each academic semester, my students often asked about my own teaching experience and research interests. “I think a lot about Bieber fan culture,” was my customary reply to the latter. “I think about the ways in which children interact with Justin Bieber, his music, one another, and the things that make up what I consider to be Bieber fan culture.”

“So are you a Bieber fan?” While I would explain that I attended to Justin Bieber to the extent that I could have informed conversations about him with those who might identify themselves as Beliebers, I continued to shirk any direct affirmation or denial. Indeed, I listened to Bieber’s music and read newspaper and magazine articles about him. I read through his posts on Twitter and Instagram occasionally and, if he became a trending topic on Twitter, I read through those tweets, too. My father sent me a large Justin Bieber card for my birthday and others gave me magazines with Bieber tear-out posters that I taped to the walls around my desk in my campus office. One semester, my
students gave me a Justin Bieber t-shirt, which I wore to both concerts where I conducted research in an effort to look like I belonged there. In fact, I observed two children wearing the same shirt, though slits had been cut in the sleeves and on the back of the shirt, so theirs had a much edgier look than mine.

All to say, I immersed myself in the material of Bieber culture an effort to learn about him and those who encounter him as fans, but I have never been comfortable claiming to be a fan of his. Perhaps I want to maintain some distance as a researcher studying children and their fan encounters. Perhaps the negative connotations of being a fan make me reluctant to take on that identification myself. More than anything, though, my resistance to call myself a fan dealt with a larger ontological project that worked to move beyond identification and representation. That is, my concern has never really been whether or not I am a fan of Justin Bieber. Rather, I have been interested in the “unfettering possibility to experiment with what a life can do and where a life might go” (Sotirin, 2011, p. 117) and, specifically, with what my encounters with Bieber fan culture might produce in terms of thinking differently about research as well as the potentials that participating in fandom might create for children (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) write, in qualitative inquiry there is an “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied” (p. 10). My immersion in the materials and stories of Justin Bieber led to emotional and intellectual attachments that sometimes produced my own unanticipated reactions to his behavior and his engagement with his fans. For example, soon after I began drafting this dissertation, Justin Bieber visited the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and he came under criticism for writing the following in the museum’s guestbook prior to his departure:
Truly inspiring to be able to come here. Anne was a great girl. Hopefully she would have been a belieber.\textsuperscript{9}

Critics were quick to call out Bieber’s narcissism while others, including The New York Times and The Washington Post referred to Anne Frank’s diary in which she described her bedroom walls being covered in popular culture artifacts of the day\textsuperscript{10}. On Twitter and Instagram, self-proclaimed Beliebers insisted that no harm was meant by Bieber’s comment.

As I turned the light on in my campus office the following Monday morning and saw the Justin Bieber posters hanging on the wall above my bookcase, I felt unease. Professors and colleagues had been emailing me and posting articles to my Facebook page as news of Bieber’s visit to the museum emerged and I spent the better part of the day wrestling with my own reactions to his comment and the public’s response to it. The tipping point for me came later in the day when images of Justin Bieber and one of his friends wrestling inside the Anne Frank House were released; Bieber and his friend played next to a mural of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. After staring at the image for a few moments, I removed the posters from the office walls, folded them, and put them in my desk drawer alongside a Bieber calendar, a Bieber birthday card, and a Bieber valentine made by one of my students.

\textsuperscript{9} The original Facebook post about Justin Bieber’s visit appears here: \url{http://tinyurl.com/bsd2oyw}, accessed April 15, 2013.
The disappointment and frustration that emerged for me in those moments had something to do with the fact that as a child, I was very fond of Anne Frank. In middle school, I entered a history competition and composed and performed a dramatic monologue in which I portrayed Miep Gies, the woman who was for a time responsible for keeping the Frank family safe from the Nazis. As a child, I came into relationship with Anne Frank and those who fought to save her. As a researcher, I felt as though Bieber, someone with whom I had also come into relationship as I read about him, listened to his music, followed his tweets, and encountered his fans, had somehow disrespected Frank’s memory. Even now, after months of reflection, language fails to convey what I experienced in those moments in my campus office. Just as I struggled to feel grounded in crowd at the Justin Bieber concert, there was something so visceral in the struggle between my affection for Anne Frank and my frustration with Bieber’s actions.

Removing the Bieber materials from my office space and putting them out of sight was an intentional change that I made to the researcher-Bieber-office assemblage - a change that was driven by my confusion and disappointment. But even prior to the removal of the posters and cards, I was changed as a researcher when my encounters with the images, storylines, notifications from professors and colleagues of Bieber’s message, and the memories of my own childhood relationship with Anne Frank produced anxiety about engaging even further with the idea of someone who, in all honesty, I found rather displeasing. These changes and modulations speak to the affective dimension of qualitative research and to the attention that we might give to ourselves as researchers as we come into relationship with the things that we study. I turn now to further
considerations of affect and the ways in which my research with Bieber fan culture created opportunities for me to experience research differently.

Affective/Affecting Research

There is very little literature that explores the affective dimensions of conducting research with fans. Instead, research on fan cultures has primarily been concerned with what Hills (2002) refers to as “fan knowledgeability” as researchers work to establish some sort of “discursive justification” or explanation for why and how fans engage with fan culture in the ways that they do (p. 66). It seems as though the explanations that emerge from the solicitations of fans feed into a narrative of representation as assumptions about what constitutes fandom are confirmed or denied. The focus of these discussions return to significations of what it means to be a fan, rather than what fan experiences might produce - for both the fan and researcher.

There was a shift for me from seeking justification to experiencing research differently at the Justin Bieber concert in Washington, DC, where I interviewed a thirteen-year-old girl named Ali\textsuperscript{11}. I was initially interested in learning Ali’s perspectives on the high-pitched, loud screams that Justin Bieber’s fans often produce. The screams erupted in waves prior to and during the concert and, as I described in the above vignette, were at times so intense and shrill that I could feel their impact on my physical body. The fans’ screams were also prominent in the movie that, in part, initiated this research. At the time, I was interested in what the screams meant and when I asked Ali why the fans scream as they do, she hesitated for a moment before replying. “It’s just...you get so excited, you don’t know what else to do.” This was toward the end of our informal

\textsuperscript{11} I return to my relationship with Ali and the other fans at the concert in my discussions of becoming-Belieber in chapter four.
interview on the sidewalk and Ali turned from me and, perhaps to show me how it is done or perhaps so impacted by the screams of the bodies around us, she let out a high-pitched squeal that I could never imagine making myself. With that, and a burst of laughter, she moved toward the crowd and joined them in singing the lyrics to one of Bieber’s songs.

Ali’s suggestion that “you get so excited, you don’t know what else to do” was her attempt to help me understand what was happening with the bodies of the fans who waited outside a Justin Bieber concert. There was such intensity as the bodies came together to form the crowd, totally immersed a shared sense of anticipation and elation. There was nothing particularly rational about the screams themselves. They were, rather, a manifestation of a body being affected by the energy passing through the crowd in that moment. Certainly a high-pitched, loud scream exudes excitement to a greater extent than proclaiming, “I am excited.” Sometimes, language is simply not enough. While Ali shared her expertise on the screaming fan, her response did something more for me as a researcher, in that it turned my attention to the energy that was all around me. Perhaps I would have to ask fewer questions, seek less justification, and just be in the moment with the children around me in order that I might understand or experience a sense of anticipation and elation, too.

In becoming attuned to my own experiences as I came into relationship with the fans, I attended to Hills’s concerns that research that pursues justification and explanation empties fandom from “the dimensions [that] most clearly define it…dimensions of affect, attachment, and even passion” (p. 65). It seems necessary to deliberate on affect in fandom and research, in particular, as it was an important component of Deleuze and
Guattari’s positive ontology and an extension of Spinoza’s interest in the potentials of the body. *What can a body do?* This question takes into consideration the corporeal body of the individual, the body of a group or crowd, as well as social bodies. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualized affect to account for the ways in which the encounters between bodies constitute becomings and carry the potential to enrich or depreciate life. In doing so, they were concerned with “experience in a non-interpretive manner” (Colman, 2010, p. 13). Their interest was in experience as relational and emergent in ephemeral, contextual, and ever-changing encounters between bodies. Colman offers this beautiful description of Deleuze’s affect:

Affect is the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact. As a body, affect is the transitional product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions and yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation, or ghost. In its largest sense, affect is part of the Deleuzian project of trying-to-understand, and comprehend, and express all of the incredible, wondrous, tragic, painful, and destructive configurations of things and bodies as temporally mediated, continuous events. (p. 11)

To think about research with children and fandom with Deleuzian affect is to attend to the unlimited and indescribable ways in which bodies are modulated by one another in our encounters; ways that cannot be predicted or predetermined because it is in the event of the encounter itself that produces the effect on the body. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote, “affects are becomings” (p. 256). They are the differences that change us, that allow us to feel life as they circulate in the assemblages of childhood, fan culture, and research. Affects are what make our encounters alive and filled with potential.
When we return to the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, we can consider the affects that circulated in the venue-concert-fans-researcher assemblage. As Massumi (2002) suggests, the affects of that assemblage could not be “pinned on a single ingredient.” It was, rather, the “directly relational notions” (p. 228) between my body, the bodies around me, the lights and sounds, swayings and vibrations, and the other parts of the assemblage, such as my intention to do research and collect data, which comprised the research event of Kortney-experiencing-opening-act-of-a-Justin-Bieber-concert. Had one ingredient or part of that assemblage been absent or had it moved differently, the entire research experience would have been different.

Indeed, the modulation of the lights and bass and the waves of anxiety that washed over me as I envisioned myself falling out of the stands contributed to an “abstract” research and concert experience that pertained to “the transitional immediacy of a real relation - that of a body to its own indeterminacy” (p. 5). This indeterminacy speaks to the uncertainty and tentativeness that I explored early in this chapter and to the notion that my becomings as a fan-researcher were always emergent and in relation to the encounters of which I was a part from one moment to the next. I was consistently between fan and researcher, between child and adult, between observer and participant. In these liminal spaces, I became aware of the transmission of affects that impacted my body and my thinking about the inquiry that I was engaged with. This awareness is what has led me to conceptualize qualitative research differently.

In chapter four of this dissertation, I elaborate on the affective dimension of children’s encounters with fan culture as I conceptualize liminal spaces where affective intensities pass as becomings. It is worth noting here, though, that just as there were
relational modulations that I experienced as a researcher, children at the Justin Bieber concerts encountered these as well, just in their own terms and specificities. The energies and intensities that flowed between and affected children’s bodies fueled their powers of existence in their encounters with bodies and materials, as they felt anticipation and anxiety, and as words failed to describe what it was that they were experiencing. Some of the modulations to the children’s bodies may have imperceptible to me (i.e., the vibrations they may have felt as the bass shook the concert venue or the trepidation or anxiety that may have emerged as they stood in a mass of bodies, high above the floor). Other affective intensities that passed through the children manifested in their screams, their bursting into song together, and at least three times during my observations prior to the Washington DC concert, that prompted them to run as a swarm down the sidewalk to other locations outside the concert venue.

To be sure, when I initially encountered the children at the Justin Bieber concerts, I had a difficult time seeing beyond the representational images of fans that, as Jenson (1992) describes, understand the fan to be:

Vulnerable...to irrational loyalties sparked by sports teams or celebrity figures.
As a member of the crowd, the fan becomes irrational, and thus easily influenced.
If she is female, the image includes sobbing and fainting, and assumes that an uncontrollable, erotic energy is sparked by the chance to see or touch a male idol.

(p. 15)

At times, I found myself resisting a tendency to be cynical about how stereotypical the girls’ behaviors seemed: their squeals, songs, cries, and apparent mob mentality as they occasionally mobilized as a group and then ran up the sidewalk in Washington, DC,
essentially taking over an entire city block. Additionally, my thinking about the affective intensities in the crowd of fans does not undo the assertion that some of the children may have wanted to see and touch Bieber and prior to the concert in Pittsburgh, PA, where he waved to the crowd from a nearby parking lot, there were many who fell to the ground in tears after the screaming subsided.

Figure 2: Justin Bieber waves to the crowd before his concert in Pittsburgh, PA in November 2012.

