Becoming Child-friendly: A Participatory and Post-qualitative Study of a Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation I explore the complexity of efforts to make the City of New Westminster more child-friendly and the creative capacities associated with these efforts. Over a period of two years, I carried out a participatory study related with the newly adopted New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy. The study involved a collaboration between 51 children, myself, adult community members, and other (human and nonhuman) bodies in a project focused on outdoor neighbourhood play. As part of this, I also interviewed 21 people who were involved in developing and implementing the CYFC strategy. In the process of this inquiry, I increasingly took up posthumanist thinking, experimenting with various ways of engaging the questions: How does the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy work with other related bodies toward change? How might it? I operated with the idea that approaching these questions through posthumanism was not only worthwhile but vital for grappling with the complexities of urban child-friendliness and imperatives to ‘make a difference’ for children in this context. Thus, this research had hybrid qualities, moving from a traditional qualitative orientation toward a more post-qualitative approach. With the idea that child-friendliness is material, discursive, embodied, and situated, this inquiry connected with topics of: outdoor play; children’s travels to and from school; child/youth engagement; urban soundscapes; weather; loitering; multi-species relations; colonial entanglements; ontological politics; and the city as a site of learning. In exploring various realities associated with the CYFC strategy, I considered how the potential for New Westminster to become more child-friendly was entangled with a complex array of more-than-human relations.
Lay Summary

In this study, I explore how a Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy works – and might work – toward change. In doing so, I experiment with various ways of approaching the study through a posthumanist theoretical orientation. The inquiry includes a participatory research project focused on outdoor neighbourhood play as well as interviews with people involved in developing and implementing the strategy. Through this research, I grapple with the more-than-human complexities of urban child-friendliness and efforts to ‘make a difference’ for young people in the city of New Westminster.
Preface

I am responsible for designing this study and the thinking/doing involved in writing the manuscript. This was not work I carried out on my own – my relationships with multiple bodies and forces continuously shaped and transformed the inquiry.

The study was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Research Ethics Board (Certificate Approval # H15-02677). I received permission from New Westminster Schools (District 40) to carry out the participatory component of this study in school classrooms. While student participants own all their own photographs related to this project, they have given me permission to use their photographs in this document.

Parts of Chapter 9 also appear in Wilson, D., & Pike, I. (2020). Friendly for Play? Engaging Young People in Examining their Neighborhood Play Environments. In J. Loebach, S. Little, A. Cox, & P. E. Owens (Eds.), The Routledge Handbook of Designing Public Spaces for Young People (pp. 344-350). Routledge. I wrote the manuscript based upon the participatory component of this dissertation research. Ian Pike was the supervisory author on this publication, and contributed to manuscript edits.
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PART I: INTRODUCING THE INQUIRY

Part I (Chapters 1-5) offers several avenues of entry into the inquiry and some of the assumptions, sensibilities, questions and concepts at work in this dissertation. These chapters, taken together, are meant to orient the reader and contextualize the research – as well as signal the kind of empirical and theoretical contributions I hope to make in this dissertation.

In Chapter 1, I provide an introduction to the inquiry and this dissertation document, outlining some benefits of taking a posthumanist approach to studying urban child-friendliness. Then, in Chapter 2, I offer an alternate pathway into the inquiry through Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts of the tree and the rhizome, concepts that work with the hybridity of this research and its trajectories.

In Chapter 3, I trace some historical lines and bodies of research traditionally associated with child-friendly cities and provide examples of posthumanist and new materialist scholarship related with urban child-friendliness. In Chapters 4 and 5, I take up two important concepts related with research on child-friendly cities – the city and the child. In Chapter 4, thinking with the concept of multiplicity, I trouble some traditional notions of ‘setting’ in research, and offer several (partial) entries into the City of New Westminster. Following this, in Chapter 5, I outline definitions and emerging concepts of the child (including the posthuman child) and how they relate with this research.

It is worth noting that in Part I, I introduce a number of complex concepts that work together in this research. I put forth these concepts (e.g., multiplicity, rhizome, assemblage) here as a way of getting a feel for or a sense of them (May, 2019) before taking them up in more depth in Parts II–IV of this document.
Chapter 1. Introduction

In this dissertation I explore the complexity of efforts to make a city more child-friendly and the creative capacities associated with these efforts. Here, I experiment with different ways of engaging with the dynamic relationships at play between children, the bodies and forces that influence their everyday encounters, and the crafting of what we think of as cities. In particular, I connect with endeavors to move forward a Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy in the City of New Westminster, Canada.

My aim in this chapter is to introduce some of the assumptions, sensibilities, questions and concepts at work in this research. As part of this, I speak to the hybridity of the research and outline how it moved from a qualitative approach toward a more ‘post-qualitative’ one. I also introduce some of the posthumanist, Deleuzian (and other related) thinking that helped configure the research process, with the idea that the concepts introduced (e.g., multiplicity, assemblage) will be taken up in more depth in subsequent chapters. In addition, I identify the sections and chapters that make up this dissertation. First, though, I offer some background on how and why I decided to approach my dissertation in this way, and highlight the potential contributions of this work to the body of research on, and enactments of, child-friendly cities.

Approaching the Study

When this study began to take shape, I was already connected with the New Westminster CYFC strategy through my involvement as a governance volunteer with the Society for Children and Youth of BC, a provincial non-profit organization that promotes children’s rights. This organization partnered with the City of New Westminster in drafting the CYFC strategy and carrying out related community consultation activities. The municipality, located in the metro Vancouver area of British Columbia, had a record of collaborating with a range of community partners to carry out child-related programs, policies and initiatives (Ross, 2015). The CYFC strategy was designed to provide a larger vision for this work and to assist with cross-departmental municipal planning (Ross, 2015). It was also part of an effort to promote New
Westminster as ‘family friendly’ and encourage families with school-age children to remain in the city (Gill, 2019; Ross, 2015). In addition to being an aspirational policy document that highlighted the importance of child-friendly urban environments, the CYFC strategy included a series of action items with implications for various municipal departments and others working with the city. These activities focused on making New Westminster better for young people across eight domains: belonging; caring; engaging; learning; living; moving; playing; and working. There was an understanding that the strategy would be responsive to the unique context of this historical city (see Chapters 3 and 4) – an urbanized centre identified as “a big little city” with a small town feel (CNW, 2020a, p. 29).

Over a period of two years, I worked with others to follow various lines of inquiry related with the newly endorsed and adopted CYFC strategy. Taking up aspects of the playing and engaging domains, I collaborated with children, adult community members, and other bodies in the city on a participatory research project focused on outdoor neighbourhood play. This project involved 51 children (aged 11-13) in classroom discussions, photography, neighbourhood walks, focus groups, photo-displays and public presentations. I also interviewed 21 people who were involved in creating and implementing the strategy.

Along the way, various nonhuman entities became associated with the inquiry and influenced its unfolding. Through this inquiry process, I came to more deeply appreciate the complexities of imagining and striving for urban child-friendliness in this context. I also grappled with the ways that the research was inextricably entwined with this complexity. It is therefore from an entangled place – a location that is not fixed, and is continually transforming – that I write this document and experiment with what these words might do.

**Departing**

My original approach to this inquiry was largely informed by social theories that privilege language and discourse. These traditions are especially concerned with the socially constructed aspects of phenomena and how people make meaning of their experiences. Here, I was drawn to feminist and interpretive approaches to inquiry that focus on creating situated
and perspectival knowledge. Through a range of qualitative research approaches, a great deal of knowledge has been generated about the characteristics of child-friendly cities and the experiences of young people in urban contexts (Brown et al., 2019; Gleeson & Sipe 2006; Kingston et al., 2007; Riggio, 2002). Grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, many studies on urban child-friendliness also employ participatory research methods that emphasize the meaningful engagement of young people in planning and designing urban environments (Bishop & Corkery, 2017). In the spirit of this sort of work, I intended to conduct qualitative interviews and also invite children to engage in a participatory research project related to outdoor neighbourhood play. Since I was operating from a community-based participatory orientation, I expected that this inquiry would be emergent and shaped by both research participants and the community context. Indeed, this was the case, but in different ways than I had envisioned. This initial research approach helped create an openness through which the study shifted away from an exclusively interpretive and participatory qualitative research and took off in unanticipated directions.

Through a range of encounters – with sidewalks, texts, hills, grass, people, traffic signs, a river, policies, snow and more – the research increasingly moved towards what has come to be known as post-qualitative. Post-qualitative inquiry, a term coined by Elizabeth St. Pierre, is an approach to inquiry that departs from “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613), to embrace novel forms of more-than-human empirical experimentation. It is informed by theories and approaches that are part of a material turn or ontological turn taking place across various disciplines. Rather than focus on meaning and discourse, these theories emphasize how matter and meaning are co-implicated in the making of realities. Here, the material and discursive intermingle on a plane of existence that includes: living beings (e.g., grass, microbes, humans), nonliving entities (e.g., rocks, technologies, texts), forces (e.g., gravity, time), abstract concepts (e.g., memory) and more (Fox & Alldred, 2018). On this plane “each element is transformed in its relations with other elements such that it no longer makes sense to speak of constituent parts” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 132). From this relational ontology, entities do not pre-exist – nor can they exist separately from – their relations with
other entities/bodies. Rather, all entities are co-constituted in a process of mutual becoming – a notion that Karen Barad (2003) calls *intra-action*. Inquiry proceeding from this orientation is necessarily *immanent* (St. Pierre, 2019a). That is, it takes place inside-of and in entangled relationship with phenomena.

In terms of urban child-friendliness, working from a relational ontology implies “turning away from the ideas of the child as autonomous agent and turning toward the idea of the child enmeshed in an immense web of material and discursive forces, always intra-acting with everything else” (Moss, 2016, p. xi). It invites new ways “to understand the child as emergent in a relational field, where non-human forces are equally at play in constituting children’s becomings” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 525). In this way, nonhumans are not simply background features of children’s lives, but are active forces implicated in world-making. This approach challenges taken for granted binaries in studying children’s experiences, including the divides between nature-culture, subject-object, child-adult, and urban-rural. It configures children and childhoods as dynamic entanglements of heterogeneous relations rather than stable and unified constructs. It also calls into question human-centric ways of studying child-friendly cities and considers “the connections and configurations of the child as human in an entangled world, in ecological community with others” (Malone, 2018, p. 78).

Importantly, operating from a relational ontology opens up new agentic and ethical possibilities for thinking and doing urban child-friendliness. It invites novel ways of configuring child-related encounters and how they unfold. For example, the experience of a child playing on a tire swing can be understood as a more-than-human event involving various entangled relations, as in the following narrative inspired by encounters that were part of this research:

*A tire swing hangs from a tree into an overgrown easement behind row houses. A child swings back and forth. She pushes off from stomped-down earth and leans back to look at the clouds as the swing moves in one direction, then another – spinning and twisting. Exhilaration. Joy. The wind plays with the child’s hair and rustles the leaves of the large*

---

1 In writing this I was also thinking with Hillevi Lenz Taguchi’s image of ‘sandbox play’ in the (2014) *SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*. 


swaying branch that holds the swing. A knotted rope connects with her hands, and the
tire, and the tree, and communities of bacteria living on the shaded branch. Over time,
the tree has grown over the swing’s hanger brackets and bolts, healing itself and
incorporating the metal. Reclaimed from the wear and tear of vehicle use, the tire is part
of the swing apparatus – and may yet transform into fuel, or rubber crumb, or an oily
mixture of long-chain hydrocarbons. But for now, it is embedded in this acceleration-
deceleration moment, entangled with small legs and feet. The swing slows down in a
final arc, beckoning to nearby children waiting for a turn. Anticipation. And then
sprinkles of rain.

Here, a range of elements temporarily come together to produce an event. The child is a part of
what happens, but is not necessarily at the centre of this embodied, affective encounter.
Agency is distributed among the human and nonhuman players, and all are involved in a
continual process of mutual becoming. This everyday happening also hints at webs of complex
relations that may not be readily apparent. For example, the above account gestures to the
entangled lives of the child and the tree, and how other lives (e.g., organisms living on the tree)
and non-organic bodies (e.g., a bolt, rain) might be also be implicated in how things unfold. Cut
otherwise, the material aspects of this encounter could be connected with various discourses
related with children’s play (e.g., pertaining to free play, physical literacy, safety). It could also
be linked with particular city policies and plans (e.g., land use policies, parks and open space
plans). A less conventional move might bring the reused tire into association with sustainability-
related concerns (e.g., tire recycling practices, water and soil contamination). Taken further, it
might also point to the potential relationships between this encounter and the lives of children
(and others) in parts of the world where tire rubber is sourced and deforestation is taking place
– a very real and material entanglement of bodies at a distance.

This example highlights the complex relations and lines of connection that compose
children’s everyday lives. Configuring an event in this way points to the range of material-
discursive elements that are always at play and are productive of the ways that children
become with human and nonhuman others. Approaching urban child-friendliness from this sort
of relational ontology presents new and generative possibilities for grappling with the complexities of urban child-friendliness.

It is worth noting that in taking such an approach I do not disregard nor disparage the discourses and approaches traditionally linked with child-friendly cities work (this is something I address more fully in Chapters 6 and 7). Indeed, these discourses and approaches are important to, and enfolded with, the posthumanist thinking/doing in this research. What I attempt to offer in this inquiry though, is an attention to materiality from a relational ontology, exploring how matter and meaning intra-act in the research. This is an endeavor that starts (in part) from the community-based participatory project and set of interviews I conducted as part of and in addition to that project – and proceeds from there through multiple encounters, extending in different directions to make connections between the CYFC strategy and a range of diverse more-than-human realities and potentialities.

**Questioning**

While this dissertation research was not guided by a fixed question, it was continuously fuelled, directed, and disrupted by a range of emergent questions that are outlined in various chapters of this document. In pursuing these questions, I was influenced by Gilles Deleuze (1995), who urged those interested in studying complex relations and processes to move away from asking “what does this mean?” and toward asking “how does this work?” (pp. 21-22). I was therefore interested in how the CYFC strategy worked – and how it might work – with and through its relations. With this in mind, two broad questions kept re-emerging, and served as a refrain:

*How does the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy work with other related bodies toward change? How might it?*

This focus on relationships and potential tapped into practical reasons for carrying out research related with the CYFC strategy – a policy initiative aimed at improving the lives of young people and enacting change. In the CYFC strategy, connections were made between children’s lives and
a range of entities (e.g., families, schools, traffic) and issues (e.g., children’s rights, play, child care, walkability) that were considered important in New Westminster. This research explores some of these connections, as well as other less apparent relationships that might bear on how the CYFC strategy works with other bodies. Here ‘bodies’ are not just human bodies, but heterogenous assemblages of connections that can be identified as bodies/entities (Duff 2010). Such bodies/entities are relational, ever-changing, and continually becoming-with. I begin to work with this concept of assemblage in this chapter and other introductory chapters (i.e., Part I) and take it up again in more depth in Chapter 6 when discussing theory.

Theoretically, the research questions align with Deleuze’s (1994) assertion that there is a virtual field of difference/potential – a field with an infinite number of relational connections – from which all things are actualized. This field is continuously transforming and setting the conditions from which possibilities emerge (May, 2005). Deleuze was concerned with how novel things might be created through tapping into this field. With this in mind, I was interested in the creative capacities of using the questions identified above, and the more (May, 2005 - see Chapter 6) they gestured to in terms of urban child-friendliness and the CYFC strategy. Rather than identify particular answers to the questions, I wanted to explore how novel possibilities might be generated from the ever-shifting field of potential associated with the CYFC strategy. This would necessarily include a multitude of more-than-human relations and go beyond those things typically associated with young people in the city (e.g., playgrounds, parks, schools, children’s programmes etc.). Here ‘making a difference’ in relation with children involves tapping into the virtual field of difference/potential and seeing what new things might be actualized.

Methodologically, thinking with these questions was compatible with the creative and experimental sensibility of post-qualitative research (discussed in Chapter 7). They work productively with an inquiry process that was increasingly rhizomatic and nomadic (concepts I introduce in Chapters 2 and 7 respectively). This process was connected with the participatory research approach from which I first started working – an approach that did not disappear, but became differently configured across the trajectory of the research.
Mapping — This Document

In writing this document, I have attempted to construct a relational map that offers multiple pathways into the inquiry. Echoing Dennis Wood’s (2010) assertion that maps are more propositional than representational, this document puts forth ideas and provocations associated with the research. A number of the chapters share names with domains of the CYFC strategy (i.e., belonging, caring, engaging, learning, living, moving, playing, working). However, they do not directly track onto all sections of the strategy, nor take up the primary subject matter in those sections. This is not meant to downplay or dismiss the important issues addressed in particular domains of the CYFC strategy. Rather, it is intended as a playful reconfiguration that connects these issues in new ways, and perhaps unsettles some taken-for-granted concepts and categories associated with urban child-friendliness.2

This document is divided into five ‘Parts’ and twenty-three chapters (outlined below). In line with the theoretical orientation of this inquiry, this configuration cuts things differently than a more conventional dissertation format. As suggested by Claire Colebrook in her 2002 book Understanding Deleuze:

We shouldn’t be producing books—unified totalities that reflect a well-ordered world, we should be producing texts that are assemblages—unexpected, disparate and productive connections that create new ways of thinking and living” (p. 76).

With this thinking in mind, I conceive of this dissertation as an ‘assemblage connected with other assemblages’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Thus, its parts do not neatly roll up into an ordered whole, but operate through multiplicity, a concept I introduce in Chapter 2 and take up throughout the dissertation.

In this document I play with form and a range of heterogenous chapter configurations. These chapters are of varying lengths (some of them only a few pages long) with diverse speeds and trajectories. They relate with one another and work together, at times explicitly and other

2 Naming the chapters in this way also resonates with chapter titles from other post-qualitative work, such as the 2019 book Feminist Research for 21st-Century Childhoods: Common Worlds Methods, which frames more-than-human encounters in terms of doings (e.g., “childing”, “rabbiting”).
times more subtly or diffusely. Some chapters include images, stories, quotes and bits of poetry that are meant to be read *diffractively* (see Chapter 7 for more on this concept) with and through other elements of the chapter – as well as through other chapters. These elements were generated from within the participatory research project, interviews, and everyday encounters that were part of this inquiry. They are also connected with the virtual field of difference/potential (see above) associated with the work. As such, the chapters often proceed from a particular research-related story, image, or quote – and flow in different emergent directions, making connections along the way. There is also some repetition across chapters. This is not meant to be tedious for the reader, but is intended to be reminiscent of Deleuze’s (1994) suggestion that there can be value when things repeat and are revisited over time in new ways. Since things never repeat in exactly the same way (i.e., they always arise under unique circumstances and in connection with different assemblages), the hope is that with each repetition new thoughts emerge and new things are created.

All of the chapters relate with the complexities of the CYFC strategy and how it might work toward change in this context. However, at times I turn things around to focus on the research process, and thus the research apparatus itself becomes a (temporary) subject of inquiry. This seems especially important in work that moves from one orientation (qualitative) to another (post-qualitative). While choosing to write from just one of these orientations might be cleaner and more straightforward, neither orientation on its own would provide a sense of what I think is an interesting aspect of this inquiry – the movement toward thinking/doing from a relational ontology in participatory research. I wonder: *How to highlight and honour the participatory work that happened with children and others in New Westminster, yet also play with the emergent (yet unknown) possibilities of employing posthumanist thought in this work?*

In thinking through this question and negotiating an inquiry process that is at times uncertain, uneven, and untidy, I consider the words of John Law (2021) who argues for thinking “more about the practicalities of holding open differences and awkwardnesses and tensions within research rather than glossing and smoothing them over “ (p. 3). He suggests that there is value in “articulating those tensions and discomforts – of making them explicit and putting
them into words” (pp. 3-4). With this in mind, in this dissertation I attempt to give a sense of the movement from a qualitative toward a post-qualitative approach with an understanding that this process cannot be fully captured or represented through language on a page. As part of this, I work with a range of concepts (taken up in detail in Part II of this dissertation). However, even prior to an identified “theories and methods” section, I use Deleuzian and posthumanist concepts in Part I of this document in introducing and contextualizing the research. I do so to provide \textit{a feel for or a sense of} these concepts (May, 2019) before taking them up in other parts of the dissertation. For example, in the next chapter – in an experimental fashion – I work with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts of the tree and the rhizome as a way of conceptualizing and navigating the hybridity of this research.

Finally, while this document is primarily geared toward an academic audience, I anticipate that some pieces could be broken off, re-fashioned and re-connected (e.g., through a thought, a conversation, a presentation) through various sorts of encounters in more applied contexts. The intent is for these pieces to (re)connect – in new ways – with the problems, questions and potentials that helped bring them into being. This dissertation document is a map with rips and folds and frayed edges. It works with Donna Haraway’s (2015) assertion that “we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections” (p. 160).