In becoming aware of my own affective experiences in moments of my research I was able to engage with the possibility that the encounters between children and Bieber, though they may appear to reify stereotypical fan behavior, are laden with intensities that impact the children’s bodies. Sometimes, as Ali suggested, there is not an explanation for why children engage with fan culture in ways that they do, but it took a different kind of research - one that opened me up to the ways in which I was affected from one moment to the next - to figure that out.
Nomadic Moves & The Body without Organs

So far in this chapter, I have attended to the uncertain and unexpected encounters in this research project that led me to wonder about my own fandom and about the affective dimension of conducting research with children and Justin Bieber fan culture. In this final section, I borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to conceptualize this research that is at times uncertain and tentative as nomadic inquiry, which creates space for improvisation, experimentation, and the emergence of a different kind of research experience. The nomad is “characterized by movement and change” (Sherbine & Boldt, 2013, p. 84), becoming-researcher in response to what emerges in assemblages of qualitative research. In nomadic inquiry, “uncertainty and disorientation are the rule, rather than the exception” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 506).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) developed the concept of the nomad in their ongoing considerations of the production of difference through the rhizomatic movements of encounters - encounters between child and researcher and fandom and concert venue and Justin Bieber and screams and song lyrics and, and, and. The smooth spaces in the thresholds between encounters are where the indeterminate, unexpected changes in research and in the researcher emerge. In the smooth spaces of the nomad, the researcher takes a “line of flight” (p. 277), which allows for something new to emerge as the boundaries of territories established on the grounds of representation [of qualitative research[er], of child, and of fan] are broken through. It is by a line of flight that “a pure flow of creativity [is] created” (Jordan, 1995, p. 132) and new and unexpected movements in research, as well as in childhood and fandom, are produced. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote that nomads maintain “the possibility of springing up at any point;
[their] movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or
destination, without departure or arrival” (p. 353). Nomads create smooth space for the
potential of movement - for lines of flight - to emerge in order that life and subjectivity
might be emergent, relational, contingent, and uncertain.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) contrasted the smooth space of the nomad with its
lines of flight and deterritorializations with striated space, the latter of which deals with
classifiable qualities, and where movements are defined in advance, rather than
improvisational. Striated spaces dominated my early qualitative research when I was
reliant on and had to plan and articulate, for the Institutional Review Board for example,
the ways in which I would enter the field and methods for data collection, interview
protocols, and other components of a deterministic research design. Striated spaces
imposed order in qualitative research as I engaged with structured, intentional, and
interior functions, like when I sought to understand the screams of exuberant fans so that
I could code or interpret the behavior in one way or another, and when I was more
cconcerned with doing what a researcher does than I was experiencing research.

During my fieldwork at the Justin Bieber concerts and in my research in the
university art program, lines of flight were moments of my being there, or rather, my
“becoming present, active, and entangled” (Schulte, 2011, p. 23) with the children and
with the flows, desires, affects, and intensities that energized the encounters between our
bodies and the other parts of the research-assemblage. This involved settling into a
discomfort that afforded opportunities to experience data, to feel it, to be affected by it,
and to come into relationship with it. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualized the
plane of immanence, from which these tentative experiences emerge as the Body without
Organs (BwO). The BwO functions to dismantle particles that have organized themselves into structured, fixed, and molarized forms. In other words, the BwO works counter to discourses that reify representational images of the researcher, child, and fan by “opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage” (p. 160) to create space for experimentation in terms of the potentials for becoming. To illustrate these points, I turn to a moment during the concert in Pittsburgh, PA, the second Justin Bieber show that I attended. The following excerpt is from my expanded field notes:

It is hot in the Consol Energy Center. After shivering in the cold outside for seven hours, waiting with throngs of Justin Bieber fans, I at first welcome the rush of heat that relaxes my muscles and returns sensation to my fingertips. Soon, though, the heat is too much and I regret wearing my thermal long-sleeve shift underneath my Justin Bieber tee. I scramble for something to use to pull my hair back and off my neck. No luck. The arena fills quickly and there is a buzz around me about the opening act of the concert. Carly Rae Jepsen cancelled her performance and no one to replace her had been announced. It is hard to make out conversations over the squeals that start in one section of the arena and move around the outer bowl, like The Wave, but voices - high, shrill squeals that I can feel in my bones’ vibrations. An hour later, the arena goes dark and the squeals get louder (which I did not think was actually possible). I stand up, wedged between bodies, many of which hold smartphones in the air. Multi-colored flashes and then beams of light flood the stage - it looks like it is on fire at one point and a DJ, hardly visible, yells something into a microphone. There is a squealed response and a throbbing pulse beat shakes the space. I look to my right
and the sixteen-year old, at the concert for her birthday, squeals and tears streak her cheeks. Her body, and everyone else’s it seems, dances, jumps, bumps to the rhythm - bodies somehow moshed together despite rows of chairs separating them. I stand for a moment, unable to distinguish between light, sound, bodies - gripping onto the chair in front of me as I try to find something to focus in on. I am a researcher, after all. I am doing research. I need to focus. But then I loosen my grip, I lean toward the sixteen-year old, my shoulder rubbing against hers. We blend together, along with the thousands of others in the arena, a blur of bodies. I cannot distinguish between the squeals, the bass, the lights, the heat; it all flows together, sweeping me along with it.

It was this swirling of potential that comprised our Body without Organs, an “undifferentiated state that supports the connections” (Jordan, 2005, p. 13) of the Bieber concert-assemblage. I am certainly aware of the extreme sensory nature of the example. For me, though, creating a smooth space in at a Justin Bieber concert meant coming into relationship with those extremes that pushed me beyond the boundaries that kept me in more comfortable, striated spaces of qualitative research.

Figure 3: Making ourselves a Body without Organs at the Justin Bieber concert in Pittsburgh, PA.
St. Pierre (1997) understands affective research as that which embraces the uncertain and that produces:

A very different research process, a nomadic adventure that cannot be defined in advance because it takes advantages of flows and multiplicities and disjunctions **to make a different sense in different ways or to refuse to make sense at all.** (p. 413, my emphasis)

For the nomadic researcher, the adventure is in the trajectories of researcher and participant and materials and concert arena coming into relationship through the movements of lines of flight. If any sense was made in the Kortney-children-research-Bieber concert assemblage, it was made in the opening up to the potentials of bodies being affected and affecting one another, producing new ways of doing research and being with children. Roy (2003) reminds us that affective relationships in research can be produced as long as we “no longer remain passively bound to affects through sentiment, but [enter] the zone of [their] production” (p. 167). Moving into the space between what makes sense as researcher, child, fan, and, and, and, we become attuned to the encounters of which we are apart and the changes that those encounters produce for how we might live with one another.

As a nomadic researcher, I emerge in the flows and changes in my relationships with children and Bieber fan culture and I understand that the tentativeness and uncertainty that can be so overwhelming and anxiety inducing can also be quite exciting. There is potential in the encounters between researcher and child and becoming aware of that potential and its impact on the body might not offer many answers, but it does prompt new ways of thinking that privilege the affective dimensions that are so often cast
aside in the name of recognition, interpretation, and representation. Mazzei (2013) writes, “thinking with Deleuze and Guattari calls us not to seek evidence, or to make easy sense, or to fashion an interpretation, but to give a direction” (p. 108).

This direction is, for the purposes of this dissertation, a move toward a different way of thinking about children and childhood. I offer few answers, for as Masny (2013) reminds us, “answers shut down potentialities” (p. 232). Instead, I think with Deleuze and Guattari to reconsider and reconceptualize what it might mean to become-child in relationship in different contexts of Justin Bieber fan culture. In the next chapter, I work to reconceptualize desire as think about the possibilities of a three-year old who appears in a viral YouTube video professing a passionate love for Justin Bieber. I consider the assemblages that the child is a part of and what the multiple emergences of her subjectivities produce from one moment to the next.
CHAPTER 3: EMERGING CHILDHOODS & A REIMAGINED DESIRE

Figure 4: Cody sits in her sister’s lap and talks about Justin Bieber.

Three-year old, Cody, sits in her sister’s lap on the floor of a bedroom in their home. Cody’s mother is out of view; her voice is heard from somewhere behind the video camera. The camera is focused on the young girl, who is visibly upset. Cody cries, her face turns red, and her body appears to shake at times. Cody puts her head on sister’s shoulder, though as she grows seemingly more upset, she pulls her knees close to her chest and buries her face between her legs, her blonde hair falling in front of her eyes. More than once, Cody stops sucking her thumb or her hand to respond to her mother’s questions and comments and at times, Cody sobs so heavily that she gasps for breath.

“Cody is very sad today,” says Cody’s mother from near the camera. Cody, why are you sad, honey?”

“But…” Cody, replies, her voice weak and quiet.

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“Because why, honey?” her mother asks.

“Because I love Justin Bieber,” says Cody, her voice getting higher as she appears to fight back tears. Her sister stifles a smile and perhaps laughter.

“I can’t hear you,” Cody’s mother says, before Cody repeats her love for Justin Bieber a bit louder. “You love Justin Bieber?” her mother asks, checking for confirmation.

“Yes,” Cody nods, “that’s why I ran in my room.”

“You ran in your room because you love him?”

“Yeah,” Cody nods.

“Does that make you sad?” Cody’s mother asks. Cody’s sister has her arm draped over Cody’s shoulder as she stares at the floor in front of her, listening to the exchange.

“Yes,” Cody says, “because I don’t get a chance to see Justin Bieber all day.” Her words are hard to make out as she cries and wipes a tear from her cheek with the sleeve of her shirt.

“Because you don’t get to see him all day?” confirms Cody’s mother.

“Yeah.” Cody seems to be getting more upset.

“Why do you love Justin Bieber?” Cody’s mother asks.

“Because I know he loves me back,” Cody explains, taking a deep breath before she buries her head once more into her sister’s shoulder. Cody’s mother again repeats what Cody says, just to be sure.

Cody wails before her mother interrupts, “Cody?”

“What mommy?” Cody replies, sobbing now.
“We don’t have to cry because we love Justin Bieber,” her mother says matter-of-factly.

“Yeah we do. Sometimes.” Cody’s sobs sound guttural and she puts her fist in her mouth as she cries. Her sister raises her hand to cover her own smile. Cody continues to respond to her mother’s questions as she explains that it is Justin Bieber’s songs that make her cry because she loves Justin Bieber.

“Honey, you do know you’re only three years old, right?” Cody’s mother asks. Cody admits that she does before her mother tells her, “Well, when you’re three, you’re not supposed to cry over boys.”

At this, Cody’s despair increases. “I know, but I just love Justin Bieber,” Cody almost screams the words. She goes on to explain between sobs, “I just want him, that’s all. I want him to be one of my family.”

Cody’s sister speaks up over her sister’s sobs, “I swear if he sees this and he comes, she will be my favorite sister ever.”

“This is wrong, I’m just saying,” Cody’s mother seems to be speaking to the older sister before she redirects her conversation to Cody. “Honey, you’re three. You should not be crying over boys.”

The exchange between Cody, her mother, her sister, and the video camera continues for more than four minutes with Cody intermittently sobbing, wiping away tears, pleading with her mother, and readjusting her position in her sister’s lap. At one point, Cody’s sister begins to sing softly into her ear one of Justin Bieber’s most popular songs. As Cody’s sobs becomes louder, her mother says, “Hey, don’t torture her, you guys, stop.” Cody’s mother tells her three-year-old daughter that if she continues to cry
when listening to Justin Bieber’s songs, she won’t be allowed to listen to him anymore. While Cody’s sister seems shocked, looking at the camera with her mouth agape, this restriction seems acceptable to Cody who explains that the songs make her so sad, that she would rather not listen to them anyway. Cody sobs through the entire exchange, at times throwing her head back and wailing.

“Okay, I’m going to turn the video camera off now,” Cody’s mother says eventually. Cody shakes her head, “You don’t want me to? You want me to keep recording you?”

“Yes,” Cody replies. Her sister tilts her head back and laughs.

“Well all you’re doing is crying about Justin Bieber!” exclaims her mother. Crying and wiping away tears, Cody struggles to say something. “I don’t wanna...I don’t wanna...” but is interrupted when the phone rings in another room. “I bet that’s Justin Bieber!” Cody yells. Cody’s sobs suddenly become guffaws and her sister and mother join her as distress and sadness are abruptly replaced with glee-filled hilarity.

“I got it!” the mother exclaims.

As the laughter subsides, Cody jumps up and runs out of the room and the camera stops recording.

The mother’s final exclamation is, like so much else about this video, puzzling. What did Cody’s mother “get”? Was it her intention all along to gather footage of her daughter that could be posted to YouTube or another social networking site? Was Cody performing distress for the camera rather than really feeling it? What about the sister’s statement about the video potentially being viewed by Bieber himself? One thing that is
so distinct about Bieber fan culture is the access that fans have to the celebrity via the Internet. If a video, tweet, or comment is posted, there is a possibility that Bieber will respond. Was this the intention all along and, perhaps more importantly, does that matter?

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The above narrative and wonderings emerge from a video that was posted to the video sharing website, YouTube, in 2010. Cody’s sister originally posted the video and described it with the following:

This is my 3 yr old little sister. She loves everyone and on this day it was all about Justin!!! She didn’t take a nap and was very emotional LOL she had never done this before!!

Reactions to the video, which currently has more than twenty-nine million views, are mixed. Many comments that appear alongside the video describe how “cute” Cody was or how funny the last part of the video was [when Cody responds to the phone ringing]. One comment reads, “I can’t believe there’s someone who loves Justin more than me.”

When I shared the video at a conference in 2011, one colleague was disturbed by the ways in which Cody seemed to be commodified by a culture that encourages consumption and reproduction of images of popular culture. At a different conference in 2012, another colleague was stunned by how long the mother “allowed the crying fit to go on.” Viewers have also expressed concern that Cody has been victimized by Bieber fan culture, apparently inconsolable as she explained the lack she experienced without him in her family, her distress becoming a source of entertainment for internet viewers of the video.
Additionally, it seems as though Cody’s mother might have carried feelings of guilt for continuing to record her child’s lament when she said, “this is wrong” and then later moved to turn off the camera. At one point in the video, Cody’s mother insinuated that the girl is too young to display such emotion about boys. Could it be that Cody’s mother was simultaneously performing mother who protects her child from the influences of the adult world alongside mother who exploits her child for Internet recognition? Cody’s sister expressed interest in the video serving as a catalyst for meeting Justin Bieber (as indeed it did) perhaps more strongly than her concern for her sister’s well being. Admittedly, I read and reread the transcript in its entirety and view the video on a frequent basis as I try to make sense of the encounters, conversations, and sobs.

Understanding that the resonant images of an innocent childhood or Cody as victim or commodity will always be in play, I wonder about setting those aside in favor of a consideration of the ways in which Cody experimented with what it means to be a child and the ways in which her childhood subjectivities emerged in the relational fields of her bedroom, the Internet, Bieber fan culture, and, and, and. In other words, what other possibilities for living might there have been for Cody? In this chapter, I plug in the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of assemblage and the Body without Organs to think about the relationships in the YouTube video from an ontological perspective that considers the difference that emerged in the encounters between Cody, her mother and sister, the YouTube video, Justin Bieber, and the video’s audience. These considerations also include a reimaging of desire, which is normally thought of as “a lack of a fantasized object” (Olsson, 2009, p. 141). I make extensive moves in this chapter to reconceptualize
desire as machinic in that it works to generate encounters between bodies and materials and creates the potential for new and experimental ways of being to emerge.

Movement, Experimentation, & Desiring-Machines

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described assemblages, referred to as desiring-machines in *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), as processes of immanent networks of connections that vary in intensities, speeds, flows, and direction as a means to escape dualisms. They wrote:

In all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata, and territories, but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. (pp. 3-4)

The French term of assemblage is *agencement*, “usually translated as ‘putting together,’ ‘arrangement,’ ‘laying out,’ ‘layout,’ or ‘fitting’...it is not the *arrangement* or *organization*, but the *process* of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (Cousin et al. 1990, pp. 9-10 in Wise, 2011, p. 91). The concept of assemblage as processes, rather than fixed structures is an important one, as the process attends to the permeability, uncertainty, and tentativeness of assemblages, which change and become different through new engagements and relationships, new flows and intensities between bodies and materials. There is a machinic element of the assemblage as it is concerned with what is produced, rather than what it means or how it might be interpreted (Jordan, 1995). The machinic assemblage embodies “a materialism without subjectivity” and “embraces discontinuity and partiality without transcendence” (Grossberg, 1997, p. 85). That is,
rather than an assemblage acting upon a body - individual or social - the body itself materializes in the comings together of the parts of an assemblage and changes as the assemblage changes. There is a contingency among the parts in an assemblage.

Movement and difference are the norm as bodies are always in flux and always becoming (Buchanan, 1997b).

On one side, assemblages face the strata where they gain structure and become organized into a state of fixedness and being. On the other side, assemblages face the BwO, the “unfixed, shifting mass of movement, speeds and flows - where [assemblages] become dismantled and their elements circulate” (Wise, 2011, pp. 92-93). Thus, while assemblages are contingent and in flux, they also have the potential to become more structured. Without desire-propelled movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, they might fall apart (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007). Assemblages, in the movements of their encounters, make and remake territories and becomings (e.g., of childhood, of fandom, of research) and constantly produce new experiences and emotions and material and expressive functions.

Assemblages have many other names, including multiplicity, blur, and swarm; a coming together of heterogeneous parts that encounter one another, generating new potentials for becoming, and creating territories that “have a stake, claim, [and] express” (Wise, 2011, p. 92). Through their expression, assemblages offer a sense of identity, though it is not a fixed representation that is prescribed or anticipated ahead of time. Rather, assemblages as desiring-machines produce becomings that always carry the potential for something new and unanticipated to emerge.
Cody, her mother, her sister, the floor on which she sits, her sobs, questions and remarks, the video camera, and YouTube video and website, the millions of people who have viewed the video and Justin Bieber arranged as an assemblage. Indeed it was in the immanent development of this assemblage that Cody, her mother and sister, the materials and the realities that emerged in their encounters were constituted. In other words, what we observe in the YouTube video, including Cody herself, are the effects of the relationships among the materials in the assemblage; the bodies and the materials were not fixed by predetermined qualities of how to be. Rather, they existed in processes of becoming that emerged among their encounters with one another. In this way, the assemblage functioned expressively in terms of what Cody, her mother and sister, and the materials were and what they did from one moment to the next. From the assemblage emerged a haecceity of its parts - a thisness or immanent singularity of Cody that expressed who and what she was in a particular moment and in particular relationships with other parts; a thisness that changed in relation to changes in the assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Toward the end of the video clip, the ringing of a telephone entered the assemblage, creating a new line of departure for the conversation - a sudden shift from the production of a grief-stricken three year old to a young entertainer, drawing laughs from her audience with her enthusiastic declaration that it might be Bieber himself on the phone. Whether it is actually plausible that it was Bieber calling is not the point. Rather, the new encounter that materialized as the phone rang and the new assemblage that emerged created a new opportunity for Cody to interact and to be. Her becomings were ephemeral, changing from one moment to the next, becoming different. Likewise, there
were becomings that emerged for Cody’s sister and mother in the fluctuating assemblages depicted in the video. We observe the materialized negotiations of what it meant to soothe a child who was in anguish as Cody’s mother and sister moved between comforting Cody, being part of a potentially viral Internet video, being entertained by Cody’s displays of emotion, and being complicit in escalating Cody’s distress in their encounters with Cody, the camera, and the potentials of YouTube. I should point out that the whether or not Cody’s distress was genuine is not central to this discussion. It could very well be that the encounters that unfold in the bedroom led to feelings of sadness for Cody. It could also be that Cody was performing or doing sadness in order to contribute something very specific to the unfolding moment that we see in the video. There is a multitude of potentials of what Cody and what the video, when considered as assemblages, did. As Olsson (2009) writes, “children’s bodies as assemblages consist of organs, but also loads of processes, desires, and behaviors coming from all sorts of directions and sources“ (p. 47). What we observe in the video is an opportunity for Cody to engage with a myriad of feelings that from one moment to the next allow her to experience new sensations and new ways of interacting with her mother, sister, the camera, Justin Bieber, and ultimately, the world.

The assemblage of Cody-family-camera-YouTube-viewers generated, on a global scale, an Internet sensation that prompted new connections with television producers and viewers. Two months after the original video was posted to YouTube, Cody, her sisters, and her parents appeared on Jimmy Kimmel, Live!, an American late night talk show. The show’s host met with Cody and her family backstage and at one point handed a cell phone to Cody. After a brief conversation, during which Cody clasped her hand over her
mouth and seemed reluctant to speak to him, Justin Bieber appeared from around the corner and took her into his arms. Seemingly elated to be meeting Bieber, Cody reiterated that she was sad in the video because she did not get to see him all day and added that she wants her sister to marry him. This meeting on a nationally televised talk show speaks to the specificity of Bieber culture and to the capacity of Internet assemblages. Encounters that began in private bedroom spaces and that produced Cody’s experimentations and emerging childhoods carry the potential to create something new, unexpected, and very public.

*Rhizomatic Becomings: Becoming-Cody, Becoming-Fan & the BwO*

While a more exhaustive consideration of the rhizome and becoming emerges in other parts of this dissertation, they are immanent to the processes of the assemblage. Becomings are not processes of imitation, but of movement and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) invoked the image of the rhizome to describe these movements. Fancy (2010) writes, “unlike the root-tree model, the rhizome is characterized by principles of connection and heterogeneity” (p. 97) since:

Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be...[the rhizome] ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1998, p. 7)

Deleuze and Guattari understood becoming to be an immanent process, one that is constant, indeterminate, and which takes place in the “continuously changing relationships” (Olsson, 2009, p. 194) of the rhizomatic assemblage.
Considering the assemblage and fanaticism, children who encounter Justin Bieber fan culture are in a constant process of making, doing, experimenting, and playing. The identity of a Justin Bieber fan is not that of a static, finalized being; rather, the girls are seemingly negotiating, deterritorializing, and reterritorializing the ways in which they relate with one another, the materials, ideas, and language of Bieber fan culture - there is always difference in their encounters. In the parlance of Deleuze and Guattari, Cody is becoming-mother, becoming-video camera, becoming-YouTube, becoming-fan, and, and, and. The affective intensities with which these bodies and materials encounter one another create space for an emergence of new modes of existence for Cody; she is able to play with what it means to be moved to tears by love. She becomes something other than a manipulated, tearful child. In her becomings, she is transformed into something different, with new potentials of encountering the world.

Through her passionate encounters in rhizomatic assemblages, Cody is daughter and sister, but also entertainer to those who watch the YouTube video, quasi-celebrity as she gains national attention on a late night television show, and in some ways becomes an exemplar for others who participate in fan culture, who may or may not ever meet Justin Bieber or be featured in a viral YouTube video. That is the exciting thing about encounters in an assemblage; because materials are contingent on one another, bodies, contexts, and affects, there is difference in what they produce. Sometimes, they may produce an encounter with Justin Bieber and mostly they may not. The possibility, though, is there. The multitude of possibilities for how Cody could have been becoming are still processes; desire continues to propel these encounters in rhizomatic assemblages in order that Cody’s childhood does not become a fixed, molarized, resonant image.
These assemblages, these processes, and these becomings take place on the Body without Organs.

How might Cody have made herself a BwO? How might she have created in and on herself a plane of consistency of swirling potentials that for a moment freed her from the constraints of the resonant images of childhood toward productive encounters with Bieber fan culture? As Cody sat in her sister’s lap, affective intensities flowed through her material body and pushed tears out of her eyes, caught her breath, and caused her to shudder and wail as she attempted to respond to her mother. These movements of intensities allowed for the emergence of Cody’s encounters with her mother, sister, the video camera, and wonderings about love and Justin Bieber fan culture. Because Cody created a BwO for these intensities to manifest and to connect with other bodies and materials, emotions and affects and what it might mean to feel to love passionately emerged. Cody and her BwO used the bodies and materials to play with and at times challenge the hegemonic discourses of what is appropriate behavior for a three-year old girl and what it means to be a cultural consumer.

The desire that brought Cody into relationship with other bodies, the video camera, and a YouTube audience produced new opportunities and modes by which Cody might be, as she experimented with what listening, loving, crying, screaming, pleasing, laughing, and wailing might produce. The productions of desire and the assemblage are not always pleasurable and might indeed lead to feelings of discomfort as seemed to be the case for Cody at times. This was certainly true for some viewers of the video. This potential discomfort speaks to Deleuze and Guattari’s reconceptualization of what desire
is and what it can do as it works to produce encounters in the assemblage, affecting us in numerous ways.