With this in mind, the chapters are arranged as follows. \textbf{Part I: Introducing the Inquiry} (Chapters 1-5) introduces the inquiry, some of its key concepts, and the field/contexts from which it emerges. This first introductory chapter is followed by \textit{Chapter 2, An Alternate Entry into the Research Through the Tree and the Rhizome}, which offers another entry to this research process through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) concepts of the ‘tree’ and the ‘rhizome’. Chapter 3, entitled \textit{Introduction to Child Friendly Cities}, traces some historical storylines related with child-friendly cities, outlines some of the ways this work has been taken up in Canada (including the New Westminster CYFC strategy), and identifies research related with urban child-friendliness in this context. This is followed by \textit{Chapter 4, The City: Entries into New Westminster – Parts One to Eight}, which introduces the City of New Westminster with
multiplicity and assemblage in mind. Finally, Chapter 5, The Child: Conceptualizing the Child in this Research, explores the concept of the child and engages with some of the complexities, challenges, and contradictions of conceptualizing the child in this inquiry.

Part II: Thinking/Doing This Inquiry (Chapters 6-8) addresses the predominant theories and approaches used in this research. Chapter 6, Ontology, identifies concepts from Deleuzian, posthumanist and other theories that help configure the inquiry. Chapter 7, Onto-epistemology, outlines five sensibilities used in the thinking/doing of this research and its shift from a qualitative approach toward a more post-qualitative one. Chapter 8, Goodness: Thinking Through the Quality of this Inquiry, picks up the five sensibilities in Chapter 7 in thinking through how one might consider the quality of this study.

Part III: Tree-Like Proceedings – A Participatory Project & Interviews Chapter 9, Participating and Interviewing, outlines the qualitative methods used in the participatory project and interviews that were part of this study.

Part IV: Tree/Rhizome Experimentation (Chapters 10-22) offers a series of short writing pieces that are intended to provoke thought and propose new connections between various aspects of this inquiry. In a nod to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) book, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, these chapters relate with one another, but are not necessarily sequential. Thus, while they can be read in the order given, other pathways might also be taken through them. Each of the chapters are distinct (with different structures, lengths, styles and ways of approaching the research), yet are intended to intra-connect and work productively together. These chapters include:

- Chapter 10. Mapping: The Photo Exhibit
- Chapter 11. Engaging: Beginning to Think Engagement Through Materiality
- Chapter 12. Snowing: The Agency of Weather in Research?
- Chapter 13. Moving: Thinking School-Related Travel Through Assemblage
- Chapter 14. Listening: How Might Child-Friendliness Sound?
- Chapter 15. Playing: Rethinking Affordance Through a Relational Ontology
- Chapter 16. Learning: Inquiring with the City
• Chapter 17. Loitering: Hanging Around in the City
• Chapter 18. Practicing: Child-friendliness in (Material-Discursive) Practice
• Chapter 19. Working: ‘More than one, but less than many’ CYFC Strategies
• Chapter 20. Belonging: Creating Sanctuary in the City
• Chapter 21. Caring/Fishing: Expanding Circles of Care to Nonhuman Animals
• Chapter 22. Remembering: Re-visiting the City as a Site of Learning

Part V: Implications (Chapter 23) is comprised of one chapter, entitled Living – How Might We?
In this final chapter, I pick up several strands of the inquiry and revisit them through a central theme in Deleuze’s work – the question of “how might one live?” (May, 2005). In doing so, I address how striving to make New Westminster more child-friendly connects with other endeavors to live differently in/with the city, projects that necessarily involve a complex array of more-than-human relations. This chapter provides a pause/gathering/conclusion of sorts in an immanent inquiry process where beginnings and endings are temporary and contingent.
Chapter 2. An Alternate Entry into the Research – The Tree and the Rhizome

Rhizome Part One – Poetic

When this inquiry began to take shape
I was thinking with trees
leafy layers
patterns and rhythms
Transcendent branches and twigs
reaching from a central bole
Arborescent
What was nested inside?
Bark – Sapwood – Heartwood – Pith
Permeable and porous,
anchored.
I was interested in examining their roots\(^3\)
Not one essential taproot, but
sinewy fibrous
root systems
with
the
soil
still
on

Along the way – in the middle, where I started – my thinking shifted and became more mint-like. I was thinking with rhizomes. Although not entirely, as I persistently drifted to tree-thinking. I grappled with immanence, multiplicity, difference, de-centred relations, intensities

\(^3\) In considering this process of examining the roots of things – and leaving the dirt/soil on – I was influenced by Charles Olson’s (1997) poem “These Days” from The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: Excluding Maximus Poems.
and lines of flight. Entangled configurations. Intermingling. Becoming. Even my tree musings were connected with rhizomes (grasses, swarming ants and bees...), dissolving into webs of relations with wind – nutrient cycles – stories – bridges – fungi – water – frog songs – weather – carbon – sunlight – climbing children and...and...and...

Rhizome Part Two – Botanical

“A rhizome (also known as rootstocks) is a type of plant stem situated either at the soil surface or underground that contains nodes from which roots and shoots originate. Rhizomes are unique in that they grow perpendicular, permitting new shoots to grow up out of the ground. When separated, each piece of a rhizome is capable of producing a new plant.” (Biology Dictionary, 2019)

Rhizome Part Three – Philosophical

“A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’ but the fabric of the rhizome is in the conjunction, ‘and...and...and...’” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25)

In their (1987) book, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the rhizome to conceptualize movement that has no centre, fixed identity or hierarchical order. While they do not employ botanical rhizomes as a strict metaphor, they use the rhizome to consider open processes that are “very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order...There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 7-8). They highlight how rhizomatic plants (e.g., mint, ginger, crabgrass) propagate through underground stems that spontaneously produce new shoots through various nodes. These plants do not die
when they are cut, but instead become several plants connected in a non-centralized way. In characterizing the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp. 13-20) use the principles of:

1) **Connectivity** and 2) **Heterogeneity** - any point of a rhizome can (and must) be connected to any other point. These connections are non-hierarchical and bring heterogeneous (i.e., diverse; not alike) aspects of the world into association.

3) **Multiplicity** – a rhizome operates relationally through ‘qualitative multiplicity’. Qualitative multiplicity implies that all things are (partially) made up of other things. However, things are not unified wholes, nor are they the sum of their parts. Rather, they are entangled in relations of mutual becoming. Thus, a rhizome is a de-centred entity that exists in entangled relation with other entities. It is ‘more than one, but less than many’ (Deleuze, 1987; Mol, 2002).

4) **Asignifying Rupture** – having no beginning or end, rhizomes proliferate from ruptured shoots. These shoots spring from the middle (milieu) and move in horizontal lines across smooth space – taking unpredictable and discontinuous ‘lines of flight’.

5) **Cartography** and 6) **Decalcomania** – rhizomatic lines form cartographies/maps that have multiple entryways rather than one particular entrance or origin. This is distinguished from processes that reproduce a copy or ‘tracing’ of something else.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that rhizomes move in unpredictable lines through *smooth space*, operating “by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (p. 21). They are continually proliferating, shifting and seeking new connections. In this way, rhizomes tend to break down established structures and generate unexpected new pathways. Examples of rhizomatic movement include: the propagation of crabgrass; the swarming of bees; the spread of a virus; and the rise of particular resistance movements. Deleuze and Guattari contrast the concept of the rhizome with the image of the tree. They suggest that trees are highly
structured, occupying *striated space* that emphasizes order, hierarchy and linear progression. Such tree-like (i.e., arborescent) configurations are typical of rooted plant growth, bodies with organs, government systems, categorical knowledge, and organizational structures. For Deleuze and Guattari, thinking and doing with rhizomes disrupts arborescent ways of operating – encouraging nomadic, creative, and generative approaches to living and world-making (May, 2005). As Deleuze (1995) states, “the rhizome’s the image of thought that spreads out beneath the tree image...there’s a hidden image of thought that, as it unfolds, branches out, and mutates, inspires a need to keep on creating new concepts, not through any external determinism but through a becoming that carries the problems themselves along with it” (p. 149).

However, and importantly, Deleuze and Guattari also argue that *rhizomatic and arborescent processes are not dualistically opposed, but are enmeshed and inextricably connected*. There is always an intermingling. They indicate that “there exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome...A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 15). Examples of these sort of tree/rhizome entanglements include: trees and rhizomatic grasses working together to form meadow assemblages; arborescent bodies of bees operating as part of a rhizomatic bee swarm; and striated government processes being disrupted by resistance movements, or a new even ideas. Hence organized structures are connected with and occasionally broken down (i.e., de-territorialized) by rhizomatic movements. In turn, rhizomatic disturbances tend to stabilize (i.e., re-territorialize) over time and become more arborescent. Thus, there is an endless intra-play of flight and capture, order and disorder, coming together and breaking apart, that fuels the ongoing flow of life. For Deleuze and Guattari, such emergent processes produce what there is in the world – and what might become of it.
I am watering peas in our community garden and watching ants climb up a stalk of borage when I notice a few green sprigs poking out between the boards of our neighbour’s garden plot (Figure 2.1). I peer closer to confirm my guess. Mint. My neighbour planted mint in her garden three years ago. Over time it spread throughout her allotted space, the underground stems reaching into surrounding garden plots. Last year, when our neighbourhood association asked us to clear ‘invasive’ plants from the community garden, a small group of people dug out my neighbour’s entire plot in order to help her comply. They worked diligently – shovelling, pulling and sifting – to extract every last trace of the offending mint, disrupting the lives of various plants and garden critters. The only plant that seemed to survive the process was a lavender bush of sentimental value to my neighbour. It was carefully placed back in the garden, its woody stem cracked down the middle through efforts to untangle the minty rhizomes from its roots.

I am now crouching down next to this weary lavender bush – communing with wind, peas, ants, watering can, cell phone, buzzing bees and more – as I take a picture of green leaves
sticking out through the boards of the garden bed. The mint survives despite a radical intervention. I’m intrigued by the unpredictable and persistent movement of this subterranean stem. A rupture – and a line of flight. My minty musings co-mingle with thoughts about Rosi Braidotti’s (2013) *The Posthuman*, a book I was reading prior to coming down to the garden. I consider anew the potential of rhizomatic movement – *and* its connections with the ordered and messy workings of cities – *and* its linkages with efforts to make cities better for children – *and* its associations with the emergent aspects of research. And here, in this unexpected encounter, the sprigs of mint become tentatively entwined with the inquiry I map out in this document.

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This inquiry is a tree and rhizome entanglement. It emerged through primarily arborescent processes and over time became more rhizomatic and experimental. Yet, as suggested above, both the tree and the rhizome work on the research throughout. As such, in this document I play with the concepts of the tree and rhizome (and associated concepts – see part three above), following and mapping various lines of inquiry with this entanglement in mind.
Chapter 3. Introduction to Child-Friendly Cities

In this chapter I outline, in a primarily arborescent way (see Chapter 2), the emergence of the *child-friendly city* as a concept. In doing so, I trace some historical lines and bodies of research traditionally associated with child-friendly cities. While there are multiple lines that might be followed, here I particularly highlight events and conditions that contributed to the emergence of the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy, with emphasis on the history, concepts, and research put forth in the strategy itself. This chapter is meant to contextualize this study and provide a (partial) sense of the circumstances and *virtual field* (a concept I discuss in Chapters 1 and 6) that gave rise to the CYFC strategy.

I begin by discussing international imperatives for creating child-friendly cities and some of the ways that urban child-friendliness has been taken up in Canada, including the City of New Westminster. I then highlight various areas of research associated with child-friendly cities and the New Westminster CYFC strategy. This research is predominantly, although not exclusively, generated through Western scholarship. I conclude by outlining some recent posthumanist and new materialist thinking related with urban child-friendliness, with the idea that this thinking will also be re-visited and extended in other areas of the document, including subsequent chapters on ‘the child’ and ‘the city’ in Part I and theories and methods in Part II.

**Conceptualizing Child Friendly Cities**

The concept *child-friendly city* started to gel internationally during the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II, in Istanbul (Riggio, 2002). There was a recognition that increasing numbers of children worldwide were growing up in urban settings and an assertion that “the well-being of children is a critical indicator of a healthy society” (UN-Habitat, 1996, p. 30). At this conference, member States made commitments to improving conditions for children living in urban environments. These efforts were grounded in children’s rights, as set out by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). They were also associated with concerns about sustainability and children’s health and well-being.
(Woolcock & Steele, 2008). There was a suggestion that municipal governments were uniquely positioned to impact the everyday lives of children and an emphasis on children’s participation in “shaping of cities, towns and neighbourhoods...in order to make use of their insight, creativity and thoughts on the environment” (UN-Habitat, 1996, p. 15).

A number of international initiatives related to children’s urban experiences were implemented following the Habitat II Conference. For example, there was a revitalization of the 1970’s United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Growing Up in Cities project that examined children’s use of and experiences within urban settings (Sipe et al., 2006). The new Growing Up in Cities initiative engaged young people (ages 5-15) from eight countries in the Global North and Global South in community-based research that involved: collecting information about children’s experiences in local neighbourhoods, towns and cities; proposing models for participatory urban planning with young people; and developing indicators that local governments could use to assess urban child-friendliness (Chawla, 2002). Using the UNCRC definition of child, this work was intended to be applied broadly to all people under the age of 18 years.

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) led the development of a Child Friendly Cities Initiative and established an international secretariat to support municipalities in gathering information, carrying out research and sharing lessons with policy makers and other partners with an interest in urban child-friendliness (Riggio, 2002). UNICEF’s Building Child Friendly Cities: A Framework for Action defined the Child Friendly City as “a city, or any local system of governance, committed to fulfilling children’s rights. It is a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions. It is, as a result, a city that is fit for all” (UNICEF, 2004, p. 3). The framework identified a number of desired urban features, including opportunities for children to:

- be safe and protected from exploitation, violence and abuse

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4 These features are taken from the updated (2018) version of the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Handbook.
• have a good start in life and grow up healthy and cared for
• have access to essential services
• experience quality, inclusive and participatory education and skills development
• express their opinions and influence decisions that affect them
• participate in family, cultural, city/community and social life
• live in a clean, unpolluted and safe environment with access to green spaces
• meet friends and have places to play and enjoy themselves
• have a fair chance at life regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or ability (UNICEF, 2018, p. 10)

There was an understanding that child-friendly cities would necessarily take different forms across locations and that efforts would be tailored to local contexts (Chawla, 2002; Horelli 1998; van Vliet & Karsten, 2015). With this in mind, a number of assessment and engagement tools were developed to assist with consulting key stakeholders, including government bodies, non-governmental organizations, experts, community groups, and importantly – young people (UNICEF, 2004). Such consultations were meant to inform and complement the development of urban plans, designs, policies and practices that would make cities more inclusive of children and responsive to their needs.

The move toward urban child-friendliness was variously taken up in cities across the globe. In high income nations, the initial focus was on improving outdoor physical environments through environmental design (Woolcock & Gleeson, 2007). Particular attention was paid to recreational areas, green spaces, traffic safety, and feelings of alienation experienced by young people (Malone, 2017). In low income nations, the emphasis was “predominantly on issues requiring immediate attention, such as providing access to basic services to alleviate the impacts of poverty and environmental degradation” (Malone, 2017, p. 13). The inequities and survival-related concerns faced by children in the increasingly urbanized environments of some of these nations (e.g., within urban slums) was a major focus of UNICEF’s child-friendly cities initiatives (Malone, 2006). As part of this, sustainability goals (e.g., related with adequate housing, water sanitation, food security, energy efficient infrastructure, pollution) worked along
with children’s rights to help create a child-friendly cities movement (Malone, 2006; Woolcock & Steele, 2008).

UNICEF’s (2012) *State of the World’s Children Report*, which focused on urbanization, suggested that it was vital for urban planners and policymakers in cities across the world to attend to the rights and interests of children (UNICEF, 2012). The report highlighted the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, citing its role in achieving development goals and raising the profile of young people in urban agendas. The connection of child-friendly cities with sustainable development and inclusive urbanization was also evident in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). Of particular pertinence was Sustainable Development Goal 11, “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UNICEF, 2018, p.18). The importance of mobilizing local capacities to improve the lives of children was similarly addressed in UN *New Urban Agenda*, adopted in 2016 at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). This declaration, intended to guide the following twenty years of sustainable urban development, touched on a wide range of issues related to the lives of children. The *Habitat III Children’s Charter* emerging from the Children and Youth Assembly at this conference asserted that in order “to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, the New Urban Agenda must listen and recognize our voices, rights and opinions” (UN-Habitat, 2016, para. 1).

Thousands of cities in over sixty-two countries had some involvement in a Child Friendly Cities program (Malone, 2017). Many of these efforts were informed by UNICEF’s Child Friendly Cities Initiative and Growing Up in Cities work. As such, there was a focus on children’s rights as well as the employment of participatory methods in community-based projects. Much of this work emphasized the relationship between urban environments and healthy child development, including physical, cognitive, emotional and social development (Gleeson & Sipe, 2006; McAllister, 2008; Woolcock et al., 2010). Some of it was also influenced by what is known as the *new sociology of childhood*, an orientation to childhood studies that challenges developmental paradigms and privileges children’s voices, civic engagement and participation.
rights (Bishop & Corkery, 2017, Malone, 2018). Since the 2019 UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Summit, more than 180 mayors and local leaders have signed the *Cologne Mayors’ Declaration for Child Friendly Cities*, making commitments to taking local action in support of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative and associated efforts to advance children’s rights (UNICEF, 2019).

**Child-Friendly Cities in Canada**

In Canada, where over 80% of people live in or near urban settings, there is a great deal of interest in how to foster cities and communities that are healthy, inclusive and sustainable (Bradford, 2002; Hancock, 1993, 2017). This includes municipal efforts to make these environments more livable for children and youth (Bridgman, 2004; McAllister, 2009). A select few child-friendly cities initiatives undertaken in Canada have been formally associated with United Nations programmes. For example, from 2003 to 2005 the Institute for Child Rights and Development carried out a UNESCO-funded *Growing Up in Canadian Cities Project* that engaged community groups in the cities of Gatineau, Halifax and Vancouver in research and community action projects related to youth participation and social inclusion in cities (IICRD, 2021). When this project ended, the (renamed) International Institute for Child Rights and Development host organization continued its child-friendly cities work under the umbrella of YouthScape, engaging marginalized youth in community-building and decision-making activities in the cities of Calgary, Halifax, Hamilton, Rivière-des-Prairies, Saskatoon, Thunder Bay, and Victoria (IICRD, 2021).

While the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative points to Canada as a country where examples can be found of ‘city-wide strategic action plans’ (UNICEF, n.d.), most of these plans are developed outside of UNICEF accreditation processes. An exception to this is the wide range of child-friendly cities efforts happening in the province of Québec. The Municipalité Amie des Enfants (Child Friendly Municipality) initiative is a collaboration between the non-profit organization Carrefour Action Municipale et Famille and UNICEF Canada (Blanchet Cohen & Torres, 2015). Since 2009, the Municipalité Amie des Enfants has assessed and accredited over 49 municipalities in Québec for upholding children’s rights and keeping a child-focus when
developing municipal services. The initiative operates under the following thematic areas: the rights of the child; access to services; child participation; education; and child protection (UNICEF, 2019).

Moves toward creating child-friendly environments in other Canadian provinces happen on a more city-by-city basis, responding to the needs, desires and circumstances within particular locations. For example, the City of Edmonton is identified as an example of best practices in developing a comprehensive child-friendliness plan (McAllister, 2009; UNICEF, n.d.). Strongly influenced by UNICEF’s Child Friendly Cities framework, the City employed a ‘child impact assessment tool’ to consult with children and other community stakeholders in developing its Child Friendly Edmonton Strategy (Yates, 2005). The resulting strategy involved: producing an annual State of Edmonton’s Children’s Report; engaging children in the design, planning and delivery of municipal programs and services; identifying and addressing access barriers for children; carrying out community-based pilot projects; using a ‘child-friendly lens’ to assess programs, services, facilities, bylaws and policies; and providing training to city staff on child-friendliness and its application to their work. For over a decade, the city has maintained a child-friendly working plan in partnership with a network of community stakeholders. These activities are supported, and at times led by, the Edmonton City Council which has been vocal about its political commitment to fulfilling children’s rights and making the city more child-friendly (City of Edmonton, 2019).

While moves toward child-friendly cities in Canada are influenced by the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative, they also draw on other approaches to creating child-friendly environments as well. For example, in Toronto the 8-80 Cities framework has been associated with efforts to make the city more child-friendly (Furneaux & Manaugh, 2019; Gill, 2017). This age-friendly framework is based on the idea that making cities great for eight-year-olds and eighty-year-olds will make them great for everyone (8-80 Cities, n.d.-a). In Toronto, the concept of child-friendliness has also been linked with family-friendliness, as seen in the City’s study entitled Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities (City of Toronto, 2020). The results of this study, focused on the needs of households with children, were used to
inform urban design guidelines aimed at meeting the needs of children and families in mid-rise and high-rise building developments. Another example of connecting child-friendliness with family-friendliness is the City of North Vancouver’s *Child Youth and Family Friendly Strategy* which was guided by research on family-friendly communities and emphasizes the importance of fostering the healthy development of children, youth and families in the community. The strategy also points to the relationships between child-friendliness and attracting and retaining families in the city (City of North Vancouver, n.d.). This practice of marketing/promoting cities is identified as one motivation, among many, for municipalities to pursue child-friendly cities initiatives (van Vliet & Karsten, 2015).