**Deleuzoguattarian Desire**

Much of what emerges in the Deleuzoguattarian notion of the BwO, and subsequently their concept of desire, comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of psychoanalysis. They felt that practices of psychoanalysis contemporary to their time constrained the powers of desire and thus in their own conceptualization of desire, sought to free it from those constraints. Deleuze and Guattari critiqued the psychoanalytic view in which “the figure of Oedipus stands as a classically ‘overdetermined’ signifier” (Marks, 1998, p. 93) and thus codes productions of the unconscious based on the father-mother-child triad (Buckingham, 1997; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). As Marks (1998) writes, this tendency to code everything based on the Oedipus complex limits “any meaning which can be generated by an understanding of social and family relations” (p. 94). Deleuze and Guattari were interested in the immanent possibilities of becoming in the connections within any number of encounters with bodies, objects, and ideas that enter and change assemblages. Deleuze (1997) wrote:

> The father and mother are not the coordinates of everything that is invested by the unconscious. There is never a moment when children are not already plunged into an actual milieu in which they are moving about, and in which the parents as persons simply play the roles of openers and closers of doors, guardian of thresholds, connectors or disconnectors of zones. (p. 62)

In other words, Deleuze and Guattari were concerned by the tendency of psychoanalysis to ignore the plethora of encounters that children are a part of as they play, experiment,
and come into relationship with others and the desire that fuels those encounters. This is particularly interesting to me in light of Cody’s interactions with her mother amidst everything else that comprised the bedroom-sister-camera-YouTube assemblage. Fancy (2010) describes the psychoanalytic understanding of desire to be based in “representation of images and fantasies of that which we cannot have” (p. 102). This perspective assumes the always already subject that longs for an object, rather than the emergence of the subject in the relationships of the assemblage. In this reading of desire, Cody’s desire is Oedipal, longing for that which she cannot have, originally the impossible desire for possession of her parents which become sublimated into a feminized desire for Justin Bieber.

Deleuze and Parnet (2007) wrote, “desire is revolutionary because it always wants more connections and assemblages. But psychoanalysis cuts off and beats down all connections, all assemblages” (p. 79) as everything refers back to Oedipal relationships. Deleuze and Guattari (1977) critiqued the psychoanalytic view that conceives desire as either existing or not, to be directed at an object by a subject or not. They wrote:

To a certain degree, the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between production and acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon it as a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of a real object. (p. 25)

To understand Cody’s encounters with her mother, sister, Justin Bieber fan culture, the video camera, and YouTube as something more productive, the way we understand desire
must be turned on its head. The term *desire* itself must be deterritorialized from the standard definitions in order for us to “carry thought elsewhere” (May, 2005, p. 19).

Deleuze and Guattari conceptualized desire as a force that *just is*; it is a “social dimension...that has the capacity to form connections and amplify the power of bodies in their rhizomatic connection” (Fancy, 2010, p. 103). In this sense, desire is the force of becoming, existing alongside the BwO, which produces the passionate encounters between heterogeneous particles of the assemblage; encounters from which becomings emerge\(^\text{13}\). The Deleuzoguattarian concept of desire is one that exists as unbound creation of difference as processes of desire generate the encounters between the parts of the assemblage that affect and are affected by one another. “Desire,” Deleuze and Guattari (1977) wrote, “causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows” (p. 5). It is desire that accounts for the productivity of movements, lines of flight, deterritorializations and reterritorializations, and ruptures of the rhizomatic assemblage. Desire is the force that makes encounters materialize - it is the energy of the assemblage, the *desiring-machine*.

Deleuze and Guattari understood desire as inextricably linked to the assemblage of a field of relations; if someone or something is desired, it is desired within the context of that field, amidst the parts of the assemblage and the encounters between those parts (Smith, 2011). Schrift (2005) adds:

\(^{13}\) Jackson and Mazzei (2012) write, “desire’s production is active, becoming, transformative. It produces out of a multiplicity of forces, which form the assemblage. We desire, not because we lack something that we do not have, but because of the productive forces of intensities and connections of desire...desire circulates in ways that produce the unexpected” (p. 86).
Desire is a part of the perceptual infrastructure: it is constitutive of the objects desired as well as the social field in which they appear. It is, in other words, what first introduces affective connections that make it possible to navigate through the social world. (p. 69, my emphasis)

Desire for Cody and other Bieber fans is not what emerges as the result of a pre-existing emotion or affect, for example a longing for Justin Bieber or wanting the security of membership of a group. Rather, desire is the force that produced the emotions and affects, the encounters themselves within the assemblage of Cody-family-camera-Justin Bieber, which become territorialized through existing significations - the object, belonging, etc. In other words, desire becomes territorialized into want.

Cody said that she wanted Justin Bieber to “be one of [her] family.” When Justin Bieber is decentered as the object of Cody’s desire and desire is reimagined as a productive force, Cody’s desire for Bieber to be in her family becomes something different. She desired not Bieber himself, but everything that comprised the assemblages of which she was a part. Thus, desire produced encounters with her mother and sister, the video camera, the bedroom space, and with Justin Bieber. As desire connected these bodies and materials, passionate encounters and realities emerged, manifested by sobs that made Cody struggle to take a breath, that caused her shoulders to heave and tears to streak her face. Desire produced attentiveness on the part of Cody’s mother as she encountered her daughter and engaged with her in words and gestures as she negotiated whether to soothe or challenge or do something else for and with Cody. Further, desire produced potentials for Cody to experiment with what it meant to be three years old, to be passionate about something even to the point of it manifesting in great anxiety, and to
play with ideas of access, for example, when she joked that Justin Bieber is calling at the end of the video.

Holland (2011) describes the relationship between desire, the BwO, and the production of the real when he writes:

Desire takes place on the Body without Organs...[it] seeks to always disorganize and free itself from instincts and habits so as to experiment with new modes of perception and action, new modes of existence...the aim of desire is to maintain and pursue investment in the BwO indefinitely and indeterminately...the play of desire on the BwO...operates as a difference-engine, continually forming, deforming, and reforming passionate attachment to reality. (pp. 62-63)

Desire as a productive force in the assemblages of Bieber fan culture accounts for the simultaneously playful, earnest, and often unanticipated ways in which fans encounter one another and materials.

The constant effort of desire to seek movement away from that which is instinctive or habitual creates space to consider the complex and sophisticated ways in which fans are parts of passionate encounters in assemblages and enables us to consider young girls’ fan culture in ways other than the reductive notions of fan as mere consumer and imitator of popular culture. This is an important move, considering the popular attitudes concerning what childhood should be that continue to permeate our conversations. As Jenkins (1998) writes:

Too often, our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of
imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. (pp. 3-4)

These concerns about an ideal childhood emerge in the comments of concern posted alongside the YouTube video and in the arguments of colleagues, who expressed interest in term of the ways in which Cody was manipulated by Bieber fan culture and what popular culture was doing to her. Deleuzoguattarian perspectives displace Cody from the center of analysis in order to consider the complex and relational encounters of assemblages that emerge as desire flows through and around her and that, through those experiences, create a new reality for her (Buchanan 1997b; Grossberg, 1997).

A tracing of some perspectives would read Cody as always already herself and Bieber fan culture as always already functioning in ways that create and reify Cody’s fandom\(^\text{14}\). The perspective on subjectivity assumed by those working from these stances fails to account for the fact that Cody, as a consumer, is amidst multiple becomings, emerging anew from one moment to the next as she encounters new questions, statements, sensations, and emotions. Seiter (1998) reminds us, “it is a mistake to see marketers as evil brainwashers and children as naive innocents” (p. 299) as consumers create their own meanings as they engage with the popular culture objects and icons in

\(^{14}\) Buchanan (1997a) suggests that cultural studies perspectives that fall back on the representation of subjectivity work through “a common assumption that its object is ready made and that theory is something one simply applies” (p. 483). It seems that these perspectives involve a mapping onto significations of childhood and fandom, rather than mapping new possibilities that emerge in the encounters of rhizomatic assemblages of childhood and Bieber fan culture. A Deleuzian cultural studies perspective attends to the ways in which subjectivities emerge in relation to one another and to other bodies and materials. In other words, Deleuzian cultural studies considers the ways in which Cody is already constituted, but perhaps more importantly considers the ways in which and the relationships in which she transcends the given, becoming in the midst of the affective transmissions between bodies and materials.
their lives (Buckingham, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003; Jenkins, 1992, 1998). Cody creates meanings that align with profit-making motives of marketers and others that are unanticipated by marketers, but the important point is that other things are created in the assemblage as well - the experience of emerging in the moment, multiple becomings in relation to the other bodies and materials that she encounters, and new possibilities for becoming on micro levels and, in these particular assemblages, on a global scale.

Mapping a Deleuzoguattarian perspective of desire brings to the fore the relationships that constantly change Cody and fan culture in the moments that unfold in the video. Massumi (2002) suggests that representational perspectives on identities often taken for granted in theories emerging from cultural studies “misses change” (p. 253) and in doing so does not see the processes of becoming that materialize in assemblages. As such, it misses the potential for difference that is afforded by the flows of desire. In other words, understanding that desire works toward difference as it moves within assemblages allows for more complex considerations, that attend to both territorializations and deterritorializations of children’s engagements with popular culture in addition to promoting new ways of thinking about how we encounter one another and materials and the new potentials for reality that are produced in those encounters.

Assemblage and becoming create space to consider the active means by which children come into relationship with one another and with materials in an effort to be transformed into something different. These transformations allow for new encounters and new potentials for being and interacting in the world as bodies and materials come into relationships with one another in passionate ways. Espousing Deleuze and Guattari’s positive ontology is a move away from the oversimplified and overcoded
notions of children’s consumption of and commodification by popular culture - from the perceptions of children as consuming, imitating dupes - toward an understanding of something more productive, relational, and complex.

Reimagining desire as a productive force that moves among and between children and materials associated with Justin Bieber fan culture offers a perspective that views children’s engagements with popular culture as not about any one thing. That is, children’s fanaticism is not about Justin Bieber or even about the children themselves. Rather, children’s relationships with other bodies, with YouTube videos, music, singers, and as I will consider in the next chapter with comics, concert venues, posters, and, and, and is really about the new and transformative potentials that emerge in the assemblages of fan culture; potentials that are driven by desire that circulates and works to generate new and different modes of existence. For young fans of Justin Bieber, these modes of existence include, among other things, opportunities to be a part of emotional encounters - in private spaces of bedrooms and in the more public venues like on the sidewalks of major cities or on a nationally televised late night talk show - encounters which, even temporarily, allow children to become something and someone different, new, and unpredictable.
CHAPTER FOUR: BECOMING NONBELIEBER

Figure 5: Beliebers swarm outside the concert venue in Washington, DC.

In this chapter, I reconnect with two research spaces that I introduced in chapter two by returning to the nomadic and affective experiences that emerged in a university art program and at two Justin Bieber concerts. I consider two children in particular, and the production of new modes of being that emerged for them in the flows of assemblages. I conceptualize these emergences as becomings, which are ongoing processes of differentiation, experimentation, and improvisation in affective relation with other bodies and materials (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Jackson, 2010). I have thought about becoming in other parts of this dissertation. In chapter two, I considered my own becoming-fan and becoming-researcher as I worked through the often tentative and uncertain processes of doing research with children and fan culture and in the previous chapter, I considered Cody’s becomings in the assemblages that materialized in the YouTube video.

Following a theoretical consideration of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming, I share two vignettes, each of which are followed by my plugging-in of the
concept as I work to think about what might have been emerging in the assemblages for the children and materials they encountered. I conclude the chapter with a consideration of the multiple becomings of childhood and, particularly, the varying ways that girls encounter and become with Bieber fan culture.

**Becoming-Child, Becoming-Affective**

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) developed the concept of becoming as they described the ways in which subjectivity involves rhizomatic movement and experimentation within very specific and ever-changing contexts. In this way, becoming functions in response to western philosophy’s “preoccupation with [being] as a transcendent, linear process” (Jackson, 2010, p. 580) and allows for a shift from representational thought, which posits images of what childhood is or is not (e.g., innocent, wicked, preparation for adulthood), to a consideration of identity as multiplicities or a composition of heterogeneous parts that assemble, organize, and are disassembled and reorganized in the encounters between bodies and materials.

Becoming’s processes are comprised of human and non-human encounters that create opportunities to “perceive, move, think, and feel in new ways” (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p. 6). It is in the midst of these processes that the researcher and fan and child escape their own limits and experience new modes of existence. These transformations have the potential to be liberating and even revolutionary as they involve fleeing from representational images of being in an entanglement of potential. In this way, becomings involve what is possible rather than that which reifies essentialized images of childhood.
Transformational becomings are inseparable from affect, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) illustrated with their discussion of the relationship of the wasp and the orchid. The wasp lands on the orchid and something happens *between* them.

The line or block of becoming that unites the wasp and the orchid produces a shared deterritorialization: of the wasp, in that it becomes a liberated piece of the orchid’s reproductive system, but also of the orchid, in that it becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction.

(p. 293)

Neither the wasp nor the orchid is the same after their encounter. Each has been affected in the event, becoming transformed, different than they were before. This illustration serves Deleuze and Guattari’s efforts to break with essential categories (e.g., man/woman, adult/child, producer/consumer, rational/emotional) in order to consider the AND of who we are and who we are becoming *in the middle of* our encounters. The wasp becomes wasp AND orchid AND stamen AND orgasm AND pollen. Their encounter is an affective exchange in which the intensities and qualities of one part have been transmitted to and captured by the other (O’Sullivan, 2006).

Becoming-woman is one figure that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) employed to articulate these processes of becoming, though theirs was not a suggestion that one is becoming *a* woman. Indeed, becoming has nothing to do with progress toward an end point; there is no goal to be reached, no identity to be fixed in one’s becomings. Braidotti (2011) clarifies this point when she writes:

The reference to ‘woman’ in the process of ‘becoming-woman’...does not refer to empirical females, but rather to topological positions, degrees, and levels of
intensity, affective states. The becoming woman is the marker for a general process of transformation: it affirms positive forces and levels of nomadic, rhizomatic consciousness. (p. 37)

To be sure, becoming-woman is non-teleological. Becoming-woman involves movement of affective intensities between multiplicities; non-directional trajectories and lines of flight that allow for experimentation and uncertainty in ways that subjectivities might emerge in ephemeral contexts. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) took particular interest in thinking about children and referred specifically to the girl when describing the movements of becoming-woman:

[The girl] is a line of flight. Thus girls do not belong to any age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, ages, and sexes; they produce molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism of machines they cross right through. The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between them. (pp. 276-277)

That is to say, the girl is the movement between binary constructions or representations of identity. She is a set of affects and intensities that carry the potential to affect change. In Deleuzoguattarian thought, a line of flight is one among many lines that comprise assemblages. Molar lines are stratifications that work to organize, segment, and classify ways of being. Representational images of childhood (and research and fandom and, and, and) are constructed by the molar, which, as Braidotti (2011) writes, is concerned with “being, identity, fixity, and potestas” (p. 42). The molar is what codes, categorizes, and essentializes in order that bodies, materials, and ideas become recognizable. It is what
provides the territory that is known for the nomad, who wanders away from it on molecular lines in movements of creativity and innovation.

Molecular lines are a “deterritorialization of the molar” (Jackson, 2010, p. 582) as these lines cut across an assemblage and destabilize the structure of the molar whole. Becoming is a fluid process that moves away from homogeneity on molecular lines and lines of flight, as the researcher and child and fan, and, and, and flee from that which seeks determination and homogenization, toward something more ambiguous and experimental. Becoming is a state of being “in-between” (p. 581) on the threshold between multiplicities, where affect and desire flow in the production of new assemblages and new experiences for becoming-woman, becoming-girl, and becoming-fan.

Becomings, deterritorializations, and lines of flight do not operate in opposition to the notion of reterritorialization, or the emergence of a new entity, territory, or way of being. The very processes of becoming, as Parr (2010) writes, “inheres in a territory as its transformative vector; hence, it is tied to the very possibility of change immanent to a given territory” (p. 69). In other words, our becomings rely on structures and fixedness already in place, which become unfixed and reorganized through the flows of desire in encounters in the assemblage. It is through becomings that components of the assemblage “acquire new functions within a newly created territory” (Bogue, 2003, p. 66), so it is not only subjectivity that becomes transformed. Reterritorialization is the transformation of the territory itself as assemblages and their components become different and reconstituted through lines of flight.
Becoming-Sam\textsuperscript{15}

Over the course of two months in the spring of 2012, I spent Saturday mornings with eleven-year-old, Sam, and her peers in an art studio, where she attended weekly art classes that were facilitated by graduate and undergraduate art education students at a large American university. I sat with Sam for approximately twenty minutes at the beginning of each class session, during which she and her peers in the ten-, eleven-, and twelve-year old class composed images and text in individual sketchbooks. Much of our time together was spent talking about comics she created outside of class and brought in; recounting and reenacting television commercials and YouTube videos that depict young girls screaming in apparent ecstasy about Justin Bieber\textsuperscript{16}; and discussing Sam’s multiple relationships with popular culture, which one morning included an intense conversation about her desire to name her new kittens after characters in the popular book and movie series, *The Hunger Games*. The vignette below details one of our mornings together, when Sam was particularly excited to share her latest compositions with me. Following the vignette, I consider the assemblages that emerged in the research event with Sam and the different ways of becoming in the Saturday art school that were produced in those assemblages.

*Sam sits at the end of a long table that is littered with sketchbooks and writing and drawing tools. Her long blonde ponytail hangs down her back as she sits cross-legged in a black broomstick skirt and cardigan sweater. The line green polish has started chipping off her toenails; a soft, smacking sound joins the hum of voices in the*

\textsuperscript{15} The children’s names in this chapter and in the chapter that follows are pseudonyms.
studio as she flexes and bends her toes, her flip flop rebounding off the bottom of her foot. Sam gently turns the pages of her sketchbook, glancing at a drawing of flowers climbing a trellis that stands alongside an intricate cobblestone pathway. A gray kitten lies belly-up, seemingly sunbathing in a garden. Sam pauses at this drawing for only a few seconds and then continues to flip through the pages. She finally stops at a four-panel comic that depicts a stick figure falling into a pit of some sort. Sam giggles softly as she pushes her sketchbook toward me.

“So what’s happening in your comic?” I ask. I am struck by the gentleness of the kitten scene in the pages before and the graphic depictions of impending death that cover the paper in front of me.

“Justin Bieber is standing next to a pit with spikes in it,” Sam replies, a smile spreading across her face, “and then he starts to sing and then this guy comes up and he kicks [Justin Bieber] off his cliff. And he laughs, ‘ha ha’ at him and [Justin Bieber is] falling to his death.” As Sam talks, she writes “Hero” next to the “guy” who kicks Justin Bieber.

Figure 6: “Justin Bieber is standing next to a pit with spikes in it.”
“It is always after Justin Bieber starts singing? Because you said at first you didn’t start liking him -- the first time you heard him sing you thought he was a girl?” I stumble through my questions before Sam interrupts.

“-- and not only I thought he was a girl, but he’s also just really annoying,” Sam says matter-of-factly.

In the middle of our conversation, Sam stands up and leads me to her hooded sweatshirt, hanging on a hook in the corner. She retrieves her iTouch from the pocket of her faded orange hoodie and with the touch of her finger, brings the screen to life. “Wait, let me finish this first, okay?” she pleads, though I have no idea what I am waiting for and I have no intention of interrupting her. Sam adds something to her project and turns her iTouch toward me. On the screen is a chalk-like drawing of a figure lying in a field. The rendering is of a person who has shaggy brown hair and is wearing a green t-shirt and brown pants. All around him are the bodies of oversized birds. With her index finger, Sam draws X’s where the person’s eyes should be, signifying that whomever it is, in fact, dead.

“You know Angry Birds, right?” she asks, and as she places the iTouch in my hand, I realize that this time Justin Bieber has not been kicked off a cliff, but has died at the beaks of the Angry Birds, characters in a popular computer game that are launched at various objects, subsequently causing all sorts of destruction. They are impeccably reproduced and repurposed as a piece of Sam’s ongoing death-to-Bieber narrative. I only have a moment to consider the scenario before Sam takes the iTouch back and passes it to a girl who is walking by. “Hey, you know Angry Birds, right?” Sam asks her.
“Yeah, I know it. Whoa!” The girl’s reply is followed by laughter. “Is that Justin Bieber?” Sam nods and laughs with her peer. She returns her iTouch to the pocket of her hoodie and walks back to her seat.

“So is it always when he starts singing that the hero comes along,” I repeat my initial question as Sam resituates herself at the table, smiling at the comic depicting Justin Bieber’s death once again.

“Or he’ll just be,” she replies hesitantly at first, and then with more confidence. “I have lots of comics of him. I have a whole stack in my room, but I wanted to bring the one that I made [Sam cups her hand as if she is holding the iTouch] -- the one I have he’s just walking. And there’s a trapdoor that’s about to go, so the floor will, like, collapse under him. And he’ll go into a pit with sharks in it,” Sam laughs before she continues, “and then the sharks will digest him and then they can hear him singing inside -- their stomach. And then they barf him out.”
I burst into laughter with Sam. This brutal murder of Justin Bieber keeps getting more outrageous, and I think Sam knows it. “And then the fish eat him. Because the fish don’t care [that they are eating regurgitated Justin Bieber].”

“So in a sense,” I ask, “Justin Bieber dies multiple deaths?”

“Yeah,” Sam laughs.

*****

The functionality of the assemblages that Sam and I were parts of emerged in the molecular flows between and among the ideas, bodies, language, and materials and were in constant processes of deterritorializing and reterritorializing, thereby producing new experiences, emotions, pleasures and uneasiness for both of us, all the while transforming the space of the Saturday art program. Wise (2005) emphasizes the importance of attending to the assemblage’s functions when he paraphrases Deleuze and Guattari. He writes, “the elements that make up the assemblage also include the qualities present and the affects and effectivity of the assemblage: that is, not just what it is, but what it can do” (p. 92).

Sitting close to one another at the end of the table in the art studio, Sam’s and my bodies were parts of an assemblage that was also comprised of her sketchbook, the picture of the gray kitten, the writing implements that were scattered across the table, Sam’s nail polish that caught my eye, the comics and ideas about Justin Bieber, the voices of her peers and teachers in the studio space, and, and, and. This Sam-Kortney-Bieber-comics assemblage produced molecular processes for Sam’s becoming-performer and becoming-entertainer as she shared her impressions and compositions with me. I reached up and turned the digital voice recorder so that the microphone would be pointed
in Sam’s direction and the assemblage changed. A reminder that this interview and sharing of comics was a part of a research project was generated by that subtle material change to the assemblage, reterritorializing the moment as a molar, recognizable research event, as fleeting as it may have been. My worry that I might miss some of Sam’s explanations or descriptions entered our relationship, too, and generated a moment that reminded us both that this moment extends beyond sharing comics and laughing. My intentions as a researcher materialized and the relationship with Sam became something new, a moment that perhaps prompted Sam to clearly articulate her descriptions of her comics and refocused my attention on the expectation to do good research, which I thought about at length in chapter two.

Sam’s descriptions of her comics and her enactment of Bieber’s demise as she considered the panels on the page of her sketchbook afforded her the opportunity to engage with me, with materials, and with the children sitting close by listening to our exchange in ways that perhaps disrupted or at least complicated the construct of girls as sexualized and commodified victims of popular culture (see Buckingham, 2011; O’Donnell, 2007; Orenstein, 2011). Her provocative appropriation of YouTube videos and images of a popular recording artist in her comics and her animated discussions of the death of another human being created a sardonically humorous event in which Sam controlled the narratives of Justin Bieber and fanaticism and garnered attention from the other parts that comprised the assemblage. As in the affective transmission between the wasp and the orchid, where one’s traits becomes another’s, Sam was becoming-serene kitten-garden scenes, becoming- murderous public spectacles on the page, and perhaps becoming-compliant pupil who attended to the directions of her teachers and worked
within the expectations of the art program. Sam’s becomings with the materials of the assemblage did not overturn the structure of the Saturday art program. Indeed, it was how the program was structured that created space for Sam’s improvisations to emerge. Sam had choice in terms of what she might draw and create. She and her peers were encouraged to talk as they composed their creations during sketchbook time. In each of her encounters, she was becoming and the space of the art program was also becoming; reterritorialized in the movements of the children and the materials, emerging as a slightly different territory as the children emerged in their interactions with one another, with the materials, and with the space itself.