Across Canada, a growing number of cities and towns have developed rights-based *children’s charters* grounded in the UNCRC. Several Indigenous communities have also taken steps to create children’s charters (Children First Canada, 2018). These children’s charters are aspirational, non-legally binding visions for what cities and communities might become if they uphold children’s rights and put “children first” (Alberta Government, 2013). They are commonly used to guide policy directions, engage young people in visioning processes, involve stakeholders in child-related initiatives, and market cities as child-friendly or family-friendly. While some children’s charters operate as stand-alone projects, ideally, they have a life well beyond their initial development phase. For example, after adopting a children’s charter in 2012, the City of Vernon and its community partners embarked on a variety of ongoing child-friendly activities and policy initiatives, including hosting a provincial Cities Fit for Children Summit and incorporating child-related goals into the city’s strategic plan and other city plans. In 2017, Vernon undertook a Child Friendly City initiative aimed at evaluating how it could better support young people in the areas of housing, transportation, health, parks and recreation (City of Vernon, 2017). While there is no over-arching child-friendliness plan in Vernon, the children’s charter has been used in these ways over time to keep child-related issues at the forefront of civic and community action.

Another way that cities have attempted to become child-friendly is through establishing *youth councils*. These councils typically provide feedback and guidance to local governments by
advising the mayor (e.g., Calgary Youth Advisory Council to the Mayor) or the city council more broadly (e.g., Halifax regional Youth Advisory Committee). Some youth councils also undertake their own community-based projects (e.g., City of Edmonton Advisory Council). In a few cities (e.g., Town of Essex) young people are appointed as Youth Council Members and bring young people’s issues to city council meetings, although they do not vote on motions (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, n.d.). The City of Toronto, in addition to having a Youth Cabinet (the official youth advisory body to the city) also works with the City Youth Council of Toronto, a chapter of the not-for-profit Coalition of Youth Councils, to democratically elect youth councillors to represent the interests of each of Toronto’s 25 wards (City of Toronto, n.d.).

The establishment of youth councils, in various forms, is encouraged by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which published a Municipal Youth Engagement Handbook with resources, strategies, and tools for elected officials and public administrators to use in engaging young people. The handbook is designed to involve youth in civic participation as well as serve as a means of “recruiting young Canadians as future municipal leaders and workers” (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, n.d., p. 2). There is variability in the vitality of youth councils across various locations in Canada (Northam, 2014). Indeed, the purpose, organization and effectiveness of these councils has been questioned in Canada and other places in the world (e.g., Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; McGinley & Grieve, 2010).

Aside from the formal structures of youth councils, city planning departments are key bodies tasked with engaging young people in civic processes. The importance of including children in urban planning is outlined in the Canadian Institute of Planners’ A Kid’s Guide to Building Great Communities: A Manual for Planners and Educators (CIP, n.d.) which encourages city planners to support the rights of children to take part in decisions that affect them and provides ideas, exercises and materials to help them engage children. This type of work is also connected with policies and guidelines found within government departments at various levels. For example, each province in Canada has developed Child and Youth Friendly Land-Use and Transport Planning Guidelines which outline how municipalities can bring the perspectives of young people into consideration in transport and land-use planning (e.g., Gilbert & O'Brien,
These guidelines were funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada, which has also taken a role in moving forward aspects of the New Urban Agenda in Canada. In a 2018 presentation to the Canadian Institute of Planners, the Chief Public Health Officer of the Public Health Agency of Canada expressed interest in working closer with planners to bring the New Urban Agenda to Canadian communities, urging planners to consider health outcomes when making infrastructure and planning decisions (Tam et al., 2018). This connection with health is consistent with Canada’s international statements pertaining to the New Urban Agenda, an agreement identified as “an opportunity to reinforce the concept of health and well-being [and] make greater links between urban development and the environmental determinants of health” (Government of Canada, 2016, p. 2). In line with this, Canada’s commitments to young people in the New Urban Agenda focus on decreasing the vulnerability of at-risk youth, including especially those who are Indigenous, have recently immigrated to Canada, or are living with mental health issues (Government of Canada, 2016).

Canada’s international commitments pertaining to children in urban environments exist along with a range of other efforts to make cities more child-friendly. These efforts – and the complex forces that influence them – are enacted differently across various locations. The concept of child-friendly cities is therefore situated and transforms over time and across contexts. Despite some shared understandings of the characteristics of urban child-friendliness (as noted above), the child-friendly city is more of an aspirational process than a fixed concept or entity. There are countless ways of thinking and doing urban child-friendliness. In Canada and elsewhere, imperatives to make cities better places for young people has taken multiple forms – and has waxed and waned – over time. Recently, some Canadian scholars have joined international calls to place children at the heart of urban planning and design (e.g., Gill et al., 2019). There are calls for city planners and community developers to “do more to work collaboratively with youth to plan communities that bolster positive neighborhood experiences for children across the full range of childhood and adolescence” (Loebach & Gilliland, 2019, p. 3). There is also a recognition that a broad set of actors must work together in the pursuit of child-friendly cities (8-80 Cities, n.d.-b; Gill, 2019; Ross, 2015). Indeed, research and practice
related with urban child friendliness lends itself to a range of interdisciplinary and
transdisciplinary thinking across a number of fields, including urban studies, geography, health,
landscape architecture, environmental psychology, history, sociology, and education (Gleeson
& Sipe, 2006; Christensen et al., 2017).

The New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy

The New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) strategy is a strategic
policy initiative developed by the City of New Westminster to guide its work related with young
people. It was developed in partnership with the Society for Children and Youth of BC, a
provincial non-profit organization that has engaged in child-friendly cities work since
participating in the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II in 1996. The
CYFC strategy complements other municipal initiatives related with children and families,
including a Family-Friendly Housing Policy (requiring developers to include minimum
percentages of two+ and three+ bedroom units in all new multi-family developments) and Child
Care Strategy (aimed at increasing the number of quality child care programs that are both
accessible and affordable for families). It is also connected with a range of community initiatives
related with young people, including the New Westminster Children’s Charter, Family-Friendly
Business Initiative and the establishment of three Child Development Hubs that serve as places
for children and families to gather, obtain information, and access a continuum of community
services.

The writing of the CYFC strategy was influenced by the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities
framework and research related with child-friendly cities (Ross, 2015). As such, children’s rights
feature prominently in the overall strategy and its themes. In addition, strategy goals were
informed by the ideas and suggestions of community members through: 840 school-based
surveys (156 children aged 6 to 12 years, 228 youth aged 13 to 17 years, and 320 parents);
community consultation activities; and discussions with city staff, governance and advisory
committees (Ross, 2015). Within the municipality, the CYFC strategy development was led by a
social planner who was well connected with community groups, non-profit organizations, and other government bodies concerned with children and youth in New Westminster.

The CYFC strategy, approved by the New Westminster City Council in 2016, focuses on making the city better for young people across eight domains: belonging, caring, engaging, learning, living, moving, playing, and working. It includes an action plan with implications for various municipal departments. There is an emphasis on public space and incorporating a child-friendly lens into existing design guidelines. This includes designing child-and-youth-friendly buildings and amenity spaces, refurbishing parks, and creating challenging, inclusive and unstructured play spaces that incorporate natural materials (Gill, 2019). The strategy aims to maximize opportunities in existing municipal plans (e.g., more explicitly linking children’s concerns within the city’s Master Transportation Plan) as well as expanding efforts toward urban child-friendliness (e.g., experimenting with new types of recreation programming). There is also a focus on child and youth engagement. For example, to accompany the strategy, The Society for Children and Youth of BC developed a Child and Youth Engagement Toolkit for use by city staff in consulting with children and youth on matters that affect them. The idea was to work towards greater child and youth participation in various aspects of city life, including municipal processes and decision-making (Ross, 2015). While the original three-year timeline of the strategy has now ended, some of the activities of the strategy are identified as ‘ongoing’ and the strategy has also been enfolded into the City’s Official Community Plan which states that:

The City is working towards a child-youth-and family-friendly community where children and youth are valued, where they can make a meaningful contribution, where they feel safe and secure, and where they can reach their full potential. (City of New Westminster, 2020a, p. 45)

The work that New Westminster has undertaken to become more child-friendly was recently profiled – along with efforts in the Canadian cities of Calgary, Vancouver and North Vancouver – in Tim Gill’s (2019) study tour report on child-friendly urban planning and design in Europe and Canada.
Research Related with Child-Friendly Cities

The New Westminster CYFC strategy and other initiatives to make cities more child-friendly are informed by various strands of research. The complexity of issues associated with urban child-friendliness connects it – as a concept and set of practices – with multiple overlapping topics. Thus, while a vast array of scholarship can be linked with child-friendly cities, here I outline some bodies of research that are closely associated with the New Westminster CYFC strategy and its identified domains. I do so with recognition that I am offering up a particular selection of research that is necessarily situated and partial, and that multiple other pathways might be taken in mapping out literature related with child-friendly cities more generally, and the CYFC strategy specifically.

From early research associated with children in cities (e.g., Colin Ward’s 1978 book *The Child in the City*) there has been an interest in better understanding children’s close-to-home neighbourhood experiences (Woolcock et al., 2010). The influential work of Roger Hart (1979) and Robin Moore (1986) focused on how children learn about and impact the world through their everyday place experiences. As such, a great deal of inquiry related to child-friendly cities has focused on where children like to spend time and the kinds of environments they experience as friendly (e.g., Bourke, 2016, Horelli, 2007; Nordström, 2010). Studies have also examined the ways that children inhabit environments differently from adults and discrepancies between generational needs and expectations (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003; Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Hart, 2002; Karsten, 2005). Working with an understanding that spaces become places through meaningful activity (Tuan, 1977), a number of studies have looked at the ways that young people construct a sense of place for themselves in cities. For example, Derr (2002) examined how children create place through activities such as climbing trees, making dens and playing games. Christensen and Mikkelsen (2013) explored how girls crafted places ‘of their own’ in local environments, finding ways to express themselves, engage in preferred activities, and feel at home. There is also an interest in place attachment and how children develop a sense of friendship with different kinds of neighbourhood environments.
This includes studies about children’s restorative experiences (e.g., Chatterjee, 2005; Korpela et al., 2002; Shu & Ma, 2018). Child friendly cities are often characterized as environments where young people are welcome in public space, including those areas not specifically designated for children (Hart, 2014; Derr et al., 2013). As such, researchers and practitioners are especially interested in children’s \textit{access to and use of public spaces and places} (e.g., Bourke, 2014; Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Loebach & Gilliland, 2019; Valentine, 2004). There is a suggestion that urban environments are largely designed with adults in mind (Carroll et al., 2019; Churchman, 2003; Thomson & Philo, 2004) and that “children still languish on the outer fringe of urban design consciousness” (Freeman and Tranter, 2011, p. 221). As such, some studies have pointed to the ways that children are unwelcome and viewed as out-of-place in public areas not specifically designated for their use (Edmonds, 2018; Karsten, 2005; Kearns & Collins, 2006; Valentine, 1996; Woolley et al., 2011). Young people are sometimes framed as intruding or loitering in public areas (Ansell, 2009; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Veitch et al., 2006). Relatedly, some research has also focused on how children inhabit and shape unsupervised marginal spaces in cities (Freeman, 1995; Woolley & Johns, 2001). While these environments offer certain freedoms, there is also concern that children’s relegation to peripheral spaces might decrease their opportunities for political engagement and active citizenship (Hart 2002; Kulynych, 2001).

Children’s freedom to move through urban environments is often identified as an important feature of child-friendly cities (Chawla, 2002; Malone & Rudner, 2017; Whitzman et al., 2010). \textit{Independent mobility} – commonly understood as the freedom of children to move around without adult accompaniment – has been a particular focus of inquiry in this area (Freeman, 2011; Hillman et al., 1990; Kyttä, 2004; Kyttä et al., 2015; Loebach and Gilliland, 2019, Malone & Rudner, 2011; Whitzman et al., 2009; Villanueva et al., 2014). There are concerns that children have increasingly less license to navigate urban environments without adult supervision (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003). Research on children’s mobility includes examining patterns of activity (e.g., Kyttä et al., 2012; Loebach and Gilliland, 2016; Mikkelsen & Christensen, 2009) and range of movement (e.g., O’Brien et al., 2000; Shaw et al., 2015; Veitch
Christensen, Hadfield, Horton and Kraftl (2017) also argue for more nuanced constructions of children’s mobility that focus on intensity of engagement, noting that children are often “intensely mobile, albeit within sometimes tightly negotiated spatial boundaries” (p. 142). Some studies have also examined the intersections of child-friendliness, independent mobility and particular characteristics of the built environment. For example, according to Kyttä’s (2004) Bullerby model, child-friendly environments have two key criteria: possibilities for children to move freely and opportunities for them to actualize environmental affordances. Here the term affordances – thinking with J.J. Gibson (1979) and Heft et al., (2014) – are understood as “the perceived functional opportunities and restrictions concerning a person’s actions in a given environment” (Kyttä et. al, 2018, p. 2).

Researchers are also interested in the connections between child-friendly urban environments and children’s active transportation, the process of travelling from one place to another through physical activity (Tranter, 2018; Wridt, 2010). There is a particular emphasis on children’s travel to and from school (e.g., Buliung et al., 2009; Evenson et al., 2006; Ikeda et al., 2018; Larouche et al., 2019; Larsen et al., 2009; Su et al., 2013; Torres, 2020). Studies have also examined the relationships between child-friendliness and sustainable transport systems, including walking, cycling and various forms of public transit (Freeman, 2020; Tranter, 2006; Tranter & Malone, 2008). Concerns about decreased physical activity and increased obesity rates among children are frequently linked with active transportation (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; Seliske et al., 2012; Tremblay et al., 2011). As such, there is an interest in the associations between children’s physical activity, active transportation and characteristics of the built environment (e.g. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009; Carlson et al., 2014; Rothman et al., 2021; Timperio et al., 2018).

The movement of children through cities is also linked with concerns about the movement of motor vehicles (Riggio, 2002). As such, there is a focus on traffic safety, an issue identified as a threat to children worldwide, particularly those living in urban poverty (Silverman, 2016). Globally, road traffic is identified as the leading cause of death for people aged 15-19 and the second highest cause of death for people aged 5-14 (World Health
With this in mind, it has been suggested that urban planning has a large role to play in preventing road traffic injuries and deaths (Gill et al., 2019). There is also interest in the relationships between parent/caregiver concerns about traffic and pedestrian safety and the extent to which children navigate neighbourhoods without adult supervision (Aranda-Balboa, 2020; Foster et al., 2014; Timperio et al., 2004). With this in mind, researchers have examined the role of adults’ perceptions of risk and safety (e.g., traffic, child abductions, violence) in limiting children’s freedom to explore local neighbourhoods (e.g., Carver et al., 2008; Foster et al., 2014; Hillman et al., 1990; Valentine & Mckendrick, 1997; Vlaar et al., 2019). There is a suggestion that parents have difficulty identifying safe places where they feel comfortable letting children play unsupervised (Veitch et al., 2006) and that city streets are increasingly constructed as adult-only spaces (Karsten, 2005; Gill 2008). Consequently, some have argued that children spend less time outside and have restricted access to explore urban environments on their own (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003). Studies also focus on the influence of adult perceptions of risk, safety, and liability on children’s freedom to play in local neighbourhoods, with a particular emphasis on the perceptions of parents and caregivers (Carroll et al, 2019; Gill, 2018; Herrington & Nicholls, 2007; Herrington et al., 2017; Malone, 2007).

Indeed, children’s play is an area of research that is often linked with urban child-friendliness (Broberg et al., 2013; Kyttä, 2004; Veitch et al., 2006; Voce, 2015; Walsh, 2006; Woolcock, 2019). While there are various definitions and understandings of play, child-friendly cities are often identified as places that invite – rather than simply permit – children to play (Gleeson et al., 2006). While children’s play is sometimes viewed as taking place within the confines of playgrounds, parks and other child-designated areas, researchers and practitioners have long recognized that play happens in a wide range of urban contexts (Bishop & Corkery, 2017; Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Ward, 1978). Efforts to make urban environments more play-friendly are sometimes linked with children’s rights – and article 31 of the UNCRC, which outlines the right to play (Lester & Russell, 2010). They are also often associated with ‘healthy cities’ initiatives and concerns about children’s health and development (Brown et al., 2019).
Related to this, a growing number of studies explore the connections between children’s health, well-being, and outdoor active play, including ‘risky play’ (e.g., Brussoni et al., 2012; Tremblay et al., 2015). There is also a growing interest in the impacts that playing in greenspaces and ‘natural’ environments might have on children’s health and wellbeing (Adams et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2015; Jansson et al., 2016; Little & Derr, 2020; Louv, 2005; McAllister, 2011; McCurdy et al., 2010). Relatedly, researchers have shown interest in how playing in – and connecting with – ‘nature’ might foster a sense of care for the nonhuman world and commitments to environmental sustainability (Chawla, 2015; Chawla & Flanders Cushing, 2007; Heft & Chawla 2006).

In addition to designing with children in mind, researchers and practitioners have emphasized the importance of actively engaging young people in participatory planning and design (Bishop & Corkery, 2017; Chawla, 2002; Driskell, 2002; Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Hart, 1992, 1997; Horelli, 1998; Knowles-Ýanez, 2005; Malone, 2013; Nordström & Wales, 2019; Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). These sorts of participatory processes are thought to enhance understandings of what makes communities child-friendly and inform the development of plans that are responsive to the needs and priorities of young people (Derr et al., 2018; Cushing, 2016; Freeman & Aitken-Rose, 2005, Knowles-Yanez, 2005; McAllister, 2009, Mintzer & Chawla, 2020). There is a focus on listening to children’s voices and actively engaging children in decision-making and knowledge-making processes (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). As well, research from this orientation often tries to flatten, as much as possible, power relations between adults and children (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

Emphasizing participation, researchers have examined the capacity of children to voice their perspectives, act as agents of change, and make meaningful contributions to their cities (Bishop & Corkery, 2017; Derr et al., 2017; Derr & Kovács 2015; Malone, 2013). This includes providing input into policies and other decisions related with children (Prout, 2003; McMellon & Tisdall, 2020). A number of studies also indicate that children would welcome involvement in city planning and design processes (e.g., Chawla 2009; Malone 2013). However, there is a great deal of inquiry pointing to the ways that children are under-represented or excluded from these
processes (Hart, 2002; Karsten, 2005; Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Nordström, 2010; Osborne et al. 2017). With this in mind, some researchers have undertaken studies with city planners related to their efforts to include young people in city planning and design (Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Whitzman et al., 2010). For example, in a study of how planning professionals understand the theory and practice of children’s participation, Sofia Cele and Danielle van der Burgt (2015) found that participants had a difficult time determining the difference between participation and consultation as well as recognizing the agency of children. Similarly, in a study of city planners’ efforts to include children’s perspectives, Claire Freeman and Elizabeth Aitken-Rose (2005) called for: greater efforts by planners to understand the complex worlds that children inhabit; the adoption of child-focused and youth-focused methodologies; the development of strategies with concrete outcomes; and the development of cohesive cross-government initiatives that are coordinated and integrated. Freeman and Tranter (2011) argue that if we conceive of “children not as vulnerable, dependent and incompetent, but as important, active social agents, then we can see children as part of the solution to emerging cities” (pp. 250-251). Such work positions young people as rights-bearing subjects who are capable of meaningful participation in public life.

Notably, the Growing up Boulder initiative, started by Louise Chawla, David Driskell and their colleagues in 2009, is identified as an example of best practices in participatory planning and design with young people. Growing up Boulder is a collaboration between young people in Boulder Colorado, the City of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, various community organizations and the Children, Youth and Environments Center at the University of Colorado. Over a number of years, these partners have worked together on a variety of projects aimed at promoting the inclusion of children and youth in city planning and design (Derr et al., 2013). Various methods are used to promote the active participation of young people, including: mapping, community assessments, photo documentation, model building, interviewing, digital storytelling and presentations to city representatives. Among other impacts, this work has influenced: the design of parks and civic areas; the development of a Child and Youth Bill of Rights; the identification of important issues and concerns related to young people in the city;
and community action in the areas such as youth-friendly businesses, public art, and nightlife (Derr et al., 2013). The long-term comprehensive work carried out through Growing Up Boulder makes it a model of child-friendly community planning and design across the world (Bishop & Corkery, 2017). This work demonstrates how children not only benefit from vibrant urban environments, but how they can contribute to them.

**New Directions in Thinking/Doing Urban Child-Friendliness**

With complexity in mind, some scholars are re-imagining how children’s relationships with urban environments are conceptualized. There is a growing sense among researchers and practitioners that urban child-friendliness must be considered more broadly than the typical focus on playgrounds, skate parks, and other child-specific places in the city (Bishop & Corkery, 2017; Freeman & Tranter, 2011). At the same time, there are calls within childhood studies to diversify and re-imagine the ways that child-related work is approached (Christensen et al., 2017; Horton & Kraftl, 2006a; Spyrou et al., 2018). For example, in addition to studying the micro-scales of children’s experiences, some scholars suggest that child-related research should address a broader range of forces affecting children (e.g., Cele, 2006; Holloway, 2014; Kraftl, 2013; McNeish & Gill, 2006; Philo, 2000; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). This includes a consideration of the ways that children’s lives relate with a vast array of human and nonhuman forces at play in urban contexts. For example, Nicola Ansell (2009) suggests that children:

> encounter near and distant places in multiple conscious and unconscious ways. While their most intense interactions may be with proximate spaces, the world they encounter is produced through diverse interactions and they constantly engage with things that connect with distant places – books, school curricula, fruit or clothes produced elsewhere (p. 201).