As Sam and I stood in the corner of the studio, our bodies were parts of an assemblage that was also comprised of the space and bodies around us, the iTouch, the images that appeared on the screen at the stroke of her finger, the words we exchanged, the expectations for sketchbook time, her peer who joined us for a moment, the coats that served as the backdrop to our sharing, and, and, and. The bodies-iTouch-Angry Birds assemblage produced a shared moment of secretiveness in a line of flight from the molar expectations of sketchbook time toward something unexpected and indeterminate. The angry birds, as they function in the game, do not kill people. Rather, they are flung through the air with the force from a slingshot and collide with structures, which then fall onto various animals (e.g., pigs, monkeys). The game is over when the structure falls completely and the animals are killed. Sam employed techniques of drawing, outlining, and coloring (all encouraged during sketchbook time) in her composition of a violent scene that appropriate images from a popular game. In doing so, something perhaps unsettling and entertaining emerged - an unexpected (to me) image to be shared in secret.
Sam’s appropriations of Angry Birds fled from the script offered by the game in a move of deterritorialization which allowed her to innovatively play with ideas of Bieber’s destruction as new possibilities and narratives emerged in her creations and in her interactions. When Sam’s peer walked by, a new flow entered the bodies-iTouch-Angry Birds assemblage, transforming it to include the laughter and approval of another body, a new audience, and a new response. The inclusion of Sam’s peer in the assemblage created a spectacle of laughter and bodies and materials in the corner, bodies with shared knowledge and engagements with the images Sam created. Becoming-iTouch, becoming-peer, becoming-spectacle, becoming-secrets in the corner.

A participant in the event, feelings of uneasiness and excitement rushed through me as I was implicated in this deviation from working quietly during sketchbook time. At the same time, I enjoyed being a part of something exclusive with Sam and her peer. In my willingness for Sam to literally guide me to different parts of the studio and in following her trajectories of becoming from one encounter to the next, I accepted the invitation to participate in a private exchange of an Angry-Birds-Bieber-death image and my methods for data collection changed. I fled from the molar construction of my interview protocol and its expectations as I left the slip of paper in my pocket and my tape recorder on the table. In the moment of standing in the corner becoming a part of the bodies-iTouch-Angry Birds assemblage, I became part of Sam’s deterritorialization of the structure of sketchbook time and simultaneously the production of uncertain, exciting, relational research.
Becoming-Ali

In November 2012, I attended two concerts that were stops on Justin Bieber’s *Believe World Tour*. I explore my own affective relationships with the concert research in chapter two and focus now on the bodies, materials, and movements that emerged around children at the concerts. The following vignette highlights the becomings of thirteen-year old Ali, whom I met prior to a concert in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but this vignette not only about Ali. Rather, what emerges is a descriptive composite of pre-concert experiences that I compiled from my observations and entanglements with children in Washington, DC and Pittsburgh, PA. Providing this description will allow me to explore Ali’s lines of flight and the becomings of the other fans that emerged among the ideas and materials that constituted the territory of a Justin Bieber concert.

*It is a cold November afternoon and I walk briskly down the sidewalk toward the concert venue. I have heard the squeals for the better part of two blocks and though I am unfamiliar with the neighborhood, I am certain that I am headed in the right direction. I turn a corner and hurry toward a crowd of people standing near the entrance to the building’s parking garage. It is as if the screams of the crowd beckon me through the city streets and I join the crowds already gathered. They are girls, mostly, who appear to be no older than fifteen or sixteen years old. Their bodies are pressed up against a metal barricade that separates the sidewalk from the driveways into and out of the parking garage. Adults linger toward the back of the crowd and it is hard to determine who might be accompanying whom. The crowd is actually divided and maintains the space on either side of the driveways. The children - there appear to be approximately one hundred fifty of them - scream as the doors of a large black tour bus parked adjacent to
the sidewalk open and close. I initially suspect that the tour bus triggered the screams that I heard from blocks away, but indeed the crowd erupts each time a vehicle pulls into or out of the parking garage.

I listen to the screams and notice how the crowd is dotted with various shades of purple. One girl, who appears to be no older than five, holds the hand of an adult as she walks by the crowd. She wears purple tights, a purple tutu, and a purple shirt with a picture of Justin Bieber’s face on it. The crowd cheers and the girl looks slightly disoriented as she waves her hand and continues down the sidewalk. Other girls wear shirts with depictions of or messages to Bieber. Keep Calm & Tour On. #Believe. It All Started One Time at the Avon Theatre. A car drives out of the garage and into the street. The crowd bursts into squeals again.

“Do you know Justin Bieber?” one girl yells as the driver pulls away. Those who stand with her laugh before crowd gets quieter.

Figure 8: The crowd gathers adjacent to the entrance of the parking garage in Washington, DC.
There are posters as well. On many of them, people have written the lyrics of Bieber’s most popular songs, or turned those lyrics into somewhat cheeky messages. Will Body Rock For Free, says one poster, held by a girl who looks to be around eight. When You Smile, I Smile is the message on another poster.

My attention is pulled toward passersby when four males stop to ask what the crowd is waiting for. “Justin Bieber!” a few girls scream in unison.

“He’s terrible!” one replies and a woman, who appears to be in her fifties and is dressed in purple pants and a purple coat, removes the cigarette she has been smoking and yells at the boys in Spanish. I am not sure what she says, but it garners a laugh from many in the crowd and the boys move on.

For much of the afternoon, scenes like these emerge. Cars enter or leave the parking garage and the crowd screams. Occasionally, the voices join in chorus and sing Justin Bieber’s songs. Chants of “We-want-Jus-tin! We-want-Jus-tin!” come and go.

There is a persistent energy in the air that at times grows in intensity and materializes in the screams, singing, and chants and at other times wanes and materializes as the buzz of quiet conversations about where to eat dinner or whether to get coats out of the car. At some point, I notice a girl and her mother who have joined the crowd. The girl wears a large coat and holds a poster by her side. She is quiet for a few minutes as she watches the crowd. I think that I see her smile when the other children begin to scream, though she does not join in. Stepping in front of me, she tucks the poster between her legs, shakes her coat off, and hands it to her mother.

Her name is Ali. She has come from Ohio to see Justin Bieber. She is thirteen years old and the removal of her coat has revealed a purple t-shirt that is covered, front
and back, in neon colored puff paint. It took her two days to write the titles of Justin Bieber’s songs on her shirt and even longer to create the poster, on which she has written a continuous mash-up of song lyrics.

We talk for a moment about the excitement of the crowd and her hope that she might get to see Bieber before the concert begins. “I just want to breathe the same air he breathes,” Ali says. She laughs as she returns her gaze momentarily toward the crowd.

“Being a Belieber is important,” Ali tells me, “because there are people [like Justin Bieber] who when you talk to them or listen to them, they just make you feel happy.” Ali explains that she is not a fan of only Justin Bieber. In fact, the posters on the walls of her bedroom bear the images of the boy band, One Direction. Ali is a fan of Taylor Swift, too, having been to one of her concerts. “Well, actually, I probably like One Direction a little more than Justin Bieber. The boys, though, they listen to Justin’s music, but they say they don’t like him. Which I don’t understand because they all have
“his old haircut and it’s like they want to look like him, but they’re embarrassed or something.”

Our conversation is interrupted by the shrill screams of many young girls around us. We stand on the tips of our toes and Ali grabs her mother’s shoulder to keep her balance as we try to see to whom or what the girls are reacting. “It’s the people in his movie,” Ali yells back at me.

“CJ, come over here!” one voice yells above the crowd.

“That’s his sound guy,” Ali explains as the screaming subsides and she steps back to where I am. I ask Ali about the screaming. “It’s just...you get so excited, you don’t know what else to do,” she states simply. She turns from me and lets out a shrill scream and then laughs, inching away from me and toward others who begin a new chant.

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Admittedly, as I stood with the crowd, jotting notes about my observations, it was rather difficult for me to see beyond the representations of hysterical fan-girls that proliferate conversations about children’s engagements with popular culture. The screams, posters, t-shirts, and seemingly cliché responses (e.g., “I just want to breathe the same air he breathes”) produced a slight cynicism in me that simultaneously made me very excited and very uncomfortable. How was I to think about the molecular becomings that give rise to liberating effects for the children if everything that I saw seemed to move towards the molar construct of the reconstitution of the child consumer? How was it that these children were doing anything other than simply consuming and reproducing the messages that Bieber’s marketing system and the mass media fed to them?
Hills’s (2005) critique of fan culture research helped me to move beyond what I was recognizing as images of the hysterical fan-girl as I connected to the children’s passionate encounters in the crowd. Recall that Hills is concerned that it is affect, attachment, and *passion* that are ignored by most who write about fandom. By attending to the potentially passionate nature of the children’s encounters I am able to deliberate on the ways in which the children were coming into relationships, and indeed becoming in relationships, with one another and with materials. This is not to suggest that their encounters never reified significations of the seemingly hysterical fan-girl, but on very micro levels, there were transformations emerging as affects were transmitted between bodies and materials. Why else would children want to be a part of those encounters? There must have been the potential to experience something exciting that kept them engaged in the creation of assemblages for at least the seven hours that I was with them.

As in my research with Sam, I was always a part of the assemblages of the children and Bieber concert along with other bodies, posters, t-shirts, smartphones, screams, tour buses, and, and, and. These relationships provided space for the children to evoke experimentation in terms of the ways in which they might encounter fan culture. Ali’s hand-painted t-shirt emerged amidst a time consuming and meticulous encounter between Ali’s body, squeezy tubes of easily smudge-able paint, purple cotton, and Bieber’s music. The passion that entangled Ali with those materials created an affective exchange between them, so that Ali was simultaneously becoming-puff paint, becoming-purple cotton, becoming-music, becoming-everything else in the space where she entangled herself with her creation. The manufacturers of the puff paint, t-shirt, and Justin Bieber himself could not have predicted the ways in which Ali and those
commodities would become molecular as a part of an assemblage that she could take into a different assemblage, where she might gain membership or recognition among a body of anticipating, passionate children, many of whom also decorated shirts and posters, becoming with them in an affective transmission of qualities, as the wasp and the orchid.

Deleuze and Guattari suggested that these movements - the transmissions, molecularizations, and becomings - were all rhizomatic, shooting off in any number of directions and in doing so created, as Jackson (2010) writes, “tiny explosions that kept new creations on the move” (p. 583). In addition, the materials that were specific to the territory of the Justin Bieber concert - the signs, posters, t-shirts, smartphones - comprised a type of reterritorialization that maintained or perhaps reestablished a sense of cohesion outside the concert venue, though in the encounters of the fans-concert-assemblage, that cohesion was always becoming dismantled and reorganized.

When Ali and her mother joined the crowd outside the concert venue, the assemblages changed and new ways of being emerged for her. She became immersed in the intensities of a multiplicity of fan assemblages, which might have produced for many of the children, a rare opportunity to participate in a public spectacle as passersby stopped to look and to listen, changing the assemblage once again. The encounter between the boys-passersby-insults assemblage and the crowd-woman-cigarette assemblage created an experience where a crowd could mobilize in defense of one they felt passion for. Becoming-loyal. Becoming-defensive. Becoming-laughter. Becoming-woman with cigarette?

The multiple becomings that swept the children up from one moment to the next seemed to emerge on a current of anticipation. The passion in their screams and songs, in
their chants, and in the posters and t-shirts contributed to a seemingly ongoing affective wave that could indeed be read as anticipating the possibility of a personal encounter with Justin Bieber. *Is he on the tour bus? Will his car drive into this parking garage? Is he already in the building?* (See Figure 5). I think, however, that the possibility of seeing Bieber prior to the concert was only a part of what was happening. The children were experiencing the anticipation in the moment of being there and becoming there.

It seems to me that in conversations about children as cultural consumers and reproducers and in discussions of children as victims or dupes of popular culture, the possibility that children enjoy *being there and becoming there* is ignored. Children are constantly in the midst of encounters, and thus in continuous processes of becomings, even on the most micro levels. Could it be that we too hastily assume that children are somehow outside the experiences that are emerging along with them - that they are always looking ahead or expecting something to come next? This is, in fact, a common adult construction of childhood. Childhood is conceptualized in relation to what is coming next - maturation, loss of innocence, anticipating the gains and losses of the next year older. Children, likewise, learn to anticipate with excitement and fear what growing up holds in store, and yet they experience their lives always in the present. Ali and the other children at the Justin Bieber concert helped me to think about what becoming in the moment might entail for children and perhaps how we are all capable of being open to the affective encounters of which we are a part when we are a part of them.