Ansell argues for re-visioning how scale is used within children’s geographies in ways that trouble traditional notions of near/far and micro-scale/macro-scale. She suggests that employing different ontological thinking (e.g., a flat ontology) in research with children might generate useful insights into the ways that children’s lives relate with a range of heterogeneous
forces in the world. This kind of thinking necessarily highlights how aspects of children’s lives do not neatly fit into nesting spheres of influence (e.g., the family, society) and how children’s realities are intimately connected (e.g., through technologies, material objects etc.) with realities that might seem only loosely related with them.

Some researchers also argue for greater attention to the material aspects of children’s lives (e.g. Christensen et al., 2017; Horton & Kraftl, 2006b; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi 2010; Kocher et al., 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017; Prout, 2005). For example, in their influential article “What else? some more ways of thinking and doing Children's Geographies”, John Horton and Peter Kraftl (2006a) suggest that an attention to materiality has the potential to make visible a number of important but often unacknowledged aspects of everyday existence, calling attention to “how we are always already surrounded by material things; how we continually do things with or through material things; how—in effect—material things ‘act back’ and continually affect and/or effect us” (p. 73). Thinking in this way, some researchers associated with childhood studies have started using new materialist, nonrepresentational, posthumanist, and other related theories to conceptualize the dynamic, complex and fluid nature of children's worlds (e.g., Kraftl, 2020; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Lester, 2013; Malone et al., 2020; Murris, 2016; Nxumalo, 2016; Rautio, 2013; Russell, 2015; Spyrou, 2019; Taylor, 2013).

These materially-informed approaches are concerned with how children are entangled in complex relationships with human and nonhuman others. As such, there is less focus on the agency of individual children and more emphasis on distributed agency across networks of relations. Spyrou et al., (2018) suggest that “this kind of relational ontologizing signals a shift from a view of children as individual, bounded entities and independent units of analysis to an understanding of children as ontological becomings: what matters is not what they are but how they affect and are affected in the event assemblages they find themselves in” (p. 8). Here becoming is not a developmental notion of child-becoming-adult, but a relational conception of world-making where children are in a continual process of becoming with (Barad, 2007) human and nonhuman others.
This sort of relational thinking has the potential to influence a range of work associated with child-friendly cities. For example, Pia Christensen, Sophie Hadfield-Hill, John Horton and Peter Kraftl (2017) suggest taking a more relational and nuanced approach to children’s mobilities beyond the typical focus on – and individual conception of – independent mobility, arguing that:

children’s mobilities are accomplished through the distributed, combined or collective agency of heterogeneous entities that include technologies, humans and nonhuman entities of different kinds, such as parents, siblings, friends, pets, transport means, transport policies, public infrastructure, urban street design and planning. (p. 26)

This orientation to mobilities invites new ways of considering how children move with/become with other entities in the city. It gestures to the complexities of how “people and things move and are made mobile by each other, sometimes for each other and often against each other” (Christensen et al., 2017, p. 281).

In inquiry associated with children’s play – an area of study that is commonly connected with urban child-friendliness – scholars are also engaging with this sort of relational theorizing. For example, Stuart Lester’s (2015) “Playing in a Deleuzian Playground” uses concepts from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (e.g., rhizome, assemblage, the virtual) to think creatively and generatively about play. In his (2020) book Everyday Playfulness: A New Approach to Children’s Play and Adult Responses to It, published posthumously, Lester further takes up theories operating from a relational ontology (e.g., Deleuzian, new materialist, posthumanist) in exploring well-being, micro-politics, space, critical cartography, account-abilities, response-abilities and professional practices related with children’s play. His colleague and collaborator Wendy Russell also experiments with such theories in research and practice on play and playwork (e.g., Lester & Russell, 2014; Russell & Lester, 2017; Russell, 2015). Recently, building on Lester and Russell’s work with playwork practitioners, Russell and colleagues Bridget Handscomb and John Fitzpatrick have used ‘critical cartography’ to develop new approaches for documenting playwork practices. I thinking differently about ‘play spaces’, this work draws on
principles of participatory action research as well as thinking from post-qualitative inquiry (see Russell et al., 2020).

Approaches that operate from a relational ontology are also employed to challenge the taken-for-granted nature/culture binary that is often part of child-in-nature movements as well as childhood studies more generally (e.g., Malone, 2016; Prout, 2005; Rautio, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Such approaches trouble the idea that nature and culture are necessarily opposed and disrupt assumptions that: human lives exist outside of nature; in the past humans were more connected with nature; and that people need to re-learn how to be close to nature (Rautio, 2013). Karen Malone (2018) argues that it is important to acknowledge:

that humans are nature. That from birth the child is always innately connected with and in relation to the natural world. Even in cities that seem devoid of ‘nature’, it exists always in us, the soil, the air, the plants and the water that sustains us. We are always deeply in relation with ‘nature’ and it is deeply in relation with us (p. 127).

Malone, along with her colleagues Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles and Elisabeth Barratt Hacking (2020) work with the concept of childhoodnature – echoing Donna Haraway’s naturecultures – in challenging nature/culture binaries and thinking differently about childhoods and ‘nature’, particularly in relation with emergent realities in the Anthropocene.

Relatedly, commonworlding approaches explore how human lives are situated and entangled in ‘common worlds’ (Latour, 2004) of complex more-than-human relations (e.g., Hogkins, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, Taylor, 2013). Here, interdisciplinary networks of researchers practice feminist common worlds methods as well as research on “children’s common worlds relations with place, with the material world, and with other species” (Common Worlds Research Collective, n.d. para. 3). Inquiry carried out in this tradition critically re-consider what constitutes the human, challenges the notion that humans are at the centre of world-making, and explores the agency of nonhuman entities in the making of shared worlds (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015).

Reimagining more-than-human relations in these novel ways has potential implications for research and practice on child-friendly cities. With this in mind, in this dissertation I explore
how taking a relational and material approach in this inquiry might generate new forms of thinking/doing in association with urban child-friendliness and the New Westminster CYFC strategy. As part of this, I explore some of the complexities and lines of connection that influence how children become with human and nonhuman others in this context. This more-than-human approach is necessarily connected with the history and literatures I have outlined in this chapter. Exploring how the CYFC strategy works – and might work – with other bodies toward change also opens up possibilities for challenging and extending praxis traditionally associated with child-friendly cities.
Chapter 4. The City: Entries into New Westminster – Parts One to Eight

With multiplicity in mind, in this chapter I introduce the City of New Westminster. What began as a few paragraphs describing New Westminster as a ‘setting’ (see parts five and six below), appears here as a series of entries into the city from various partial and intra-connected locations: traditional, ancestral and unceded; colonial; historical; attractive; geographic; demographic; infrastructural; and visible. While I use some traditional markers of setting, such as geography, demographics, and history, I also gesture to the challenges of identifying New Westminster as a place that can be known through one – or even many – perspectives. Rather, I work with idea that the city is an entity/body made up of innumerable (partially) located and interfering realities (Amin & Thrift, 2002). The realities engaged with here do not roll up into a unified representation of the city as a whole (something I revisit at the end of this chapter), but generate ‘partial illuminations’ (Latour & Hermant, 2006) of its entangled relations.

In approaching the city in this way, I am also thinking with on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) assemblage – a concept I introduced in Chapter 1, and take up again in more depth in Chapter 6 when discussing the ontological orientation of this study. The concept of assemblage has been increasingly employed by scholars concerned with how cities work (e.g., Blok & Farías, 2016; DeLanda 2019; Farías & Bender, 2010; Fisker et al., 2019; McFarlane, 2011a, 2011b) and how childhoods are performed (e.g., Aitken, 2018a, Gallagher, 2019; Horton & Kraftl, 2006a; Kraftl, 2020; Murris, 2016; Prout, 2005, 2011; Russell & Lester, 2017; Taylor et al., 2013). As Anders Blok and Ignacio Farias assert in their (2016) book Urban Cosmopolitics, a growing number of urban studies scholars have moved away from considering cities as distinct bounded objects, and toward treating them as webs of co-constituted urban assemblages that are constantly shifting and re-organizing. Using Isabelle Stenger’s (2005) concept of cosmopolitics, Blok and Farias (2016) suggest that:

Cities do not amount to objects existing ‘out there’, but that they are made and unmade at particular sites of practice, brought into being via concrete relations, materials, knowledges and engagements...a cosmopolitical approach to the city focuses on the
multiple forces and assemblages that constitute urban common worlds, and on the conflicts and compromises that arise among different ways of composing their forms and limits. It brings into view how urban worlds are always in the process of being subtly transformed, destabilized, decentred, questioned, criticized or even destroyed (pp. 1-2).

In this chapter, I particularly emphasize New Westminster’s settler colonial history, something that is commonly referred to in descriptions of the city as well as in interviews and conversations I had with people as part of this study. I also encountered this history in more materialized ways, including through park configurations, heritage designations, railway tracks, public art, institutional sites, the presence/absence of trees, street layouts and more. In carrying out this inquiry I sensed that New Westminster’s past was enfolded with the present in ways that were relevant to current realities, including aspirations to make the city better for children. This thinking/feeling became entwined with the doing of the research over time, compelling more nuanced conceptions of this urban environment and the complexity of its relationships.

While there is no singular or linear history of New Westminster, and no all-encompassing picture of the city as it is today, in this section I experiment with the notion that there are ways – situated, partial and always in flux – that this place might still be known. I also work with the city as a body with porous boundaries that are continually composed and re-composed in relationship. Therefore, below I put together a range of texts and images from different sources (e.g., books, articles, reports, websites, interviews) that approach New Westminster as a historicized, materialized and storied location. In doing so, I make decisions or cuts (Barad, 2007) about what to include, exclude, extend and feature in this arrangement. The intention here is to suggest, in an imbricated and somewhat collage-like way, a number of possible pathways into the city that work productively with other parts of this inquiry.

**The City Part One – Traditional, Ancestral, and Unceded**

This research took place on the traditional, ancestral, unceded and overlapping territories of the Halkomelem speaking First Peoples, including the qiíq̓éy̓t (Qayqayt), qič̓a’y̓
I offer this territorial acknowledgement as a way to honour and respect the many Indigenous peoples connected with the land that is now commonly identified as New Westminster. As part of this, I acknowledge that colonial practices of domination, exploitation, dislocation and erasure have made invisible much of their histories and connections with the land. This settler-colonial past/present is vital to an account of this city as a place. As part of this, I also acknowledge the commitments made in Canada to responding to the *Calls to Action* put forth by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) which investigated the residential school system and the forced removal of 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from their families to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture. These Calls to Action focus on redressing the legacies of residential schools and advancing reconciliation processes between Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (TRC, 2015).

Since the realities of Indigenous peoples associated with New Westminster are complex and continually shifting (e.g., there are ongoing explorations of how various First Nations, bands, communities and individuals are connected with the land), the stories told about these relations are shifting as well. The emergent quality of such relations can be seen in the following story related with the Qayqayt First Nation, also known as the New Westminster Indian Band. This text appears in the New Westminster Schools Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, developed in collaboration with the school district’s Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee and Chief Rhonda Larrabee who, in the film referenced below, discusses the history of the Qayqayt First Nation and recovering her Indigenous identity:

In the 19th century, a village alongside of what is now Front Street in New Westminster was called Qayqayt (pronounced Ka-kite). In 1859, New Westminster City Council sought to remove the First Peoples from the city core, creating three reserves in the surrounding area, including 27 acres of Poplar Island and 105 acres across the Fraser River at Bridgeview. A smallpox epidemic killed many First Peoples in 1904. In 1916, the McKenna McBride Commission closed the New Westminster Indian Reserve and told
the residents to move. Many reserves in British Columbia were being closed at this time, most without compensation or alternative lands to help them move. Qayqayt from New Westminster were married into or adopted into other Nations, relocating to Musqueam, Squamish, and Washington State. The story of the Qayqayt was almost forgotten. Chief Larrabee’s mother, aunt and uncle were the last few living members of the Qayqayt First Nation, which once numbered 400 people before their lands were sold and their remaining reserve was deemed inactive in 1951. Chief Larrabee’s journey of self-discovery led her to apply for Indian Status in 1994, resurrect the Qayqayt Band, become chief, and work to keep the legacy of her ancestors alive through education. Her story is captured in the award-winning National Film Board of Canada documentary, A Tribe of One. (New Westminster Schools, 2018)

The City Part Two – Colonial

![Figure 4.1 First Celebration in B.C. of Dominion Day, New Westminster. (ca. 1878). Queensborough photo collection. New Westminster Archives, New Westminster.](image-url)
In 1859, New Westminster was proclaimed a city by James Douglas, Governor of the Colony of British Columbia (Figure 6.2), making it the first incorporated city in western Canada.

Figure 4.2 Douglas, J. (1859, June 20). Proclamation. B.C. Historical Documents Collection. Open Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver.
In the (1983) dissertation entitled *The imposition of British Culture as portrayed in the New Westminster capital plan of 1859 to 1862*, Laura Elaine Scott describes how New Westminster was developed as the proposed capital of British Columbia, a colony on the west coast of North America. The city was envisioned as a means of consolidating the British claim to the area and asserting political and military dominance (Scott, 1983). While it did not retain its status as a capital city and struggled with identity and prosperity over time, the imperatives of colonial settlement are enfolded into its existence. Scott outlines the various ways that the City of New Westminster was built upon ambitions of empire, with symbols of British authority and culture infused into its original design. This project involved the establishment of institutions and physical infrastructure that suggested power and permanence – a courthouse, jail, hospital, churches, roads, and a railway line (Scott, 1983). It also included attempts to tame and *conquer nature* as alluded to in the following speech given by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (September 2, 1858) to the first group of Royal Engineers heading out on a voyage across the ocean to the site of New Westminster:

Soldiers - I have come to say to you a few kind words in parting. You are going to a distant country, not, I trust, to fight against men, but to conquer nature; not to besiege cities, but to create them; not to overthrow kingdoms but to assist in establishing new communications under the sceptre of your own Queen. For those noble objects, you soldiers of the Royal Engineers have been especially selected from the ranks of her majesty's armies. The enterprise before you is indeed glorious. Ages hence industry and commerce will crowd the roads that you have made...[and]...dwell in the cities of which you will map the sites and lay the foundations. (Wolfe, 2005, p. 14)

Scott discusses the complex human dynamics involved in designing and building New Westminster as well as the physical challenges presented by the land (Figures 6.3 to 6.5). The difficulties that the Royal Engineers encountered in negotiating the steep terrain, dense vegetation and marshy river floodplain were well documented, as noted in the following account from Lieutenant R.C. Mayne:
Dr. Campbell and I went to examine a part a little north of where the town stands, and so thick was the bush that it took us two hours to force our way in rather less than a mile and a half. Where we penetrated it was composed of very thick willow and alder, intertwined so closely that every step of the way had to be broken through, while the ground was cumbered with fallen timber of a larger growth. (Murray, 1962, as cited in Scott, 1983, pp. 52-53)
In the (1909) book *Bishop in the Rough*, Reverend Sheepshanks recalls his first encounter with New Westminster in 1859:

On turning a corner of the river, after an hour or two of steady steaming upstream, at about fifteen miles from the mouth of the river, the captain, who was standing at my side, said ‘There, sir, that is your place’. I looked up a long stretch of the river, and there on the left-hand side, I saw a bit of clearing in the dense forest. Mighty trees were lying about in confusion, as though a giant with a sweep of his mighty arm had mown them down. Many of the trunks had been consumed by fire. Their charred remains were seen here and there. The huge stumps of trees were still standing in most places, though in others they had been eradicated and consumed. And between the prostrate trees and stumps were a few huts, one small collection of wooden stores, some sheds and tents, giving signs of a population of perhaps 250 people. This clearing continued up river more than a quarter of a mile. And the dense pine forest came down to somewhat less than the same distance from the river’s bank. This was New Westminster. (Duthie, 1909, as cited in Scott, 1983, p. 81)
The City Part Three – Historical

This was New Westminster. Reverend Sheepshanks’ words echo in my thoughts as I sift through current text and images that introduce the city and attempt to capture it – pronouncing in various ways: This is New Westminster. Under the heading Welcome to the Royal City the following text and image (Figure 6.6) appears on the front page of the city’s website:

As the oldest city in western Canada, New Westminster has a long and rich history. In 1859, the Royal Engineers arrived from England to establish the first capital of the new colony of British Columbia. The chosen site was selected both for its beauty and strategic location on the Fraser River. (CNW, n.d.-b)

Figure 4.6 [Aerial Photograph of New Westminster]. (n.d.-a). City of New Westminster: Welcome to the Royal City.

“The tradition and the history of the city comes up on a weekly basis. It’s not like it’s a bad thing - you feel like you’re being dragged back to the origins of the city. But they’re just really tied to celebrating what this city represents and it’s always referred to as the
Royal City that has that history. So you always want to try to include some history into what you’re doing. It’s included in the logo. But at the same time, we want to be moving forward as much as possible, so we try to be innovative while incorporating some of that history in the programming we do.” -- from interview with city employee

Under the heading of *Grounded in the Past and Forward Thinking* the New Westminster Official Community Plan puts forth the following:

New Westminster’s distinct identity has been formed through a narrative that tells the story of over 10,000 years of life along the Fraser River. This narrative defines who we are today and guides us in choosing what our city will become. Our city’s heritage is an endowment from its citizens and includes buildings, streetscapes, traditions, memories and values. New Westminster’s rich history can be read on the ground through a stunning and diverse array of architecture, green spaces, street patterns, a working riverfront, and the historic Downtown. We have a strong connection to our past from the ancestral roots of our First Nations communities to the evolution of Front Street and the city’s many historical neighbourhoods. However, we are also an open minded, creative and forward thinking city — we embrace new neighbours and our evolving cultural mosaic. We understand the changing landscapes of society, the economy, and our environment and actively plan for our place in the future. We are innovative and find ways to integrate beloved heritage buildings into sustainable and livable developments. We are adaptable to the changes that technology may bring to the design of our buildings, transportation and communication networks. We are conscientious of climate change: our citizens are committed to shrinking their carbon footprints while the City takes action to encourage energy efficient buildings, provide desirable, low-carbon transportation options, and reduce waste. (CNW, 2020a, p. 27)
The City Part Four – Attractive

This text appears on the Tourism New Westminster website under *about New West* (a common nickname for New Westminster):

New West is the trendy hidden gem of Metro Vancouver. Western Canada’s oldest city, New West is a historical and cultural hub with everything from food and shopping, to arts, theatre, and live entertainment...Steeped in history, New Westminster’s colourful past is key to the arts and culture at the heart of BC. When British Columbia was just a dream in the hearts of pioneers and gold miners, this was its capital city. The cosmopolitan centre of the brash young ‘colony’. Established in 1859, and named by Queen Victoria for her favourite London District. The Royal City’s story is one of boom, bust, and revitalization. This small community on the banks of the Fraser flourished and grew. At times suffering, persevering, and rebuilding to become the community hub of today...There are endless things to do and see in each of the six unique shopping districts of New Westminster -- Uptown, Queensborough, Sapperton, Downtown, the West End, and the Quay. Each has its own distinct personality and culture, making them feel like cities of their own. (Tourism New Westminster, n.d.)

Despite being in the centre of a highly urbanized region, New Westminster is identified as “a big little city” with a small town feel (CNW, 2020a, p. 29).

“We’re so tiny right? We’re what, we’re 15 square kilometers. We’re one
eighbourhood. I know there are 10 distinct neighbourhoods in New West, but we’re one
tiny neighbourhood. There’s not a huge population here. The City Council is very
progressive at the moment. School trustees are very progressive at the moment. There
seems to be an energy to do things in new ways here. Even though it’s such an old city.
One of the originals.” -- from interview with school district employee

“There’s just things here that feel more small town. And people know each other, and
there’s a rapport between the city and the community...there are also people who are
passionate about their city and really grass roots. And [they] organize and blog and are on social media, and they love their city.” -- from interview with city employee

“I would say New West is a very caring city. There’s lots of, as in any city, there are all kinds of social challenges that are going on, whether it’s housing, people not having work, immigration, all kinds of things that create challenges in a neighbourhood. And I would say New West is very caring because it seems like so many of the different strategies and policies that we’re working on are about trying to help or fix or encourage a better place for people to be.” -- from interview with city employee

The City Part Five – Geographic

“In terms of physical geography, it’s interesting because you have an isolated island where no one leaves and the you have a city on a hillside, where people walk across the city but not up and down the city...So you may have a service that’s less than two kilometres from your house, but you’re not going to go there because you’re not going to walk your family up and down the hill to get there. So, if you’re not on the right plane, it’s not a service you’re going to use.” -- from interview with school district employee

Occupying 15.6 square kilometres, the City of New Westminster is situated on the Fraser River, surrounded by the municipalities of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Richmond, Delta and Surrey (CNW, 2020a). Ten commonly identified New Westminster neighbourhoods are shown in Figure 6.7, numbered as follows: 1) Queensborough 2) Connaught Heights 3) West End 4) Moody Park 5) Brow of the Hill 6) Glenbrooke North 7) Queen’s Park 8) Massey Victory Heights 9) McBride, Sapperton and D) Downtown and Quayside. Notably, Queensborough – a neighbourhood located on the river floodplain on the western tip of Lulu Island – is connected to/separated
from the rest of the city by bridge. The participatory research project that was part of this study took place in the neighbourhoods numbered 6, 7 and 9.