*Becoming-Different, Becoming NonBelieber*

Sam, Ali, and the other children at the Justin Bieber concerts helped me to move beyond my own stubborn stereotypes of what children are doing when they engage with
popular culture. The children with whom I did research taught me, rather, that it is not a matter of what they are doing, but of what is being produced and most important to this discussion, what potentials for new ways of experiencing the world are afforded by their encounters with Bieber fan culture. Sam and Ali helped me to think about these things in starkly different ways - Sam with her subversive comic becomings and Ali with her passionate fan becomings. Each reminded me that who we are from one moment to the next is so contingent on everything else - observable, in the sense of the shared conventions of these events (i.e., signs, symbols, structures, shared and contagious emotions and slogans) and unobservable, in terms of the effects of affect that produce our becomings and the possibilities inherent in our relationships with bodies and materials. This suggests to me that any typology for what childhood is completely misses the mark.

As Mac Naughton (2005) writes:

From a rhizomatic perspective, we can never ‘be’...in a fixed and final way; instead, we are always becoming...as fashions, expectations, experiences, values, beliefs, opportunities, and desires change over time and between cultures and geographies. From a rhizomatic perspective, the development of...young children requires more complex explanations than...cause-and-effect relationships...The lateral logic of [the rhizome] challenges the idea that one act causes another and that one idea or meaning inevitably leads to another. It highlights instead how relationships and meanings link in complex and shifting ways in our becoming. (p. 121)

I would add to Mac Naughton’s beautiful description of children and becoming that becoming does not involve becoming either or. It is the conjunctive and that is so
important to rhizomatic thinking that resists the construction of a dichotomy between the 
ways that Sam engaged with Bieber fan culture and the way that Ali and the others did. 
The assemblages were different. The affective intensities were different. The becomings 
were different. Most importantly, the becomings emerged as difference and served each 
child with the possibility to experiment with how they might live in relation to Bieber fan 
culture.

It is also not an either or in the valorization of creation or structure. Deleuze and 
Guattari described the refrain as a means of conceptualizing the ways in which 
deterritorializing lines of flight and becoming function in relationship to the stability of 
reterritorialization. Bogue (2003) suggests that the familiarity of a Saturday Art program 
and the known components of an Angry Birds game and the conventions of Justin Bieber 
concerts offer “a point of stability, a circle of property, and an opening to the outside” (p. 
17). The creation that emerges in becomings does so because of the structures that are 
already in place and in doing so transforms those structures into something different, with 
different configurations and possibilities for immanent lines of flight. In the following 
chapter, I take these considerations into the elementary classroom as I think about the 
ways in which teachers and children are becoming in the affective and, at times, uncertain 
relationships that emerge in encounters with one another and with popular culture.
CHAPTER FIVE: CHILDHOOD POTENTIALS

Throughout this dissertation I have worked to think differently about childhood and fandom, the ways in which they intersect, and the processes of becoming that emerge in desiring assemblages. Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, I have been able to move beyond the resonant images of childhood to consider the processes of change that emerge amidst children’s experimentations with bodies, materials, and Bieber fan culture. By honing in on the in-between spaces of children’s encounters with popular culture, I have been able to consider childhood itself as a space where affective intensities move with the potential to create new ways of being in the moment. In doing so, I have come to know childhood in ways that “trouble popular teleological ideas of ‘growing up’” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 274). In my reflections on my own encounters with fandom as a child and my encounters with my elementary students when I was a classroom teacher, in considerations of Cody, Sam, and Ali, and in my attention to the affectivity of relational qualitative research, I have tried to reconceptualize childhood not as a phase on a molar trajectory of development, but as a network of affective becomings in ephemeral assemblages of desire that can be mobilized in the lives of children, in the lives of qualitative researchers and as I will explore in this final chapter, in the lives of teachers as well.

This reconceptualization is no small thing as the tendency to overcode and regulate children’s behaviors, relationships, and desires are so often part of a greater effort to prepare children to fit a fixed and essentialized image of what the child should be as s/he grows into being a person, capable of contributing to an increasingly
globalized society. As Olsson (2010) suggests, the desire that carries the potential for change for children is frequently “redirected” for the attainment of “predetermined goals” (p. 143). These efforts toward molding the child for adulthood disparage the moments that children are already in and the most important thing then becomes preparing children to participate in something that we can neither foresee nor predict. Theobald (2005) calls on us to “discover profoundly new ways of perceiving the world in which we live” (in Yelland & Kilderry, 2005, p. 244) and for me, these new considerations involve thinking about childhood in ways that honor the productivity of experimentations with assemblages of desire as dynamic and potentially transformative becomings emerge.

In this final chapter, I take this new way of thinking about childhood into a space that is quite dear to me: elementary classrooms. This is an important discussion as recent educational reform movements in the United States, including the implementation of Race to the Top and the Common Core State Standards, imagine an “idealized generic child against whom all children might be measured” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 32; see also Dyson & Genishi, 2012; Ravitch 2013). Thus, moves to standardize teaching, curriculum, and assessment assume the myth of an certain and fixed childhood as reality and ignore the multiplicity of ways in the encounters between children and their teachers carry the potential to create new and exciting ways to be and learn (Sherbine & Boldt, 2013; Wohlwend, 2011). While the more formal research that emerges throughout this dissertation occurred in art programs, on YouTube, and at concerts, the ways in which I observed children encountering one another and materials and what was produced in those encounters, I believe, carries great potential for how we might consider our relationships with children in school.
When I was a classroom teacher in kindergarten, second, and third grade classrooms, I observed on countless occasions how my students came into passionate relationships with popular culture. Despite my wonderings, I did not have the language then to describe what those relationships might have been producing. Even now, I offer little in the way of definite answers. Providing any type of blue print for what affective and emergent and relational pedagogy should look like in the classroom seems to counter the experimentation and difference that are so crucial to the ontological perspectives with which I approach this work. So rather than concluding with any implications for what should or should not be done between teachers, children, and classroom assemblages, my hope is to generate space for others to create their own specific connections to specific encounters for specific teachers and children.

I would like to imagine that the kind of thinking that I have taken up in this dissertation can be taken up by teachers, too, in order to transform classroom encounters and, more importantly, to become aware of and honor the transformations that are already taking place for themselves and for children. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore possibilities for classrooms that emerged alongside my reconceptualizations of childhood by plugging in the ideas to my own experiences as an elementary grades teacher and, specifically, in relation to a writing project that emerged during my final year in the classroom. Bearing in mind that our encounters are always tentative and contingent on the materials that comprise assemblages with us, I invite those who work with children to plug in their own wonderings and experiences as they imagine what possibilities might develop in their relationships with children.
Embracing Uncertainty: Childhood as Emergent

In chapter two, I considered the uncertainty of my research encounters, as I was at times uncomfortable with the tentative nature of how I might have been coming into relationship with Sam and with the bodies at the Justin Bieber concerts. My feelings of instability and not knowing manifested from the affective dimension of how I was becoming in that moment; affective intensities that I, for a time, wanted to ignore in the name of understanding, knowledge, and justification. Massumi (1996) writes that such affective intensities comprise “a state of suspense, potentially of disruption” (p. 220), which can certainly manifest in any number of feelings, uneasiness and excitement among them, and which in their disruption, carry the potential for change. How might teachers attend to the affective dimensions of children’s relationships with popular culture in the classroom? I would suggest that much like I had to allow myself to be swept up in my research so that I might feel the experience and emerge with it, teachers might also actively acknowledge the assemblages that they are part of, along with children, materials, ideas, curriculum, among many other things, and that teachers might settle into the flows of intensity that move through their encounters.

This would involve imagining the classroom as a rhizome, rather than as a curriculum- or teacher- or standards-dominated arbolic hierarchy. A rhizomatic perspective of classrooms and childhood attends to the fact that any number of things are already happening and emerging in the mutually dependent relationships between the teacher, children, and materials. This does not purport that Common Core Standards curriculum, standardized testing, or other new reform initiatives are ignored in favor of a lack of structure or a free-for-all; a rhizomatic classroom is neither structure-less nor a
free-for-all. It is a space that is open to the connections among the things that comprise it, with the potential for new and different experiences to constantly emerge. Thus, new reform initiatives become parts in the ever-changing assemblages of teacher-child-popular culture-curriculum-classroom, with the potential to reterritorialize children’s and teachers’ lines of flight into a new entity, but always different from what it was before.

Although unexpected becomings occur in even the most territorialized spaces, children and their teachers thrive when given time and space in the classroom. Through thought, play, and the arts, children and teachers flourish when they are able to take advantage of opportunities to come into relationship with whatever it might be that produces such affective intensities for them (Dyson, 1997; Olsson, 2010; Ranker, 2006). Such catalysts cannot be known in advance, though it seems that creating space for a permeable curriculum, which as Ranker (2006) describes, creates space for “school-valued and home- and community-valued narratives [to] intermingle” (p. 24), might serve as a means by which children and teachers can come into relationship with popular culture through their exploration and wondering.

I have written elsewhere about how this permeable curriculum emerged in my own classroom as children came into relationship with a computer game called *Poptropica* (Sherbine & Boldt, 2013). In describing pieces of that project in my considerations here, I attempt to produce “an encounter between examples from practice and philosophical concepts that is capable of bringing forward something new, interesting, and remarkable” (Olsson, 2010, p. 28). The Poptropica project should not serve as an exemplar for Deleuzoguattarian thinking in a classroom. It is, rather, a space
for me to plug in concepts in the hope that others might create their own connections to their own spaces in teaching and childhood.

Poptropica is a web-based computer game that many of the children in my second grade class began to talk about, play, and embody a little over halfway through the school year. Players choose an avatar and in manipulating the computer’s mouse or keyboard, maneuver the avatar through various islands of a land called Poptropica. In doing so, the player-becoming-avatar collects hidden objects and ultimately saves the island from the demise that has befallen it. For instance, on 24 Carrot Island, Dr. Hare has stolen all of the carrots and kidnapped four of the island’s residents as part of a larger plan to achieve mind control over everyone on the planet. Players-becoming-avatars must locate Dr. Hare’s secret lair and rescue the residents, ultimately stopping his plan for world domination.\footnote{Accessed from: \url{http://poptropicasecrets.com/poptropica/poptropica-24-carrot-island-walkthrough/}, February 1, 2014.}

I first heard children talking about Poptropica during after-school activities, but soon they asked to play during free time in the classroom and during their hour-long special area in the computer lab each week. The children talked about islands and Poptropica situations in the cafeteria and in line for the water fountain. They even seemed to embody the movements of the avatars during their recess play as they chased one another, running with small, quick movements and jumping into the air, ducking down (presumably because of the obstacles hanging above them or so that they might be undetected by the villains) and then running and chasing and jumping again.

The children’s engagements with the game were passionate, to say the least, as it seemed to infiltrate much of our classroom lives. It manifested in doodles of avatars on
desks, conversations about game play and challenges in times of transition and during writing workshop time, and in playing the game collectively on the two desktop computers in my classroom. Playing the game was not a solitary endeavor. Children collaborated in the development of their strategies and literally played the game together as they stacked their hands on top of one another’s to control the movements of the avatars, excitedly offered instructions as they pointed to what was unfolding on the screen, and shouting directions, exclamations, squeals, and groans as they leaned into the computers, seemingly melding with the game itself. In their encounters with the game, each other, the materials and expectations of the classroom space, and with me, the children emerged between the seemingly ubiquitous dichotomy of official and unofficial literacy practices as they engaged in play and, ultimately, an ongoing writing project in which the children created their own Poptropica worlds on paper that was fueled by the flows of affect and desire in the assemblage.

Indeed, I slipped into the threshold as well and emerged as a different teacher as the children showed me how to play the game, as I listened to the children exchange animated stories about the adventures of the avatars they created in their writing notebooks, and as we considered the multitude of doodles and sketches and illustrations of their invented games. As we all came into relationship with Poptropica, I was able to create space within the structure of the writing workshop (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001) for children to continue the explorations and experimentations that were already happening. Children expressed interest in creating their own Poptropica islands in writing. Indeed, they were already creating their own Poptropica islands in their play, so using the game as our guide, the children and I devoted time each day in class to drawing avatars and
developing characteristics of the people and settings of their imagined islands. The children developed problems that a player-becoming-avatar-hero would need to solve and they did so as they played, talked about, and game into relationship with each other, the game, and with me. In other words, I created space for the affective potential of Poptropica to work in our classroom - to see and hear and feel what might happen among us.

![Ben shares his drawings, inspired by the game, Poptropica.](image)

Though I could not articulate it at the time, our encounters with one another and with the children’s popular culture interests produced new opportunities for us to become in the classroom together. For me, it was a matter of embracing the uncertainty that came with not being as familiar with the game as the children were and slipping into literacies that were based on talk, play, and drawing - literacies that were not always valued by my school district’s adopted curriculum. I was, at first, tentative in trusting the desire that propelled the encounters between the children, game, and materials.
Over time, I noticed the ways in which children were becoming transformed in their engagements with the game and in their creations of their own Poptropica worlds. Children were coming into relationship with the avatars they drew and described and with the worlds that they imagined in intricate detail. When I became aware of the potential that the children’s engagements had for what their classroom lives might be, I settled into my own uncertainty. I allowed myself to be swept up in the children’s passions and responded in a multiplicity of ways as a part of our assemblages. For some children, I listened. A lot. For some children, my emergences as a teacher meant asking a lot of questions and for others it meant helping to color all of the avatars that were created and for others my being there meant playing the game and for others it meant prompting a refrain that might bring them back to Poptropica. The teacher that I was becoming and the becomings of the children were mutually dependent, emerging together in rhizomatic and unexpected ways.

For example, Ben and Desmond were friends who were absolutely captivated by the game Poptropica as well as the Poptropica writing project. Ben was developing Science Island, where an evil scientist named Robotic Bob The Meteor King typed an algorithm on the computer in his underwater headquarters that caused a time machine to malfunction. Ben described the problem as follows:

*The problem on Science Island is a time machine sucked its own pieces into itself and if no one finds them everything from the past will come to the present. You have to find all the pieces before time runs out. Then you have to defeat the evil scientist that made the time machine malfunction.*
Ben’s interest in the past coming to the present had a lot to do with his fascination with dinosaurs (see Figure 10). He was thrilled by the possibility of them coming back to life and roaming the earth in his creation. So, too, was Desmond. Desmond was just as interested in Ben’s drawings of dinosaurs and of the peril of Science Island as he was with his own project. The day that I sat down with the boys to discuss their writing, Desmond looked over Ben’s shoulder to see the illustrations in his notebook while describing his own project. Desmond told us, “They [sea dragons] have to find the missing piece of the tomb. And it’s missing from the underwater sanctum, where they live.” As he spoke, Desmond did not look at the stack of papers clutched in his hand, where he had drawn and written descriptions of his creation, Razor Blade Island. Indeed, the descriptions he held in his hands were very different than what he described as he looked excitedly at Ben’s creation.

*The problem on Razor Blade Island is there is a new place to eat. Everyone likes it so much, but one day the secret ingredient goes missing and everyone goes nuts.*

In the assemblage of Poptropica-Desmond-Ben-teacher-dinosaurs, Desmond took advantage of space to experiment with telling a story off the page. Desmond:

Did not feel bound to what he had written; rather his words and ideas entered into the present assemblage and then reemerged with each retelling. Perhaps Desmond’s sea dragons were concerned about the inner sanctum only when Ben was nearby; perhaps adventurous and daring sea dragons seemed more compatible with Ben’s dinosaurs than the retrieval of a secret ingredient. (Sherbine & Boldt, 2013, p. 84)
I could never have anticipated the relationships that emerged among the children, materials, and me during and around the Poptropica project. In honoring their encounters with a computer game and in creating space in the classroom for those relationships to emerge, the children experienced the possibility of creating new realities for themselves, both in terms of the realities of what Poptropica could be, but perhaps more importantly, in terms of how they might live their lives in the classroom. The children and I were willing to be affected by our relationships with the game and with one another and were able and eager to embrace the uncertainty of our encounters and creations.

_Becoming With: Childhood as Relational_

Indistinguishable from the ways in which teachers and children are emergent in elementary classrooms is the notion that in the relationships between bodies and materials, there is produced any number of becomings. In the liminal spaces of the classroom, teachers and children are becoming-together, in relation to one another, away from fixed and representational images of “teacher” and “child” and toward something contingent and uncertain. Becomings, then:

Do not stop to participate in the organized forms we can recognize as men and women, children and adults...[they] explode the ideas about what we are and what we can be beyond the categories that seem to contain us. (Sotirin, 2005, p. 99)

Deleuze (1997) wrote that the trajectories of becoming “[merge] not only with the subjectivity of those who travel through a milieu, but also with the subjectivity of the milieu itself, insofar as it is reflected in those who travel through it” (p. 61). He was describing, it seems, the intensive value of everything that comprises the classroom space as a milieu.
Relationships, encounters, and becomings are not only about the humans in the classroom, but the popular culture artifacts, materials, the curriculum, and, and, and. Just as a post-humanist methodology helped me to attend to the relational becomings of children in their fan culture encounters, so too might perspectives that decenter the humans in the classroom in consideration of the flows between everything in the assemblage help us to think differently about what it means to become. MacLure (2011) addresses these concerns in terms of educational research and I believe that there are connections to teaching and learning as well:

In educational research, [active engagements with the complex networks/assemblages] might...increase our attentiveness to children’s strong relations to things, artifacts, and spaces...that are overlooked in favor or social or interpersonal relations” (p. 540).

I borrow from MacLure to argue that valuing the potential that children’s encounters with popular culture carry for any sort of transformational becoming, we must recognize that we are participants in those encounters in the very intense relationships that children have with materials. It is a matter of becoming entangled in the experiences that emerge in classrooms, an entanglement that happens to some extent by allowing oneself to be affected. Doing can produce a special kind of aliveness when we become aware of and attend to our own affection.

Greene (1995) urges us to “[break] through the frames and presuppositions and conventions” in order that we can “recapture the processes of our becoming” (p. 130). For teachers, this suggests that becoming-teacher might look and feel very different from one moment to the next as the assemblages that we are a part of change with the ebb and
flow of a dynamic classroom. We cannot know what we are becoming or what children might be becoming ahead of time. Importantly, I do not think it is necessary to even name our becomings. In embracing the mutual dependence of our own subjectivities, we can acknowledge that there is an intensity in classroom encounters that has the potential to affect us and change us, for better or for worse. Not knowing what might emerge in our encounters can be a scary prospect; it takes courage to create space in classrooms for us to respond to the intense affectivity of our encounters.

In my experience, it is a risk well worth taking. Opening oneself to the emerging relationships of childhood, in classrooms and at concert venues, on YouTube and in art programs, might lead us to be more compassionate in the ways we think about children and their encounters. This speaks to the cornerstone of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy: rather than asking, “How should one live?” or “How should one act?” the possibilities of what happens in the relationships of a classroom prompt us to constantly examine the question, “How might one live?” (Jun, 2011, p. 92). What possibilities emerge in how we might live in classrooms and how might we attend to them in our encounters with the specific children who are our students from year to year, and the specific materials that are both present in the classroom and that the children bring with them? The magic of the Poptropica project could never be replicated; the particulars of those children, those interests, that moment in the life of the school and of education “reform” and my life as a teacher, the specificity of the game and the materials that the children brought into assemblage will never happen again. However, the promise and the danger of teaching is that there will always be new assemblages. Teaching need never be boring and it can never be the same thing twice.
Perhaps Noddings’s (2012) conceptualization of an ethics of care in the classroom is a point of consideration. She describes this ethics as involving the “expressed needs of the cared-for, not simply the needs assumed by the school as an institution and the curriculum as a prescribed course of study” (p. 772) are attended to. This assumes that the needs of the cared-for, in this case children, are expressed and while that is certainly the case at times, I wonder if thinking about children as becoming on molecular levels, on imperceptible lines of flight, might help us to become even more attuned to the potential that is always present in their relationships with others and materials and if that might guide us in opening up curricular spaces in more caring ways? This is not necessarily a call for action, but a call to become more aware, more entangled, and more fascinated with the potentials of childhood becomings and of our own.

If we return to the Poptropica project, becoming fascinated and becoming attuned for me meant simultaneously immersing myself in the popular culture materials that the children were encountering and remaining aware that the children were emerging along with their experiences as they played, talked about, and drew the game. Certainly, there were times that I described my understandings of the project as literacies and play and made direct connections from the children’s writing to curriculum standards in order that I might connect with school administrators, teaching colleagues, and parents. In doing so, the Poptropica project itself was reterritorialized as a recognizable classroom practice, something with which we could identify so that we might flee again in our experimentations.

The game itself and the context of the writing workshop with its routines and expectations provided the structured territory from where children could take their lines
of flight, play, create, act, draw, talk, and then return changed and new to share what emerged during their deterritorializations. Like the nomad, who has a starting point and a direction, but no determined destination, the children and I were able to experiment with the possibilities of learning together, thereby becoming transformed. The permeability of the project meant that children’s out of school interests, even in addition to their interest in the computer game, entered the writing-Poptropica-assemblage: dinosaurs and cooking and weather and science and the grocery store and outer space and Broadway. These were places and ideas that the children explored in their creations and in generating space for them to experiment with what really mattered to them, I like to think that the Poptropica project honored the students’ becomings and thus, involved an ethics of care. Becoming-teacher. Becoming-children. Becoming-Poptropica.

*Nomadic Classrooms: Childhood as Non-Teleological*

Deleuze (1997) wrote in an essay entitled *What Children Say*, “children never stop talking about what they are doing or trying to do or exploring milieus by means of dynamic trajectories, and drawing up maps of them” (p. 61). He was suggesting that children are nomadic cartographers, mapping new possibilities for what life might entail through their encounters, experimentation, and becomings. In doing so, new realities are produced, opening up further potential for what it might mean to live a life.

What I would like to suggest here, and that I have perhaps said indirectly throughout this dissertation, is that children are not the only ones capable of mapping new possibilities for themselves. When we think about childhood, the inclination is to think about it as a certain time in life and there is certainly value in that (Sorin 2005). But what might happen if we consider childhood as a set of potentials for how any of us
might live? What if childhood is actually a surface on which the affective transmissions of becomings and experimentation with the possibilities of life are, even momentarily, freed from the constraints of typologies and essentializations?

Classrooms that work to be nomadic are those that foster this exploration by creating smooth space where children and teachers can take lines of flight, deterritorializing what they might understand to be childhood or teacher or school in their play, thinking, talking, drawing, and, and, and. It seems to be that by mapping out new possibilities for the ways in which we come into relationship with one another and the materials in the classroom, we might transcend the fixed images of ourselves and explore the possibilities of who else and what else we might be becoming. Greene (1995) seems to be describing a nomadic classroom when she writes:

Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. They ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs wide-awareness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility. (p. 43)

Nomadic thinking and nomadic classrooms cannot be mapped out in advance. This is what makes them so exciting and alive. They are open to the affective transmissions that change us and that create new ways of being in the world. They provide space to wonder, to ask questions, and to come into relationship with other bodies and materials.

Greene gets to the heart of what my work is about. For me, it is important to
imagine the possibilities of childhood as a constant production of difference - difference that is emergent and relational and that happens on molecular trajectories, beneath and around that which we think we know. Bieber fan culture provided assemblages in which I could emerge along with my thinking as I came into relationship with concepts that helped me to see beyond the images that proliferate childhood and that carry meanings of what it should be to considerations that are much more tentative and emergent. Who could have imagined such a thing in advance?

This is a very hopeful way of thinking about how we might live in the world and how we might produce realities that allow us to escape ourselves. Perhaps if we move to embrace perspectives that appreciate what children care about, what they are invested in, and what they are becoming, we might begin to think differently about what learning means and where, with whom, for whom, and with what learning takes place. Varenne (2007) suggests that these concerns are “fundamentally unspecifiable” (p. 1580). Rather than identifying a construct like Bieber fan culture or a classroom as a place of learning, teachers must instead remain alive to the many possibilities of what learning - and I would add becoming - look like in these spaces.
References


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