“New West is on a steep slope. Our city is mostly built to be, especially on our waterfront, it’s like a working waterfront. So it’s a lot of tugboats and log booms and wood chips and you’ve got big barges going by. And then you’ve got train tracks cutting us off from our waterfront. So, accessibility wise, small kids, you’re looking at stairs or something so you can get over there. And from that side of the train tracks you’re looking at basically a sloped hill. So, walking or biking with young ones can be challenging. And then you’ve got, we’re on a major truck route. So, we have a lot of industrial and commercial type traffic going through…people going to other places, cities, are just going through.”

-- from interview with city employee

New Westminster is the location of many government organizations and institutions, including the Royal Columbian Hospital, Douglas College, TransLink, Law Courts and the Justice Institute
of British Columbia. Over decades, a highly industrialized waterfront developed to support forest, marine and manufacturing industries as well as the transfer of goods via rail and ship. Recent efforts have been made to add more green corridors and amenities to this waterfront as well as heavily built-out areas of the city. This includes an urban forest management strategy with a goal of increasing the tree canopy in the city through planting new trees on private land as well as city-owned park and civic lands (CNW, 2020a).

The City Part Six – Demographic

“We have the fifth highest population density of any municipality in Canada. Because of that, we’ve had to build up a lot, towers and stuff.”

-- from interview with city employee

According to the most recent census, New Westminster was the third most dense municipality in the Metro Vancouver area of British Columbia, with a population of 70,996. The largest proportion of this population was between 30 and 34 years old, while 16.8% were between 0 and 19 years old. Immigrants made up 34.9% of the total population, with the Philippines, China and India identified as the three largest source countries. Compared to Metro Vancouver, New Westminster received a notably larger proportion of refugees, making up 12.2% of the immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2016). Driven largely by immigration, the diverse population of the city is expected to reach 102,000 by 2041 (CNW, 2020a).

With a limited land base, New Westminster’s population growth is primarily accommodated through the building of high rises and other high-density urban housing (CNW, 2020a). Apartments comprise over 68% of dwellings, with a larger number of people residing in rental housing than most regional municipalities (Hart et al., 2016). However, there is considerable variation in the type of housing stock across neighbourhoods, with more ‘historic’ areas having a larger proportion of single-family homes, a number with heritage designations (CNW, 2020a). Since New Westminster has a lower percentage of children and youth than average in the Metro Vancouver area, there has been a recent focus on creating family-friendly
housing and amenities (e.g., playgrounds, child care centres) to attract and retain families with children (CNW, 2020a).

New Westminster was also identified as a city of contrasts in a 2016 community profile completed by a funder of thirty-seven organizations in the city (Hart et al., 2016). For example, this community profile indicated that the city had the second highest median family income in Metro Vancouver, yet also the highest unemployment rate. In addition, while fifty-nine percent of people aged 25-64 had a college degree or higher, over a third of eighteen-year-olds did not graduate high school in 2009-2012.

The City Part Seven – Infrastructural

In his introductory message to the New Westminster Utility Commission Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Len Kelsey, Chair of the Utility Commission, states:

Most people flip a switch, open a website, or turn up the thermostat without much thought as to where the service comes from. In the coming year we will initiate a dialogue with our customers to consider and align our operations with their priorities and expectations. At the same time the Utility must continue active engagement with other civic operating departments and Council to integrate our planning and service delivery as the city continues its dynamic and innovative development. To continue to serve this historic and evolving community with reliable and responsive energy and data services, we must continue to invest in upgrading and expanding our resources, both physical and human (CNW, 2018a, p. 4).

In this section, I point to the ways that New Westminster might be explored through hidden assemblages of infrastructure – entanglements of the physical, the human and more. I do so with the idea that noticing and tracing the relationships of seemingly inert material objects with other aspects of urban life might offer additional ways to identify the city. A vast array of planned, designed and engineered aspects of cities are rendered largely invisible amidst everyday urban life. These elements might be out of plain sight (e.g., buried pipes and cables), not readily decipherable (e.g., street markings), have hidden features (e.g., breakaway posts) or
simply go unnoticed (e.g., manhole covers, wireless towers) (Mars, 2020). Here, the meanings associated with material objects might be readily apparent (e.g., a street sign with the words *Slow Down, Children Playing*) or more subtle (e.g., a speed bump that conveys the message *slow down* without using words) (see Latour, 1994).

I think about the various ways that infrastructure-related assemblages can be configured as I view maps and other images of New Westminster. The City of New Westminster hosts a rich open data site with access to municipal data and a range of maps related with infrastructure that can be variously viewed and layered (e.g., roads, bus routes, electric systems, communication networks). For example, Figure 6.8 shows map of the New Westminster water network.

![Figure 4.8 City Water Network. (n.d.). CityViews 3.0 Public – City of New Westminster, BC.](image)

Looking at this water network map, I consider how the flow of water is integral to the *workings* of the city. As Roman Mars (2020) states:

> The health and growth of a city is inexorably linked to water. Clean water must be available and dirty water needs to be removed. The importance of this cannot be overstated, but it’s easy for it to escape our notice. Water is often a driving force behind the locations of cities, but it also shapes and limits their physical boundaries. As the
climate changes, this fluctuating relationship will have a profound effect on the lives of city dwellers that will be impossible to ignore (p. 107).

While the river is often referenced as important to New Westminster’s past and present, the networks of water that flow underneath and through the city are also intra-related with life here. Such relationships with water are dynamic and change over time in association with human and nonhuman forces. Research projects such as the *Lost Streams of New Westminster Project (2019)* examine aspects of this dynamic change. The project uses historical maps, photographs, and texts to identify streams that no longer flow over the land in New Westminster, exploring how streams, creeks and intermittent flows of water have been lost through diversion, covering over and installing pipes. The researchers state:

> Early maps prepared by the Royal Engineers don’t indicate the presence of streams. Their maps showed the future plans for the “Royal City” and streams were likely perceived as temporary obstructions to their grand schemes, but nothing that couldn’t be “engineered” by these master planners and builders (McPhee et al., n.d., para.3)

The project highlights how water flows that were incompatible with future visions of the city went unmapped or were deleted from maps. Steeped in relations of power, these flows can help construct certain realities and bring things into being – they can also work to obscure and erase. They operate as part of more-then-human assemblages to make certain things visible and invisible in the city.

**The City Part Eight – Visible**

With visibility in mind, this last section connects with Bruno Latour and Emilie Hermant’s *Paris, Invisible City* (2006). In this project, the authors wandered around Paris and explored, through images and text, the challenges of capturing and representing the city. They photographed a range of objects and traced several everyday pathways through Paris, attending to how different views and encounters might generate new theories about social relationships and the identities of place. They insisted that the inability to capture *all of Paris* is not due to fragmentation, nor a lack of aggregated information, but because there is no
distance (from standing up high on a landmark, or clicking through successive layers on a digital map) from which the observer can separate from the city and view it whole. The challenge here is not simply that Paris is complicated (i.e., has a lot of moving parts), but is complex (i.e., is shaped through entangled knotty relationships) (Latour & Hermant, 2006). They suggest that Paris might be known, to some extent, through the step-by-step tracing of pathways through the city. In doing so, they offer up insights or “partial illuminations” (Latour & Hermant, 2006) that relate with how things are ordered, located, gathered, bound and distinguished – making the city, in some ways, visible.

This tracing of pathways is something I have attempted to do in providing various entry points into the City New Westminster. In crafting these partial introductions to the city, I am suggesting how it might be identified through multiple (sometimes contested) realities and sites of becoming. While many other pathways could be followed in considering New Westminster as a research setting, my intent here is to create some connections that might be picked up in other parts of this inquiry. I do so with the idea that efforts to make New Westminster more child-friendly are necessarily entangled with historicized, materialized and situated webs of co-constituted urban assemblages that are constantly shifting and re-organizing. This research immanently engages with these messy entanglements and explores how they might be implicated in children’s everyday encounters and relations with other bodies.
Chapter 5. **The Child: Conceptualizing the Child in this Research**

Defining the Child

With respect to language, my use of the term *child* in this inquiry draws on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) definition of child: a human being below the age of 18 (UNCRC, 1989). As discussed in Chapter 3, scholarship and community-based work on child-friendly cities is often linked with the UNCRC and children’s rights. In line with this, the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) strategy points to the UNCRC definition, while also employing *youth* when referring to people 13 to 17 years of age. Taking my lead from the strategy, I occasionally use *youth* and *young people* to roughly identify people below the age of 18, recognizing that these terms also commonly refer specifically to teen-aged (and sometimes older) people. I also use *kids* and *students*, two words that participants (aged 11-13) involved in the school-based research project used to identify themselves. These overlapping language choices are responsive to the context of this research and loosely track onto the UNCRC definition of child.

Conceptualizing the Child

However, beyond terminology, it also seems important here to more fully address the concept of *child* and the various forms of child that emerge through this inquiry. In grappling with how to conceptualize the child in this research I initially leaned toward social constructionist thinking. I considered how language and discourse help produce child-related identities and are connected with various projects (e.g., articulating human rights; assessing children’s development; setting transit user-fees). As suggested in Chapter 3, there is a great deal of scholarship concerned with how constructions of the child are shaped through human discourses and social processes. In the field of childhood studies in particular, understandings of the child (and associated childhoods) are viewed as highly contextual, historical, and political (Mayall, 2000; Prout, 2005). While I do not take up the history of childhood(s) in this chapter, it
is important to acknowledge the rich and nuanced bodies of work that have been produced through this tradition. Such work has influenced research and practice related with child-friendly cities and is also entangled with the concepts of child and childhoods that emerge through this dissertation research.

**Posthuman Concepts of the Child**

My shift towards toward posthumanist thinking influenced how I conceptualized the child in this inquiry. Notably, in reading Karin Murris’ (2016) book *The Posthuman Child: Educational Transformation Through Philosophy with Picturebooks*, I began to more deeply consider how the child is brought into being through more-than-human webs of relations. In putting forth a posthuman concept of child, Murris (2016) asserts that “there is no prior existence of individuals with properties, competencies, a voice, agency, etc. Individuals materialise and come into being through relationships” (p. 84). Here the child is an entangled being/becoming – an ‘assemblage connected with other assemblages’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Thus, conceptualizing the child is not just a matter of identifying characteristics (e.g., age), but of attending to complex material-discursive relations. While this notion of a posthuman child moves away from liberal humanist understandings of children as individual autonomous agents, it does not preclude the existence of child subjects, nor their agency. Rather, it implies that child subjectivities are radically relational and always shifting, as opposed to pre-given or fixed. It attends to the ways that children and childhoods are necessarily entangled with materiality and nonhuman entities. It also suggests that a multiplicity of child-related subjectivities can exist at the same time and intermingle in complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways.

In this way, a posthuman concept of child offers up new possibilities for configuring child subjectivities. It resonates with posthuman notions of what it means to be human more generally, including the challenging of stable human identity categories. It is the sort of posthuman subject put forth by Rosi Braidotti (2013) – a subject emerging “within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings...a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity” (p.
As suggested by Braidotti, the traditional humanist subject (emerging through the Enlightenment) has historically excluded some people (e.g., children) from the category of the human. Thus, finding alternate ways of thinking/doing subjectivity offers opportunities to address such inequities and acknowledges what Braidotti (2013) calls “the missing people” – as well as nonhuman entities involved in world-making.

A number of childhood studies scholars have started to work with a posthuman concept of the child and childhoods (e.g., Aitken, 2018b; Christensen et al., 2017; Kraftl, 2020; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017; Prout, 2011; Rautio, 2014). Approaching the child in this way has a myriad of implications for research and practice. For example, it blurs distinctions between children and adults in ways that challenge child/adult binaries. With this in mind, Alan Prout (2011) suggests moving away from focusing on oppositional generational positions and toward examining “how different versions of child or adult emerge from the complex interplay, networking and orchestration of different natural, discursive, collective and hybrid materials” (p. 12). Working with a posthuman concept of the child also highlights how children affect and are affected by various entangled bodies, including nonhuman bodies. For example, children’s intra-active relationships with cell phones and associated technologies (e.g., social media, algorithms etc.) contribute to the continual making and re-making of child identities – as well as to the unfolding existence of these technologies. Finally, conceptualizing the child through posthumanism opens up possibilities for responding to child-related realities in tangible and important ways. As suggested by Affrica Taylor (2013):

> Twenty-first-century children need relational and collective dispositions, not individualistic ones, to equip them to live well within the kind of world that they have inherited. If they are to peacefully coexist in this heterogeneous world, with differences that often pose ethical dilemmas, and if they are to do so without seeking to dominate, assimilate or appropriate these differences, they will need a firm sense of shared belonging and shared responsibility within the natureculture collective of their immediate common worlds (p. 117).
In considering the complexities of these common worlds, in his (2020) book After Childhood: Re-thinking Environment, Materiality and Media in Children’s Lives, Peter Kraftl argues that we not begin with children or childhoods, but after them. He suggests ‘pulling focus’ or bringing the child ‘in and out of focus’ in order to better understand and respond to children’s more-than-human relational entanglements.

The Emergence of the Child and Childhoods in this Inquiry

In their the (2019) book Reimagining Childhood Studies, Spyros Spyrou, Rachel Rosen and Daniel Thomas Cook consider the possibilities of approaching childhood studies from a relational ontology. Re-imagining how childhoods are done they ask: “which child, children, and childhood do we bring into being through our scholarship and which do we preclude?” (Spyrou et al., 2019, p. 6). In thinking through this question, I consider the various forms of child (and children and childhoods) that emerge in association with this inquiry and how they are brought into being. Here, the boundaries between the child and other bodies (e.g., city-related, research-related) are cut-out in situational encounters that do not stay still. Thus, there is no general concept of child that precedes and stands apart from this research. Rather, there are various forms of child that emerge through, and are inseparable from, research-related events.

Again, this is not to say that child identities/subjectivities are abandoned in this inquiry. Rather, they are more distributed and less stable. Indeed, in terms of addressing matters of equity and justice related with children (something that is important in work related with child-friendly cities – and is important in this research too) there is a need to identify the child as a subject. It is difficult to operate politically without some form of identity. Thus, shedding identity is something that may not serve children or other marginalized groups that have been considered less-than-human or not-yet-human over time. For this reason, this research plugs into humanist and rights-related assemblages associated with the UNCRC. Doing so is not trouble-free, as there are tensions in bringing together universal individual human rights and the situated more-than-human sensibilities of posthumanism. Such tensions are well articulated by Stuart Aitken (2018b) in putting forth his concept of the ‘post-child’. Aitken
argues that universal child rights have a long tradition of marginalizing young people, reinforcing inequities, and hindering the potential for children’s lives to become different.

Aitken (2018b) employs “posthuman thinking as a challenge to the efficacy of children’s rights and while not dismissing their importance to theory, practice and policy, ask[s] if perhaps there are better practices and politics through which to improve young people’s lives (p. 10). Drawing on a feminist politics of location, Aitken (2018b) argues that (although not easy nor straightforward) it is possible to create the ‘spirit of’ universal child rights in everyday circumstances, stating:

Rights and everyday politics in a post-global world are corporeal and technological, fluid, negotiable and relational, and they are tied to the ways that young people (and their relations with other people and things) create and recreate spaces of experience, experimentation and power (p. 132).

He suggests that such rights can be enacted through and situated practices of care and ‘sustainable ethics’ (Braidotti, 2013).

In this research, I attempt to plug into this situated, relational and contingent way of negotiating rights, while acknowledging the challenges of doing so. I also suggest that the multiplicity implied in a posthuman concept of child allows for forms of a rights-bearing child – the sort of social actor often referred to in work pertaining to child-friendly cities – while also inviting more fluid configurations of child-related subjectivities, including those that do not necessarily have an individual human consciousness. In configuring the child as a dynamic entanglement of heterogeneous relations rather than a stable and unified construct, posthumanism acknowledges various forms of collective agency – different configurations of ‘I’ and ‘we’ in connection with the child and childhoods. With this in mind, in this research the child is important, yet ‘moves in and out of focus’ (Kraftl, 2020) as the research explores complex entanglements, problems and potential associated with the New Westminster CYFC strategy.
PART II: THINKING/DOING THIS INQUIRY

Part II (Chapters 6-8) takes up some of the concepts introduced in Part I and further connects them with the theories, approaches, and sensibilities employed in this inquiry.

Chapter 6, Ontology, highlights Deleuzian, posthumanist, and other related theories that have increasingly influenced the thinking/doing of this inquiry. Here, I particularly focus on the concepts of immanence, multiplicity, the virtual, difference, and assemblage, as well as outline aspects of Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman critical theory.

With the idea that ontology and epistemology are always entangled, in Chapter 7, Onto-epistemology, I focus more on how the theories outlined in Chapter 6 are enfolded with this inquiry. I also outline how the work shifted from a qualitative orientation toward a more post-qualitative one. Picking up Braidotti’s posthuman critical theory again in this chapter, I identify five sensibilities that help shape the inquiry: praxis, nomadism, encounter, diffraction and cartography. In Chapter 8, I further take up these five sensibilities in discussing how one might consider the quality of this particular inquiry.

The theoretical and methodological thinking in Part II connects with, and leads into, Part III, where I describe particular methods used in the participatory project and interviews that were part of this research.
Chapter 6. **Ontology**

“It matters what ideas one uses to think other ideas (with).”

-- Marilyn Strathern, 1992, p. 10

Working with the idea that the concepts we think with have agency (Thiele, 2014), in this chapter I highlight concepts that have influenced the arrangement of this inquiry. As suggested in previous chapters, theories related with the *new social studies of childhood* informed my initial approach to this research. This theoretical orientation became enfolded with the inquiry in important ways over time, as I will further outline in Chapters 7 and 9. However, in this chapter I outline some Deleuzian, posthumanist and related theories that increasingly became part of the research as well. In particular, I identify the ontological thinking that helped shift this research toward the post-qualitative – with particular emphasis on the concepts of *multiplicity, the virtual, difference, and assemblage* put forth by Gilles Deleuze (sometimes with Félix Guattari). I also outline aspects of Rosi Braidotti’s *posthuman critical theory*, a form of posthumanism that is compatible with Deleuzian theories, and that I heavily draw on in this dissertation as well. This chapter is closely connected with, and flows into, the following chapter (Chapter 7, Onto-epistemology) which focuses more on how the theories outlined below are enfolded with the thinking/doing of this inquiry.

It is important to acknowledge that I am plugging into concepts that are attached with various complex bodies of thought. The concepts have also been taken up in diverse ways – including by the theorists themselves – over time and across different projects. As Deleuze and Guattari (1994) suggest:

In any concept there are usually bits or components that come from other concepts, which corresponded to other problems and presupposed other planes. This is inevitable because each concept carries out a new cutting-out, takes on new contours, and must be reactivated or recut (p. 18).
With this in mind, I do not attempt to fully summarize, simplify or neatly fit these concepts together. Rather, I try to cut and activate them in ways that might lead to insights and creative engagement with the problems and questions driving this inquiry.

**Ontologically Thinking**

Theories and approaches that are part of the recent *material turn* or *ontological turn* influencing childhood studies include: new materialisms (e.g., Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2013); posthuman studies (e.g., Braidotti, 2013); agential realism (e.g., Barad, 2007); material feminisms (e.g., Alaimo & Hekman, 2008); new empiricism (e.g., Clough, 2009); actor network theory (Latour, 2005); affect theory (e.g., Massumi, 2002); vital materialisms (e.g., Bennett, 2010); assemblage theory (e.g., DeLanda, 2019); non-representational theory (e.g., Thrift, 2008) and more. These orientations are diverse, yet variously overlap and co-mingle. What they share is a concern with ontology (i.e., the study of being or what there is) (May, 2005) and how matter is co-implicated in world-making – that is, how things come into being through complex arrangements of material objects and forces (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Many strands of this work are influenced by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, notably in his collaboration with Félix Guattari on the (1987) book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. It is important to acknowledge that these approaches also share sensibilities with some Indigenous philosophies and traditions, particularly in their attunement to nonhuman agency and the interconnections between humans and nonhumans, including human-animal and human-land relations (Bignal & Rigney, 2019; Jones & Hoskins, 2016; Rosiek et al., 2019; Tallbear, 2011).

In using materially and ontologically-informed approaches in this inquiry, I am working from a *relational ontology*. This ontology assumes that existence is composed through complex webs of fluid relations that are in a continuous process of *becoming* (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that there is a “pure plane of immanence upon which unformed elements and materials dance” (p. 255). On this plane, there are no inherent insides or outsides – there is only the middle (milieu). From this orientation, existence emerges
through immanent (i.e., inside/existing within) processes rather than pre-given transcendent processes.

A relational ontology also operates through *multiplicity* (a concept introduced in Chapter 2), where everything is connected – loosely or intensely, but not permanently – with everything else (May, 2005). Thus, there is no single coherent reality, nor many distinct realities that can be identified and counted, but a multiplicity of mutually entangled realities. This multiplicity is ‘more than one, but less than many’ (Deleuze, 1987; Mol, 2002; Strathern, 2004). As John Law (2004) states:

We discover multiplicity, but not pluralism. For the absence of singularity does not imply that we live in a world composed of an indefinite number of different and disconnected bodies...it does not imply that reality is fragmented. Instead it implies something much more complex. It implies that the different realities overlap and interfere with one another. Their relations, partially co-ordinated, are complex and messy (p. 61).

Deleuze (1994) suggests that there is a *virtual field* (of *multiplicity* or *difference-in-itself*) – from which all things are *actualized*. While the virtual is real, it is not directly knowable. It is a realm of relations and potential that can only be *sensed* (May, 2005). In outlining Deleuze’s concept of the virtual, Todd May (2005) states:

Suppose we consider the possibility that there is more to our world than we can perceive, and more than we can conceive...we need to consider the possibility that our world (or, since the concept of the world is too narrow, things or being or what there is) outruns any categories we might seek to use to capture it (p. 81).

Deleuze argues that the virtual field is always transforming – folding, unfolding, refolding – and setting the conditions from which possibilities emerge (Deleuze, 1994; May, 2005). It gives rise to (temporary) identities – those aspects of existence that can be recognized and named (e.g., a child, a city, a feeling, a policy, a swing, a snowstorm). The ‘difference’ associated with this virtual field is not a *difference between* identities that are already actualized, but an *emergent difference* – the process of things continually actualizing and becoming different (Deleuze,
1994). One concept Deleuze and Guattari (1987) associate with this sort of differential becoming is the concept of *assemblage*.

**Assemblage Thinking**

Assemblages (an English translation of the French word *agencement* used by Deleuze and Guattari) are often described as fluid arrangements of heterogeneous elements (Nail, 2017). While these arrangements might seem like stable bodies/entities, Deleuze and Guattari insist that assemblages are relational arrangements that are always in flux (i.e., they operate more like *assemblings*, something implied in the French word agencement, but somewhat lost in its English translation to the word assemblage) (Nail, 2017). Thus, assemblages are not collections of stable elements that form a unified whole, but are co-constituted, interfering and endlessly re-arranging. They operate through multiplicity (see above). An element of one assemblage might be part of many other assemblages – and might also be considered an assemblage in itself (DeLanda, 2016). Rachel Crellin (2017) gives the following example of assemblage:

We might consider the assemblage of a bus travelling between towns: the assemblage is made up of varied kinds of passengers—old and young, all going to different places to carry out different things; the bus driver (who has a different agenda) is also part of the assemblage, as is the road network, the money used to pay the fare, the seats and windows, the motor engine and the bus operating company. All of these components are brought together in a temporary assemblage that is the Number One bus on an afternoon in July. As the bus moves, the assemblage changes: different passengers get on and off, the location and road change, the levels of fuel and oil in the engine decrease and many other components besides are all in flux...the driver of the Number One bus on that July afternoon is at once part of the bus assemblage and part of an assemblage that is her family, and a different assemblage that is all the buses operating in the area. Furthermore, we can consider the bus driver herself as an assemblage of organs, tissues, foods, liquids, beliefs, clothes and feelings (p. 113).
In assemblages, things do not have to be alike to be related (e.g., a bus, money, clothes, feelings). They are heterogeneous. Further, elements of assemblages have collective and distributed agency – they do things together (Bennet, 2010). Using the Number One bus example, movement down the road is carried out through a configuration of: bus, engine, road networks, bus fare, driver’s agenda, food and more. All are acting together to make things happen. However, this mutual performance does not imply that assemblages are coherent units that can be reduced to their parts. Deleuze argues:

Assemblages should not be understood as a composite of forces that may somehow be disassembled to reveal each constituent element. On the contrary, assemblages are ‘intensive multiplicities’ whereby each assembled element is transformed in its relations with other elements such that it no longer makes sense to speak of constituent parts.

(Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 132)

Therefore, while elements of an assemblage can be identified (e.g., passenger, road network, oil) these identities are temporary and may work with various other assemblages. For example, the bus driver is part of a family assemblage and is also inseparable from a digestion assemblage involving food and various types of microorganisms that, in turn, help compose a human body assemblage. In this way, existence is relational, contingent and fluid. All entities are in a process of transformation and becoming with others.

Assemblages are made up of material bodies (both organic and inorganic) and also elements of meaning and discourse. They are material-discursive. Here, the concept of discourse encompasses more than language and words. It also involves systems of thought that enable and constrain what can be said (e.g., ideas, attitudes and beliefs about what counts as meaningful) and that actively work – with matter – to produce realities. Again, thinking with the Number One bus, the material aspects of assemblage (e.g., engine, seats, human bodies) cannot be separated from discursive aspects (e.g., road names, passenger’s attitudes, communication flows).

Moreover, assemblages – and components of assemblages – do not simply nest inside each other. There are no inherently bigger or smaller things, nor fixed scales with
predetermined orders and magnitudes (DeLanda, 2016). Therefore, the bus travelling between two towns is not contained to a discrete local level of action. It is entangled with various assemblages (e.g., transport laws and regulations, algorithms, weather patterns, economic flows) that cut across what we typically call scales. For example, the use of technologies (e.g., cell phones) on the bus create various connections, intimacies and obligations that collapse traditional notions of near/far and local/global. In this way, scales are flattened, hierarchies are questioned, and new kinds of relationships are potentially formed and illuminated.

Thinking with assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari are more interested in what things do (potential) than what they are (identities). They emphasize fluid creative processes and how novel things emerge from the virtual realm (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Assemblages are seen as constantly changing through territorialising flows which stabilize them and deterritorialising flows which destabilize them (Ansell Pearson, 1999/2012). Deleuze and Guattari further suggest that a singular affect (e.g., an action, an event, an encounter) can sometimes rupture an assemblage and lead to a deterritorializing line of flight (Fox & Alldred, 2015). Returning once again to the Number One bus, the predictable travel of the bus between towns might take unexpected new directions through an encounter (e.g., involving snow, a nail on the road, a labour dispute) that disrupts the workings of the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the rhizome in conceptualizing such lines of flight, contrasting the spontaneous movement of botanical rhizomes (e.g., mint) to that of structured and rooted entities (e.g., trees) (see Chapter 2).

Posthumanist Thinking

Scholars have used Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts in advancing a range of neo-material theories and approaches. In this dissertation, I plug into some of this work, particularly a strand of posthumanism known as posthuman critical theory, conceptualized by Rosi Braidotti (2018a) as the convergence of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism. Braidotti (2018a) indicates that “the former proposes the philosophical critique of the Western Humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the allegedly universal measure of all things, whereas the latter rests on the rejection
of species hierarchy and human exceptionalism” (p. 339). Influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari and feminist theories, Braidotti (2018a) indicates that posthuman critical theory combines critique and creativity in a theoretical approach that is immanent, vital-materialist, embodied and embedded. It is concerned with inequities that are built into (human) conceptualizations of humanity. At the same time, this theory takes new directions in proposing how entangled (human and nonhuman) entities might relate in more life-affirming ways.

Posthuman critical theory challenges taken-for-granted constructions of the human and the idea that *human* is a neutral concept. Braidotti and Hlavajova (2018) point to the “effects of structural injustice and exclusions upon entire sections of the human population who have not enjoyed the privileges of being considered fully human. Gender and sexual difference, race and ethnicity, class and education, health and able-bodiedness are crucial makers and gatekeepers of acceptable ‘humanity’” (p. 2). Here, there is a concern with inequities and the ways that groups of people (e.g., children, racialized communities) have been constructed as less-than-human over time. This includes inequities embedded in emancipatory projects identified as humanist (e.g., universal human rights movements).

Posthuman critical theory also troubles human-centric notions of the world and the privileging of human experience (i.e., anthropocentrism). It considers how “interlaced assemblages of life exist also in extricable and constitutive connection to the nonliving forms and forces” (Bignall & Braidotti, 2019, p. 1). There is an attention to the ways that matter co-constitutes life and how agency is distributed among various arrangements of human and nonhuman bodies working together in assemblage. Such thinking also challenges binaries such as: nature/culture; human/nonhuman; male/female; subject/object; and matter/meaning. It allows for the creation of stories in which humans are not the main characters. It also implies that humans are implicated in situations that might seem to have little to do with their everyday lives, but with which they are connected (e.g., the links between plastic bag use of the and the lives of birds, nematodes or whales). Therefore, this post-anthropocentric orientation looks beyond human-centred notions of justice to consider just relationships between various entities, including nonhuman ‘others’ (Braidotti, 2013). Posthuman critical theory is therefore
concerned with how things work, for whom/what they work, and the possibilities for how things might work.

In putting forth posthumanism critical theory, Braidotti argues for creating alternatives to the traditional humanist subject, arguing “for the need to rethink subjectivity as a collective assemblage that encompasses human and nonhuman actors, technological mediation, animals, plants, and the planet as a whole” (Braidotti, 2017, p. 9). This sort of subjectivity necessarily disrupts and re-draws lines around what we think of as ‘bodies’, including human bodies. As Cecilia Åsberg, (2018) states:

The human body may well today be regarded as a microbiotic multi-species ecology in and of itself. Only 10 per cent of the trillion cells that constitute it are of the human-animal variety, while a motley majority of other microscopic organisms dominate our bodies. Even our genes are less than fully human (p. 157).

In re-thinking subjectivity, Braidotti (2011; 2018) calls for the creation of a ‘we’ that is not universal or unitary, but local and relational. She asserts:

The knowing subject is not Man, or Anthropos alone, but a more complex assemblage that undoes the boundaries between inside and outside the self, by emphasizing processes and flows. Neither unitary, nor autonomous, subjects are embodied and embedded, relational and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics. (Braidotti, 2020a, p. 395)

This orientation to subjectivity invites a range of new possible subject positions and perspectives. It has elements of the feminist politics of location (Harding, 1992; Rich, 1987), although these locations are necessarily partial, contingent and continually transforming (Haraway, 1988; Braidotti, 2013). In this way, it echoes Donna Haraway’s (2008) assertion that “entities with fully secured boundaries called possessive individuals (imagined as human or animal) are the wrong units for considering what’s going on” (p. 70). Such a re-assembling of subjectivity – a recomposing of ‘I’ and ‘we’ – is not just a theoretical endeavor. Rather, it holds the potential to transform more-than-human relations in tangible and important ways.
In this dissertation I think with – and experiment with – the above theories as they relate with the CYFC strategy in New Westminster. As previously suggested, all of the above concepts help configure the inquiry in various ways, including the social theories that I first used in setting up and carrying out parts of the research. As suggested Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman in their 2008 book *Material Feminisms*, theorizing in more material ways need not discount social constructions, nor other thinking from the linguistic turn. Rather, resonating with Rosi Braidotti’s conception of posthuman subjectivity, they suggest that such theorizing might yield new and generative possibilities for considering how materiality works in entanglement with discourse to produce subjectivity. With this in mind, in this research I increasingly move toward working from a relational ontology with the idea that theories and concepts more traditionally associated with child-friendly cities (e.g., social constructions of childhood, children’s rights) are necessarily enfolded with this thinking. In doing so, I increasingly engage child-friendliness as an ongoing process involving complex more-than-human relations. I am also curious about how to tap into the virtual realm to see what new becomings might emerge along with the CYFC strategy – and this research in relation with the strategy. In the following chapter I re-engage aspects of the above theories and outline how they became part of the doing of this research – recognizing that thinking/doing and ontology/epistemology are always entangled.
Chapter 7. **Onto-epistemology**

*O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,*

*Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?*

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,*

*How can we know the dancer from the dance?*

--- William Butler Yeats, 1928

*“We don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world and its differential becoming.”*

--- Karen Barad, 2007, p. 185

In this chapter, I outline the onto-epistemological orientation of this study and the research sensibilities associated with it. I do so with the idea that ontology is inseparable from epistemology. I discuss how this research moved from a qualitative to post-qualitative approach and identify some of the thinking/doing that became entangled with the inquiry with a focus on: *praxis, nomadism, encounter, diffraction* and *cartography*. It is through these sensibilities that I engage with this inquiry and address two key questions that returned in various forms throughout the process: *How does the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy work with other related bodies toward change? How might it?* I am drawn to the creative potential of these questions, and *the more* they gesture to in terms of urban child-friendliness in this context. In pursuing these questions, I am not seeking to find particular answers or sets of solutions, but to open a problematic field from which to explore new and potentially useful connections.
Moving Toward the Post-Qualitative

As previously suggested in this document, I entered into this inquiry with the intent to construct a community-based qualitative study with participatory components. My approach was heavily informed by social constructionism, a theory of knowledge that assumes the world is constructed through (human) social relationships and understandings (Burr, 2015). Thinking with social constructionism, I began to put together a study aimed at better understanding the complexities of implementing the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy while at the same time inviting children’s perspectives and ideas regarding aspects of the strategy. This initial planning process took place in collaboration with a planner from the City of New Westminster and three staff from the New Westminster School District responsible for facilitating community initiatives in schools.

I used Sally Thorne’s (2016) interpretive description as a guide in working with community collaborators to ‘scaffold’ the study. This approach to qualitative research combines both description and interpretation to generate nuanced and contextual insights that can be used in applied settings (e.g., health research) (Thorne, 2016). It resists faithfully and prescriptively following set methods, but instead suggests logically putting together – and perhaps recreating – qualitative methods to suit particular knowledge projects. Interpretive description “encourages borrowing from the full universe of available design techniques as appropriate to the nature of the question at hand” (Thorne, 2016, p. 39). Here there is freedom to experiment, not capriciously nor carelessly, but creatively and purposively toward knowledge that is useful in the world.

This approach to research aligned with my interest in examining the on-the-ground realities of striving to make a city a better for young people. The study also responded to calls within the interdisciplinary field of Childhood Studies to engage in research that addresses both children’s close-to-home experiences as well as a broader range of influences on their lives. Looking critically at the field, some scholars have argued “that there is a ‘thickness’ for children to be involved and influence many local situations, but a ‘thinness’ at more macro and policy
levels” (Tisdall & Punch, 2012, p. 256). This resonates with Nicola Ansell’s (2009) suggestion that, in addition to engaging in local participatory research with young people:

We should follow the ‘capillaries’ away from children themselves (in both time and space), to empirically investigate flows that are not directly visible to children (though some might be explored by them), into spaces from which children are physically absent. Policies are made and events take place beyond children’s perceptions that they cannot comment on, yet profoundly shape their lives. The political spaces from which children are physically absent are as important as those in which they are present (p. 204).

With this in mind, I worked with collaborators from the city and school district to craft a research plan that involved 1) a participatory school-based project with children related to outdoor neighbourhood play as well as 2) interviews with people associated with the development and implementation of the CYFC strategy more generally. I was interested in meaningfully and respectfully engaging with children to learn more about their play experiences and ideas for making their neighbourhoods more play-friendly. As part of this, I was committed to pursuing avenues for participants to share their perspectives with decision-makers, if they were interested in doing so. This participatory project was also intended to generate knowledge that could help inform both the playing and engaging domains of the strategy.

In addition, the study involved interviews with adults who were well-positioned to speak to some of the complex forces influencing the implementation of the CYFC strategy. This included people working in the school district, community agencies and non-governmental organizations. It also included elected officials and staff working in the city as well as other areas of government. The intent was to generate insights and facilitate community-based action that might be useful in the immediate environment (e.g., related to outdoor play in particular neighbourhoods) as well as in larger contexts (e.g., the overall CYFC strategy; debates related with child-friendly cities).
In alignment with widely accepted principles of participatory research (see Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein et al., 2017), I expected that the inquiry process, particularly the school-based project with children, would be emergent and shaped by participants, collaborators, and the research setting. Indeed, this was the case, but in different ways than I had envisioned. Along the way, various nonhuman others (e.g., sidewalks, theories, policies, a river, snow, and more) became connected with the inquiry. Through these more-than-human connections, I came to better appreciate the complexities of imagining and striving for urban child-friendliness. This included the ways that the experiences of people – and the meanings they assign to their experiences – are enmeshed with materiality. I also grappled with the ways that the study was inextricably entangled with this complexity. Importantly, I started to re-think my ontological assumptions and move toward a neo-material and posthumanist orientation. In this way, the inquiry took off in unanticipated new directions, shifting toward an approach that has come to be known as post-qualitative. This move didn’t happen evenly, nor was it absolute. Rather, post-qualitative forms of thinking/doing became enfolded with the inquiry in a multitude of ways over time.

**Doing Post-Qualitative Inquiry**

Post-qualitative inquiry, a term coined by Elizabeth St. Pierre, is an approach that departs from “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613) to embrace novel forms of more-than-human empirical experimentation. It is informed by theories that are part of the *material turn* or *ontological turn* as well as post-structuralist and postmodernist thinking (St. Pierre, 2011; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2019a). Inquiry proceeding from this orientation operates from a relational ontology and is necessarily *immanent* (St. Pierre, 2019a). That is, it takes place *inside of* and in entangled relationship with research phenomena (see Chapter 6). It does not seek to unravel or untangle a phenomenon, but immanently engage with its complexity. As such, post-qualitative inquiry disrupts a range of onto-epistemic assumptions embedded in many forms of humanist qualitative research. Patti Lather and St. Pierre (2013) suggest:
Entanglement makes all the categories of humanist qualitative research problematic. For example, how do we determine the “object of our knowledge” – the “problem” we want to study in assemblage? Can we disconnect ourselves from the mangle somehow (Self) and then carefully disconnect some other small piece of the mangle (Other) long enough to study it? What ontology has enabled us to believe the world is stable so that we can do all that individuating? (p. 630).

In challenging divisions between knowing subjects and knowledge objects, post-qualitative inquiry troubles the notion of representation. Methods, from this orientation, are not inert tools of observation that represent phenomena from a distance, but are part of their creation. It is worth noting that contesting representation is not new, and is also associated with post-structural theories and various forms of qualitative inquiry that question subject/object binaries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For example, returning to interpretive description, Thorne (2016) states that researchers using this approach acknowledge that:

In the world of human experience, “reality” involves multiple constructed realities that may well at times be contradictory, and...acknowledge an inseparable interaction between the knower and the known, such that the inquirer and the “object” of that inquiry influence one another in the production of the research outcomes (p. 82).

Thorne locates interpretive description in non-dualistic philosophical traditions (e.g., Crotty, 1998) where researchers are seen as interpreting socially constructed phenomena in ways that are situated and perspectival (Thorne, 2016). This kind of thinking is distinguished from dualistic conceptions of inquiry where scholars are positioned as detached subjects who objectively perceive the world from a distance – something Thomas Nagel (1986) identifies as “the view from nowhere” and Donna Haraway (1988) critiques as “the god trick” (p. 581).

While humanist qualitative methodology and post-qualitative inquiry make some similar epistemological arguments (e.g., regarding representation), these approaches differ in the important area of ontology. Post-qualitative inquiry works from a relational ontology that assumes existence is composed through complex webs of more-than-human relations. This approach de-centers humans and re-considers the role of matter in the making of realities. It
draws on a range of philosophers concerned with ontology and immanence, including Gilles Deleuze. St. Pierre (2013) indicates that “the Deleuzian concepts assemblage and rhizome are particularly helpful in thinking connections rather than oppositions, movement rather than categorization, and becoming rather than being” (p. 653). As such, some post-qualitative studies use research assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2015) to conceptualize the entangled webs of connections that make up research processes. Here, the notion of assemblage unsettles assumptions that method is purely a product of human agency and points to the ways that research is co-composed through collective more-than-human relations. It invites new forms of subjectivity and explores how working from a relational ontology might transform inquiry. As Lather and St. Pierre (2013) ask:

If we give up ‘human’ as separate from nonhuman, how do we exist? Can there be an instituting ‘I’ left to inquire, to know? Dare we give up that ‘I’, that fiction – the doer before the deed?...Are we willing to take on this question that is so hard to think but that might enable different lives? (p. 631)

In taking on such questions, post-qualitative inquiry draws on the work of scholars across various disciplines, including physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad (2007) who argues that “reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but things-in-phenomena” (p. 140).

Barad (2003) suggests “it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter – in both senses of the word” (p. 817). They assert that researchers are inextricably entangled with inquiry, rendering them both part of the research apparatus and the phenomena under study. From an entangled place, researchers engage with other bodies in boundary-making practices – or agential cuts – that configure the work and bring aspects of the world into being (Barad, 2007). Here, bodies are not just human bodies, but intra-related entities that are at the same time material and discursive. They do not have inherent boundaries nor enduring properties, but are in a constant state of flux – part of a never-ending process of becoming with (Barad, 2007). Barad (2007) states “neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically prior or epistemologically prior...matter and meaning are
mutually articulated” (p. 152). Further, they argue that such an onto-epistemology is also enmeshed with ethical imperatives, forming an “ethico-onto epistemology” (Barad, 2007, p. 89). In this sense, ethics are identified as the obligations, accountabilities and responsibilities (i.e., abilities to respond) that are necessarily part of all relational entanglements (Barad, 2010). This sort of ethics-sensitive entanglement is something Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2010) points to in her intra-active pedagogy with children. It is similarly implied in Braidotti’s (2011, 2018b) affirmative ethics, which emphasizes the interdependence of human and nonhuman entities in world-making.

Approaching inquiry as a relational entanglement has implications for the ways it is performed. Denise Hogkins (2019) suggests “if the researcher is always new, always transforming in relation with others and cannot know beforehand, a different kind of ‘paying attention’ as a researcher is required” (p. 176). In this way, post-qualitative inquiry is concerned with creating new ways of attending to and engaging with more-than-human worlds. It emphasizes empirical experimentation rather than systematically pursuing well-worn methodological pathways (St. Pierre, 2011). It resonates with critiques of “methodological rule-following” (Law, 2004, p. 16) (see also Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2012; Higgins et al., 2017; Thorne et al., 1997) and challenges research approaches that reduce methodology to particular procedures, tools or techniques. Post-qualitative approaches therefore embrace ambiguity, uncertainty and not knowing as a means of opening up new ways of thinking and doing (Lather, 2016). These approaches emphasize immanent relationships, novel connections, and how researchers might act with human and nonhuman others toward the ‘not-yet’ conceived (St. Pierre, 2019a). In a playful reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus, Patti Lather (2013) muses that post-qualitative inquiry might be called “a thousand tiny methodologies” (p. 635).

In this inquiry, I experiment with various ways of attending – and acting – in relation with a strategy focused on making a city more child-friendly. I identify aspects of this research as post-qualitative, yet recognize that it could be alternatively cut and named. Also, while some suggest that post-qualitative research need not, and perhaps should not, employ specific
methods, others argue for emergent experimental use of methods (Lenz-Taguchi, 2012; Masny, 2016; Rousell, 2018; Somerville, 2016). While not following a prescribed methodology, in this inquiry I do craft with methods. This includes interviews and participatory methods that were used – and in some ways reconfigured – as part of the research. The insights and happenings related with these methods are important to the inquiry and are necessarily enfolded with it. They work in ways that are compatible with qualitative research (e.g., children producing knowledge related with their play experiences) and also help set the conditions for more post-qualitative explorations. In Part III of this dissertation (Chapter 9), I describe in more detail the particular methods used in the participatory project and interviews.

However, before doing so, in the remainder of this chapter I outline some important methodological sensibilities that are used across this inquiry, and that helped to bring about and navigate the shift toward post-qualitative inquiry. As part of this, I draw on Rosi Braidotti’s (2018) methodological guidelines for critical posthuman research, which include: taking a practical, problem-oriented approach that is open to the influence of nonhumans; using non-linear or nomadic thinking; employing a trans-disciplinary orientation; developing ethical and accountable cartographies that attend to power relations; and operating through a combination of critique and creativity. Below I take up these guidelines, connecting them through the intra-related concepts of praxis, nomadism, encounter, diffraction and cartography.

Praxis

While praxis is understood and performed differently across disciplines and contexts, in this research it was initially tied with participatory research traditions in childhood studies. In participatory inquiry, praxis is often conceptualized as an iterative process of moving between thought and action to both create knowledge and apply it in practice (Higginbottom & Liamputtong, 2015). In studies of children’s urban experiences, praxis-oriented research is used to mobilize people around child-related issues, produce site-specific solutions to problems, and prompt community-based action (Chawla, 2002). Some of this work is informed by emancipatory theories and traditions (e.g., Paulo Friere’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed) that
focus on empowering marginalized people and challenging forms of oppression. It is also used to create collaborative and emergent forms of knowledge aimed at fostering change, resonating with Friere's (2000) assertion that “knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 53). This critical praxis calls into question how knowledge is made, who can produce it, and what knowledge is worthy of consideration. Such praxis is part of the participatory methods used in this inquiry, including methods borrowed from child-friendly cities initiatives (e.g., Chawla, 2002; Driskell, 2002) as well as participatory visual methods such as Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and Participatory Photo Mapping (Dennis et al., 2009).

Approaching research from a relational ontology helps transform praxis in important ways. There is less of a back-and-forth movement between thought and action and more of a thought/action entanglement. As Deleuze (2004) suggests:

Praxis is a system of relays in an assemblage, in a multiplicity of bits and pieces both theoretical and practical. For us, the intellectual and the theorist have ceased to be a subject, a consciousness, that represents or that is representative...Who speaks? Who acts? It’s always a multiplicity, even in the person who speaks or acts (p. 207).

Thus, agency is not contained within individual human subjects, but is enacted through assemblage and multiplicity. This resonates with Braidotti’s (2011, 2019) call for posthuman praxis that re-considers how ‘we’ is composed and mobilized to address various forms of inequity and injustice. Here, agency comes into being through complex and dynamic more-than-human assemblages. This orientation to praxis helps compose new sorts of knowing subjects and relationships within/between subjects. It is necessarily associated with ethical and political projects that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in various forms of humanist research. Thus, power, equity, agency, and collective action are important aspects of performing inquiry – although cut through/with a relational ontology.

In this inquiry, a critical posthuman praxis acknowledges and engages the complex assemblages associated with the CYFC strategy. It allows for the identification of human
inequities (e.g., associated with age, race, class, sexual orientation, immigration status) as well as those where human lives are not centred, but are implicated (e.g., associated with biodiversity, climate change, the lives of nonhuman animals). It plugs into the project of making a city more child-friendly and promoting children’s agency. Yet, it also makes room for diverse forms of ‘we’, projects that are not human-centred, and emergent more-than-human becomings.

Nomadism

Aspects of this inquiry are carried out with a nomadic sensibility that resonates with the nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Braidotti (2011). This sensibility is one of dynamic flows and continual becoming. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that “the life of the nomad is the intermezzo” (p. 380) – or proceeding from the middle. They put forth a form of nomad (or minor) science as a way of engaging in immanent empirical experimentation. This empiricism is not about hypothesis testing and the scientific method, but processual and non-reductive engagement with the world (MacLure, 2013). Instead of adhering to general rules or templates, a nomadic sensibility lends itself to piece-by-piece creation in the moment. This crafting is situational, nonlinear and fluid. It follows emerging trajectories rather than pre-determined paths. Nomadism tends to destabilize organized methodological frameworks and lead to unexpected or rhizomatic lines of flight.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) distinguish nomadic science from what they call royal (or state) science, which is governed by logic and order. They argue that royal science inhabits striated space (rather than smooth space) and works to stratify, organize, and categorize the life (Deleuze, 1994). It is geared toward constructing universalities, accounting for variables, and determining the order of things. Deleuze (1994) suggests that royal science is concerned

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5 Claire Colebrook’s (2005) article “How can we tell the Dancer from the Dance?: The Subject of Dance and the Subject of Philosophy” takes up Gilles Deleuze’s critique of traditional notions of praxis that involve identified human subjects who take action toward particular ends. Thinking with philosophy, dance, poetry, and more, Colebrook outlines a Deleuzian concept of “praxis that is not on its way to realisation but is fully real in all of its moments” (p. 9). It is a praxis where action produces subjectivity and forms of becoming, rather than being produced by already identified bounded human subjects.
with aspects of existence that are already identified – the kinds of things that ‘everybody knows’ (Deleuze, 1994). He contrasts this with nomad science which explores the virtual realm of potential and what might be generated through *not* knowing what everybody knows (May, 2005). However, Deleuze and Guattari contend that royal and nomad science – the striated and the smooth – the tree and the rhizome (see Chapter 2) – are not dualistically opposed, but always co-exist and operate together. Thus, all royal science holds nomadic potential. Likewise, nomadic science can re-territorialize and become more structured. They suggest plugging into both nomad and royal science, indicating that “it is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161). From their immanent philosophy, it is impossible not to plug into both, even when emphasizing one over the other. Building on this idea, they make the following recommendation:

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161)

Thinking in this way, the inquiry has elements of both nomad and royal science – leaning toward nomadism. Some aspects of the research are decidedly structured and arborescent/tree-like. For example, I draw on various texts, including research articles generated within quantitative as well as qualitative frameworks in contextualizing the research (see Chapter 3). I also employ semi-structured methods in the interviews and participatory project with children. As part of this, I use reason and forms of inductive analysis in identifying patterns in this research. As well, in writing this document I work to configure and re-configure sections, chapters, and words to create order and flow.

Yet in addition to ordered activities, there is also a nomadic orientation to the inquiry that lends itself to emergent nonlinear movement. This is especially evident in the participatory project, which involved ongoing in-the-moment experimentation and improvisation. Such participatory work, under various traditions, is readily positioned to challenge what ‘everybody
knows’ and inspire new forms of knowledge creation. A posthumanist orientation takes this work to new places in exploring the intra-action of various human and nonhuman bodies in assemblage. A nomadic sensibility is also part of the interviews that became more open and fluid across the course of the inquiry, connecting with a range of research-related conversations, texts, objects and events. Even travelling to/from interviews and other research activities involved nomadic movement as I walked through neighbourhoods, took photographs, talked with residents, and wrote research-related notes. I was not sure where these explorations might lead, but had a sense that they actively worked on the research, making their way into unfolding events. Thus, this inquiry follows various nomadic lines of thinking/doing – one thing leading to another, with an occasional rhizomatic line of flight. It is sometimes productive to pursue such emerging connections and other times less so. In any case, the research process is not confined to particular spaces, but is always proliferating, shifting and forming new relations. This sort of nomadism is about difference and becoming – and the potential for transformation. There is a freedom to follow emergent paths and an openness to the ways that events may escape or overspill the working frame of the inquiry.

**Encounter**

Deleuze (1994) indicates that through nomadic movement “something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter...Its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed” (p. 139). According to Deleuze, encounters are intensities that connect with the virtual realm – the more – that always exists, yet is pre-conscious and escapes our ability to know it (see Chapter 6). He argues that attention to such encounters can disrupt habitual ways of thinking and connect with untapped potential that is real but not yet actualized (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). This thinking resonates with St. Pierre’s (2019b) assertion that post-qualitative inquiry “begins with an encounter with the real” (p. 11) toward the ‘not-yet’ conceived. This sort of encounter is also used in composing a range of post-qualitative and posthumanist inquiry (e.g., MacLure, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; Rousell, 2018).
In this research, I look for ways that encounters create new connections and bring seemingly unrelated realities into association. I am curious about happenings that disrupt the expected course of the research and send things in new directions. Fortunately, research intended to be community-based and participatory is rich with unanticipated turns (see Chapters 9, 11, 12, and others). As opposed to treating ruptures and discontinuities as problematic, I lean into them with the idea that they might hold something interesting, useful or important. I experiment with how such encounters might force new thinking/doing and point to aspects of life that lie outside the boundaries of recognition (i.e., the virtual). What novel things might be thought? What else might be actualized? For example, some encounters draw attention to how seemingly inert background features of this research (e.g., weather, technologies, room configurations) might influence the unfolding of events. As part of this, I attend to “situated enactments and sets of partial connections” (Law, 2004, p. 155) in encounters that are situated, embodied and embedded.

**Diffraction**

St. Pierre (2018) argues that post-qualitative inquiry involves intensively “reading, thinking, writing and living with theory” (p. 604) in preparing for and conducting research. In line with this assertion, I engage with a range of theoretical and other texts in carrying out this study. In doing so, I work with Donna Haraway’s notion of **diffraction** as a way of reading texts through (rather than against, over, alongside, etc. ) one another. Haraway (1997) identifies diffraction as a sensibility that provides an alternative to reflection and reflexivity, arguing that “reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real” (1997, p. 16). She contends that reflexivity implies a dualistic separation between subject and object. It presumes that phenomena can be reflected on and represented from a distance. Diffraction, conversely, assumes that subjects can only know the world – partially – from their entangled place within it. Thinking diffractively, theories and concepts are not simply applied to issues and projects, but are enmeshed with them in complex ways. Working with Marilyn Strathern’s (1992)
assertion that “it matters what ideas one uses to think other ideas (with)” (p. 10), Haraway (2016) churns things through further, suggesting:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories (p. 12).

A diffractive sensibility implies that researchers work with texts and insights from an entangled place.

Haraway’s notion of diffraction has been taken up by Karen Barad and others (e.g., Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2012) as a way of engaging with texts and approaching inquiry more generally. One way Barad conceptualizes diffraction is through wave patterns, explaining that “diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction” (Barad, 2007, p. 74). Barad uses diffraction as an interdisciplinary approach to reading insights through one another and trying to get a sense of how they create patterns of relationality. Rather than comparing or synthesizing texts, Barad attends to how they interfere and intermingle. As Iris van der Tuin (2014) states, “diffraction is always/already at work when one reads, writes and converses, in a scholarly manner and otherwise” (p. 242). This diffractive reading/thinking/doing is not static, but is always transforming and producing new interference patterns in connection with various material-discursive arrangements. In this way, diffraction is not an individual thought process, but an intra-active engagement involving multiple bodies in relation (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

Here, I use a diffractive sensibility in considering how texts and insights help cut and arrange the research. I experiment with reading concepts through one other to see what insights might emerge. I also attend to the ways that texts diffractively make their way into the inquiry process. For example, a reading of Rosi Braidotti’s (2013) book The Posthuman helped configure an unexpected research-related encounter involving garden mint (see Chapter 2). Thoughts associated with Braidotti’s posthuman subjectivity – and Deleuze and Guattari’s
(1987) concept of the rhizome – intermingled with my embodied experience of encountering mint in the garden. The mint, along with other bodies (e.g., lavender, wind, peas, ants, watering can, cell phone, bee sounds and more) became entangled with the inquiry in both material and discursive ways. The research set off in new directions as I considered how rhizomatic lines of flight might relate with this study. I wondered: How does rhizomatic movement relate with participatory research processes? How might this sort of movement influence the unfolding of the CYFC strategy? What unacknowledged relationships exist? What un-tapped potential might be plugged into? How does posthumanist thought help transform the sort of ‘I’ that asks these questions? Such lines of thinking became entangled with the research, influencing the unfolding of subsequent research-related encounters. Using a diffractive sensibility, texts are not confined to a literature review section, but are incorporated throughout the inquiry process, including the writing of these words.

**Cartography**

Writing and configuring this dissertation is part of the experimental process of carrying out this research. I acknowledge the difficulties of challenging representation, yet using language in doing so. In putting together this document, I again draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who argue that their writing is not aimed at recreating images of the world, but constructing maps/cartographies that form rhizomes with the world: “The rhizome pertains to the map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). They suggest that mapping is not about representation (i.e., producing what they call *tracings*) but about experimenting and making connections. However, they acknowledge that maps and tracings always exist together and are caught up with each other:

The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model of tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model
and outlines the map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 20)

In describing a preferred relationship between maps and tracings, they suggest “it is a question of method: the tracing should always be put back on the map” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 13).

With this suggestion in mind, I have aimed to approach this inquiry with more of a mapping than tracing sensibility. As suggested by Denis Wood in his (2010) book *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, map-making is a propositional and performative (rather than representational) act. Maps construct edges and boundaries, help identify locations, and provide a “sense of here in relation to there” (Wood, 2010, p. 23). While the research involves elements traditionally identified as data (e.g., interview quotes, photographs, narratives), these elements are not meant to capture or represent realities, but to create connections and provoke new thinking/doing. For example, I feature photographs (taken by myself and students in the participatory project as well as sourced from archives, newspapers and websites) throughout the dissertation. These photographs are intended less as representations, and more as material-discursive elements that *do* things in relation with other aspects of the research. Working with photographs (and associated text) in this way resonates with Hultman & Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) *diffractive readings* of photographs, where “a diffractive ‘reading’ is...not a reading of a photograph as in the taken-for-granted understanding, but a reading with the photograph in your encounter with it. In this event something new is created” (p. 537).

This mapping is processual, relational and experimental – following various lines of inquiry and proposing further lines of exploration. In this way, the research – and the production of this dissertation document – is a form of “situated map-making” (van der Tuin, 2019, p. 11) that works as an ongoing entangled part of the inquiry process. What materializes is not a unified picture of what took place, but a situated and emergent cartography that hangs together in certain ways – yet could also be configured otherwise. The locations on this map, and the identities associated with them, are partial, contingent and dynamic. For example, when I use first person ‘I’ in this text, I do so with an idea that this identity is distributed and
continuously transforming. This orientation troubles the idea of the individual researcher who represents the world through an essential authentic voice. I am not a separate body acting alone in this writing, but part of a web of complex relations that contribute to what materializes here.

I use cartography, along with the sensibilities of praxis, nomadism, encounter, and diffraction in this inquiry to engage the questions: How does the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy work with other related bodies toward change? How might it? These sensibilities also work with a range of other emergent questions, events, and realities that arise from within the research. In this document itself, I map the trajectory of the research from (qualitative) and toward (post-qualitative) and some of the thinking/doing that is part of this movement. There is an undeniable hybridity and unevenness to this shift. It is neither one thing nor another, but in-between and continually becoming different. The process also involves an entanglement of arborescent and rhizomatic elements, with more of one or the other operating at any given moment.

In Part III of this document, I shift back to a more arborescent mode of operating and outline specific methods that were used in the participatory project and interviews with people connected with the CYFC strategy. In doing so, I outline how this empirical work emerged from the qualitative orientation first used in this research as well as served as a jumping off point for more post-qualitative experimentation. However, before moving on to these methods, in the next short chapter (Chapter 8, Goodness: Thinking Through the Quality of This Inquiry), I further take up the sensibilities introduced here (i.e., praxis, nomadism, encounter, diffraction, and cartography) and use them to think through how one might assess the quality of this inquiry.
Chapter 8. Goodness: Thinking Through the Quality of this Inquiry

In discussing post-qualitative research as an immanent approach to inquiry, Elizabeth St. Pierre (2019b) asks, “How does one know if post qualitative inquiry is ‘good’?” (p. 5). She suggests that possible criteria for assessing this kind of research would be more in line with that of art, literature, history, natural sciences and philosophy than the social sciences. However, she also indicates that given the diverse forms of post-qualitative work, it is not possible to make generalities about goodness. Similarly, in his (2004) book After Method: Mess in Social Science Research, John Law asserts that there are no overarching rules for determining whether research that operates from a relational ontology is good or bad. Rather, if realities are fluid, multiple and entangled, then better and worse can only be determined situationally – “circumstance by circumstance” (p. 149). He resists the use of general or universal evaluation criteria:

Not because there are not different goods or because it is not worthwhile going after them or linking them together, but because there is no longer any general way of moving effortlessly from place to place without attending to specificities. There is no general world and there are no general rules. (Law, 2004, p. 155)

Law contends that the worthiness of this sort of inquiry can only be judged by identifying and weaving together different goods that emerge within particular method assemblages. With this in mind, below I weave together some possible ways to consider goodness in relation with this research, threading them through the sensibilities I outlined in Chapter 7: praxis, encounter, diffraction, nomadism and cartography. I draw on various concepts used in evaluating the quality of academic studies, with the idea that they perform together in unique ways through the assemblages of this inquiry.

Praxis

Since praxis is an important aspect of this inquiry, I suggest that goodness here is linked with how the work both engages worthwhile problems and contributes to grappling with
them. Sarah Tracy (2010) describes worthy research topics as “relevant, timely, significant, interesting or evocative” (p. 840). In the case of this research, this implies that there must be value in exploring how the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy works – and might work – with other related bodies toward change. Since praxis-oriented research aims to produce knowledge that is somehow useful in the world, the quality of this study might then also be judged by how it contributes to on-the-ground efforts toward change in this context. Such work is necessarily political and thus “operates to make certain (political) arrangements more probable, stronger, more real, whilst eroding others and making them less real” (Law, 2004, p. 161).

Given the importance of the school-based participatory project to this research, I suggest that some processual markers of good participatory research are also relevant here, including the establishment of respectful relationships, power sharing and co-learning (e.g., Israel et al., 2005). While these markers are commonly used in participatory inquiry that is more qualitative in orientation, the attention to justice and collective action highlighted in many forms of participatory work is also compatible with critical posthumanist inquiry (see Braidotti, 2018). As part of this, an attention to situational and relational ethics seems vital, particularly as it pertains to working with children. Of course, in inquiry that is posthumanist and post-anthropocentric in orientation, relational ethical obligations extend beyond the human.

Encounter

In further considering the quality of relational encounters, I draw on Deleuze (1988) who (thinking with Baruch de Spinoza), identifies good encounters between bodies as those that are joyful, life-affirming and extend our capacities to act (see also Braidotti, 2013). Such relationships between more-than-human bodies involve resonance, a sense of being mutually moved or affected. The importance of resonance in research is echoed by Laurel Richardson (2000) – a qualitative researcher who has influenced thinking related with post-qualitative inquiry (see Richardson & St. Pierre, 2012; St. Pierre, 2017) – who suggests asking the following questions of inquiry, “Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new
questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?” (p. 254).

**Diffraction**

Richardson’s questions can also work along with the sensibility of *diffraction* that is used in this inquiry. Thinking diffractively, there are potential goods in *reading texts (and thoughts) through one another*. With the idea that we re-imagine and re-work thoughts each time we re-read something (Haraway, 1997), diffractive readings are aimed at continually provoking new and increasingly complex thinking. This implies a thickness that is not ‘thick description’ but the generation of complex interfering patterns of thought. Thus, goodness here is not about the representation of words on a page, but how texts (and their associated materialities) interfere and help create new connections.

**Nomadism**

In forging such connections, I also suggest that the goodness of this inquiry might involve opening up new pathways of thought and action that are *nomadic*. This nomadic (or *rhizomatic*) mode of operating follows the contours of complex realities and branches off in nonlinear and novel ways. Gilles Deleuze holds that one way to assess whether an endeavor is worthwhile is that it generates opportunities for more to be created – for new ways of seeing and taking up the world (May, 2005). Although he does not specifically identify criteria for determining the quality of a thought or action, Deleuze (1994) privileges *experimental and creative* processes that are geared toward “*the new, remarkable, [and] interesting*” (p. 111).

Of course, not all novel creations are good. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) indicate, in creating something new there is always the potential for “reproducing nothing but a scribble effacing all lines, a scramble effacing all sounds” (p. 344). In this research, there are certainly many instances where following creative pathways produces clang-y notes and lines of thinking/doing that do not go anywhere new, remarkable or interesting. With this in mind, I suggest there are goods to be had in remaining *open-minded and curious* about such
happenings, and taking a learning orientation to those experiments that do not seem to go well. An attention to relational ethics (referenced above) seems important in this experimentation, as operating creatively or rhizomatically does not imply that ‘anything goes’.

**Cartography**

I also suggest that the quality of this research might also be gauged by how it hangs together as a map or *cartography*. Here, “cartographic accuracy” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 116) does not hinge on how well the dissertation maps a pre-given territory, but whether it traces lines, creates contours and suggests plausible relationships that connect with forms of truth. Such partial and *situated truths* (Law, 2004) are most relevant in the locations through which they emerge. However, this does not preclude them from illuminating and connecting with other related contexts and phenomena. As Law (2004) suggests, situated inquiry implies re-thinking “how far whatever it is that we know travels and whether it still makes sense in other locations, and if so how” (p. 3).

In this research, the robustness of this cartography might also be linked with what might be called *onto-epistemological integrity* – adapted from “epistemological integrity” (Thorne, 2016, p. 233). This implies that there is alignment of the theoretical and epistemological orientations of the research, the manner in which it unfolds, and the knowledge claims made. This sort of integrity implies attention to whether and how an inquiry process hangs together. Having said this, there is some tension between onto-epistemological integrity and the nomadic processes at work in this inquiry. However, this seems to me a potentially productive tension, as the inquiry is meant to be both organized (tree-like) and creative (rhizomatic). Thus, the coherent and consistent configuration is sometimes, but not always, the good configuration. Experimentation that draws outside the lines can sometimes yield things that are interesting and productive. In these instances, it is possible that research that involves messiness and contradiction can also be good and rigorous. In considering the merits of mess in research, Law (2004) states, “perhaps we will need to rethink our ideas about clarity and rigour, and find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight. Here
knowing would become possible through techniques of deliberate imprecision” (Law, 2004, p. 3). This echoes Deleuze’s (1995) assertion that productive processes can be *inexact yet rigorous*. When operating from a relational ontology, such imprecision is not necessarily a problem, a weakness, or a gap, but is – in some circumstances – the point (May, 2005, p. 24).

I will close by clarifying that I make the above suggestions tentatively, as there are most certainly other ways of approaching goodness in relation with this research. Also, since the inquiry does not stay still, the worthiness of taking one pathway over another might only be identified in retrospect (May, 2015). In addition, given the multiplicity of intermingling realities connected with the research process, it is only possible to have a partial and situational sense of how things have unfolded. In keeping with the orientation of this work, I suggest that any emerging forms of goodness would be less about what the research *is* and more about what it *does* in relationship.
PART III: TREE-LIKE PROCEEDINGS – A PARTICIPATORY PROJECT & INTERVIEWS

Part III (Chapter 9) outlines the methods used in the participatory research project with children and interviews with people involved with the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy. This chapter cuts things in predominantly ‘arborescent’ ways that are meant to complement more ‘rhizomatic’ lines of inquiry in other parts of this dissertation.

While Part III is descriptive, it also gives a sense of the various realities that were entangled with this study and the research encounters that gave rise to increasingly posthumanist thinking/doing. It highlights the empirical aspects of this inquiry, including, importantly, the contributions made by children involved in the participatory project. In doing so, it incorporates examples of the students’ photographs/captions and some of what became of our work together. Part III also outlines how the research interviews were intertwined with other aspects of the inquiry, and sets the stage for Part IV: Tree/Rhizome Experimentation, by suggesting how ‘experimentation’ works in this inquiry.
Chapter 9. Participating and Interviewing

Thinking with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) concepts of the tree and rhizome, this chapter is written in a decidedly tree-like/arborescent fashion, lining up with what might be found in a more traditional methods chapter. Here, I focus primarily on the participatory project with children that formed an important part of this dissertation research. I also describe the process of carrying out interviews with people who were connected with the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy. As previously suggested, these aspects of the research were enfolded in an inquiry process that became more-post qualitative over time.

![Figure 9.1 Image created for the “Friendly for Play” photo exhibit poster. Photograph by student participant.](#)
The Participatory Research Project

The school-based participatory research project was carried out in collaboration with children (aged 11-13) – as well as range of human and nonhuman others – over a period of two years. While I actively worked in the classroom with children for only a few weeks, in line with much participatory research, both the set-up and follow-up activities took place over several months on each side of the formal classroom sessions. Some of this chapter was written as a case study, published in the *Routledge Handbook of Designing Public Spaces for Young People* (Wilson & Pike, 2020).

Setting up the Project

In 2016/17, I worked with a range of others to carry out a school-based participatory research project related with the (2016) New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy. The project was designed to engage children in sharing their experiences and ideas related to outdoor neighbourhood play and provide them with opportunities to take community action. In setting up the project, I initially connected with a planner from the City of New Westminster as well as three staff from New Westminster Schools (District 40) who were responsible for facilitating community initiatives in schools. This small group agreed to work together to help plan and implement the research project, meeting several times throughout the process. In our preliminary discussions, we decided to focus on two of the eight domains of the CYFC strategy – *playing* and *engaging*. We were interested in engaging children in a school-based participatory research project related to outdoor neighbourhood play. As such, it was meant to connect with CYFC strategy goals pertaining to both play (e.g., increase accessibility of play opportunities; promote healthy child development through play) and engagement (e.g., improve processes and increase opportunity for children and youth to be engaged in the city). This project would also potentially align with participatory planning goals from the city’s (2016) Public Engagement Strategy. There was agreement among the group that we should invite children, as early as possible, to participate in designing and implementing aspects of this project. We discussed how we might respectfully and meaningfully engage child participants.
once we obtained ethics approval for the study. In two preliminary meetings, we mapped out what the research might look like and what we were each able to contribute to the process. All parties made commitments to supporting the project with dedicated work time, with the idea that we could also pursue funding opportunities if needed. This group generated ideas and offered ongoing practical assistance that helped shape the research.

The school district partners helped set up meetings with school administrators from three middle schools that might be appropriate sites for the research. One of these schools agreed to take on the project, identifying two staff (an administrator and a classroom teacher) who would help plan and carry the project with students in grades 6/7. While I had some ideas in mind (e.g., research questions, procedures, activities) I refined these through working with people – as well as through engaging with nonhuman aspects of the research context – over time. The classroom teacher responsible for teaching Social Studies was my main point of contact. She helped map out a series of 10 in-school sessions that aligned with a newly revised provincial education curriculum. Together we set up: procedures for recruiting participants; the timing and sequencing of sessions; processes for working with other teachers and school staff; and procedures (including approval processes) for students taking neighbourhood walks during school hours. In addition to providing practical assistance, the teacher also made efforts to integrate the research activities with the inquiry-based learning approach used in the classroom. This included allotting some class time between sessions to work on the project as well as suggesting that we orient the work around an initial question, which became: What places and things in your neighbourhood are ‘friendly’ or ‘not friendly’ for play? A school administrator, along with two classroom teachers and several support staff, also assisted with project coordination, logistics, and supporting students’ participation. This involved helping students use technology, supporting them in developing narratives/captions related with their photos, brainstorming questions for the mayor, and participating in neighbourhood walks (see below for a description of these activities).

Project procedures and activities were informed by other research and community initiatives aimed at involving children and youth in neighbourhood planning and design (e.g.,
Chawla, 2002; Driskell, 2002). As part of this, we drew on the method of Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) in working with participants to take photographs about their experiences of neighbourhood play, develop captions associated with these photographs, and share their perspectives with others in the community. We also used procedures and tools from Participatory Photo Mapping (Dennis et al., 2009) in designing the sessions and linking participants’ photographs/captions to specific neighbourhood locations.

**Carrying out the Participatory Research Project**

In the first few weeks of the school year, I was given an opportunity to speak with students in two grade 6/7 classes (aged 11-13) to explain the research project and invite them to participate. Fifty-one children agreed to be involved in the project (with parental consent). Twelve of these participants further volunteered to form a *leadership group* to help plan and carry out the school sessions. The leadership group met after most large-group sessions to plan activities, provide feedback, and take action on emerging issues. As part of this, they offered insights regarding group dynamics and how to make classroom sessions relevant and interesting to their classmates. They also took on additional responsibilities (e.g., for presentations – see below) that stretched beyond the large group activities.

Each of the 51 students participated in 10 in-class sessions over a period of three months. The length of the sessions and group configurations varied in accordance with our planned activities as well as the school schedule. Session 10 was added part way through the process in negotiation with students and school staff. We also added a short wrap-up/celebration gathering at the end of the project. Table 9.1 provides a brief description of the sessions.
Table 9.1 Description of in-school sessions with student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Group Configurations</th>
<th>Time for Each Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Project overview and introductions. Discussion re: child friendly cities, CYFC strategy, and outdoor play.</td>
<td>2 groups of ~ 25 students</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Mapping activity facilitated by The Society for Children and Youth of B.C.</td>
<td>2 groups of ~ 25 students</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Introduction to photography and guidelines. Practice using cameras.</td>
<td>2 groups of ~ 25 students</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Neighbourhood walk, accompanied by adults (small groups clustered into 5 walking groups for each session)</td>
<td>2 large groups, split onto small teams of 2-3 students</td>
<td>90 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Photo-sorting and writing captions</td>
<td>2 large groups, split into teams of 2-3 students</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 6</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>9 groups of between 4-8 students</td>
<td>20-30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 7</td>
<td>Discussion with the Mayor of New Westminster</td>
<td>1 group of 51+ students</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 8</td>
<td>Slide show and discussion re: themes and ideas</td>
<td>2 groups of ~ 25 students</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 9</td>
<td>Choosing images for photo exhibit. Generating questions regarding project.</td>
<td>1 group of ~ 51 students</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 10</td>
<td>Confirming photos and captions for the photo exhibit</td>
<td>24 small teams of 2-3 students</td>
<td>5-15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional large group activities</td>
<td>Student teams were given additional in-class time to write their captions and develop slides for each photograph/narrative. One teacher also developed and facilitated an extra in-class lesson on photography techniques. Forty-seven participants completed feedback forms related to the project. We added a final (~ 20 minute) in-school wrap-up/celebration/cake gathering.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Team Activities</td>
<td>The leadership team met 10 times (for 10-30 min.) in between the sessions. They also met after the large group sessions were finished (both during and after school) to develop and deliver presentations to decision-makers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While I facilitated all but one session, classroom teachers and other school staff attended and supported the process. Project partners from the city and school district, parents, the mayor, city staff and other community members also contributed. The first three sessions were intended to serve as a warm-up for working together, introduce the project, prompt thinking related to the research topic, get student feedback on possible directions for the project, and prepare for the neighbourhood walks. These sessions involved discussions and activities related with child-friendly cities, children’s rights, outdoor play and photography. As part of this, a representative from the Society for Children and Youth of BC (the organization that partnered with the City of New Westminster to develop the CYFC strategy) worked with the students to map neighbourhood locations where they liked and did not like to spend time. In addition to these sessions, a classroom teacher who had photography knowledge and experience facilitated an additional class on photography techniques.

In the fourth session, participants went on a neighbourhood walk to take photographs that responded to the question: *What places and things in your neighbourhood are ‘friendly’ or ‘not friendly’ for play?* Students participated in either a morning or afternoon walk in neighbourhoods near the school. Most, but not all, of the students walked to school each day (as indicated in one of our session activities), so could get to locations where they frequently spent out-of-school time in this 90 minute session. In advance of the walk, the leadership group took responsibility for assigning students to small teams (of 2-3 students), with attention to creating teams that worked well together and accommodating different student needs. At the beginning of both the morning and afternoon walks, a teacher brainstormed possible walking routes/destinations with students. The teams then chose their desired routes/destinations, clustering into five walking groups (of between 4-8 students), accompanied by at least one adult, including myself, teachers, school staff, parent volunteers or school district staff. Each of the teams was provided with a GPS-enabled camera, borrowed from the Society for Children and Youth of BC and the BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit. They were also provided with notebooks to write down thoughts related to their photographs (e.g., the location; the subject of the photo; what they were trying to show).
Students led the walks and stopped at various locations to take photographs. They interpreted play quite broadly and took pictures related to various forms of having fun and hanging out. Some students elected to take photographs on school grounds in addition to neighbourhood locations. A number of photographs related to their everyday walks to and from school. In line with the emerging orientation of the research – and partly, in response to parameters set by the Research Ethics Board for using these participatory visual methods – students were asked to focus on photographing places and things, but not people. As such, the photographs featured nonhuman aspects of their neighbourhoods, including elements of the built environment (e.g., sidewalks, playground equipment), objects (e.g., bicycles, turf, cars), and nonhuman living entities (e.g., trees, dogs).

Adults who accompanied students on the walks were asked to engage them in conversations regarding their photographs and play experiences. The nature and extent of this conversation – and related documentation in notebooks – varied across groups. While participants typically took numerous photographs (and in some cases videos), at the end of the walk each team was asked to choose five photographs that best demonstrated their thoughts and ideas. In the next session, they worked in their teams to develop captions related to each selected image. Teachers gave students additional class time to write these captions, prompting them to identify 1) Why they took the photographs 2) What they were trying to show and 3) Whether the photographs illustrated things that were ‘friendly’ or ‘unfriendly’ for play. Students also designed slides for each photograph and accompanying narrative. These activities were incorporated into curricular goals for Social Studies, Language Arts, and Applied Design, Skills and Technologies.

The sixth session involved students sharing their slides in focus groups with three to seven other participants. These 20-30 minute focus groups happened sequentially over two days. During the focus groups, each team shared their slides with the rest of the group. I facilitated the group discussions, focusing on students’ thoughts and experiences related to the slides as well as changes they would like to see in their neighbourhoods and in the city. A Community School Coordinator (who participated in the walks and was part of the planning
In session seven, city staff helped arrange for the Mayor of New Westminster to come to the school to talk with student participants as a large group. During this session, members of the leadership group delivered a short presentation about the project. The mayor then answered questions from students about the role of city council, how municipal government works, and particular issues they were concerned about in the city. A handful of classmates who were not involved in the research project also participated in this discussion (during most other sessions, these students were working on projects in other classrooms, as arranged with their teachers). Students were particularly interested in how the city was going to involve young people in decisions pertaining to the relocation of a popular skate park and the redevelopment of a nearby pool and recreation facility. There were also questions pertaining to traffic and safe walking/cycling routes. In addition, there was interest in the city’s SeeClickFix app, which allows people to report non-emergency maintenance issues directly to the engineering department. The mayor stayed at the school for a short time following the session, responding to individual questions from students.

In session eight, with permission from participants, I compiled all the slides in a slideshow and we watched them as a large group. During and immediately following the slideshow, students commented on and expressed thoughts related with the photos (e.g., common experiences, what was interesting, surprising etc.). Following this, I facilitated an activity where students were asked to generate other possible ideas, patterns and themes related with the photographs/captions from the slideshow. We discussed how their work might be used in creating a photo exhibit of their work for display at City Hall, the School Board Office and their school (something that was presented as a possibility in the initial session).

In session nine, we printed out all of the photos and put them on tables around the room. Each team was given an opportunity to choose two photographs/captions to include in the photo exhibit. I suggested that students choose one photograph from their own team and
one from the larger group. During this session, I also asked students to move around to the different tables and write down questions they had related with the photographs using sentence starters (e.g., I wonder...How does...What if...?). Most of the students’ questions started with ‘What if?’ For example: What if we were allowed to climb trees? What if dogs had more rights? What if heavy trucks didn’t come into New Westminster? What if playgrounds were for all ages? What if parking lots were changed into parks and green spaces? What if McBride Avenue was less busy? What if more places in the city were designed to be good for kids?

The tenth session was a short (approximately 10-15 minute) session with each team. At this session, I asked permission to use specific photographs/captions (chosen by students in the previous session) in the photo exhibit. I also suggested twelve additional photographs/captions to complement selections from the previous session, highlight aspects of our focus group discussions, and ensure that all groups had at least one item featured in the exhibit if they wished. In addition, we confirmed students’ final captions for the selected photographs. At this point, some of the students incorporated thoughts, ideas and stories from the focus groups. I printed out transcripts from the focus groups and shared them with the students to assist this process.

**Student Photographs and Narratives**

The photographs and accompanying captions chosen for the photo exhibit touched on various topics, ideas, experiences, stories, and materialities associated with children’s play. Below is a selection of these photographs/captions as well as some quotes from focus groups. These images and narratives relate with parks and playgrounds. However, the students’ work connected with a range of city-related realities, as suggested in various chapters in Part IV of this dissertation.

A number of students described playful and encounters associated with fairly conventional pieces of playground equipment at their school. While many of these photographs featured standard playground equipment with fairly prescribed uses (e.g., swinging, spinning),
children’s narratives suggested how more complex configurations of bodies and forces were entangled with the action beyond simple child-equipment transactions (e.g., Figures 9.2 and 9.3).

“\textit{The amount of times I fell off it, it doesn't hurt...The woodchips pretty much soften your fall, because most the time they're wet...The only thing that would hurt you if your legs are still on it and people don't stop pushing...and you're dragging...and you fall off and you are dragging on the ground and it's still spinning...It's fun. It's fun, oh I love doing that!}”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.2)

“\textit{You can fit like 20 people on the donut standing and ten sitting}”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.2)
“We ignore [the supervision aids on the playground]. I feel bad for saying it but we do”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.2)

“*They ditch class early, they go to the washroom and then run outside...They need that swing*”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.3)

Students identified how playful encounters involving play structures on the playground were connected with peer relations, in-school routines, feelings of exhilaration and joy, school policies and practices, discourses around risk-taking, rain, wood chips and more. In terms of schoolground play, another student discussed how they associated the basketball courts (Figure 9.4) with feeling included when coming to this school from another country.
“Many people come to this basketball court to play during school and after school. It’s friendly to play because there are many people playing with you. It’s a casual place to hang out. It’s just nice because you know people there and it’s like comforting because you’re at school even though you don’t really like school. You don’t really like school, but you like the stuff in the school...yeah...It’s just chill.

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.4)

The photographs students took of the ‘rainbow playground’ structure (Figures 9.5 and 9.6) in a large recreational park highlight the importance of considering context and multiple realities associated with play spaces. While most students who discussed the rainbow playground structure enjoyed playing on it, they also thought aspects of it were hazardous.
"It's so slippery...I actually fell when we were there. But it's also fun in the summer when it's dry. But it's going to be rain for like three quarters of the year."

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Fig. 9.5)

The play space was identified by students as both ‘friendly’ and ‘unfriendly’ depending on the relations this structure had to other contextual elements, including weather, time of year, age of children, and footwear. In their presentation to City Council, members of the leadership group recommended that this play structure be modified (e.g., installing grips or other measures) so that younger children could play safely.
In this same park, a number of students identified a location with outdoor exercise equipment as friendly for play (Figure 9.7).

“It's fresh air...and this one has less than it would in an indoor gym, but it has better stuff almost because there's a track you can run around and bars, like different levels of bars, and there's also logs you can jump over and balance and like sit-up things...And sometimes like exercise areas inside have like age limits and there's no age limit to the exercise park.” --from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.7)
In addition to these designated sport and recreation spaces, other students pointed to the importance of having open grassy fields, such as the one below in a small park in a residential neighbourhood (Figure 9.8).
This less structured loose space offered opportunities to play sports and games as well as less organized and imaginative forms of play (Figure 9.9).
There are a multitude of playful opportunities in urban park assemblages, as pointed out by some students below who identified this part of a park as an ‘uncharted play area’ (Figure 9.10).

“And if there's not a playground, not like a built playground, people are like ‘Oh we can't play’ but this teaches you that you can have fun and you can play without a built playground.”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 9.10)

In contrast, a photograph (Figure 9.11) was taken by another group of students who identified this same stump/area as unfriendly for play. The contrast between these photographs and
captions plugs into discourses and debates related with ‘natural’ play spaces and perceptions of risk.

In the heavily built-out city of New Westminster, many children indicated that they appreciated ‘natural’ play spaces and parks. They also gave the example of the Glenbrook Ravine (which students did not have time to walk to during our neighbourhood walks), where kids could play and ride bikes. While the ravine/park was still quite populated, there were opportunities to engage in looser types of play and even contribute to building unofficial play structures like tree houses. In discussing these tree houses, some students identified contextual influences on how they engaged with undesignated play spaces, including the presence/absence of adults.

**Figure 9.11** Caption: *Random tree stumps should not be in the middle of Queen’s Park or any park for that matter. This is not a safe place to play for children or adults because they could trip when running around and not looking where they are going.*

Photograph and caption by student participants.
Through their photographs and narratives, the students offered important insights into the complexities of how play unfolds in various locations and circumstances. They also pointed to the range of bodies and forces (human and nonhuman; material and discursive) that were entangled with this play. Their work offered both practical site-specific feedback about particular play spaces (some of which made their way into their public presentations – see below) as well as some novel and situated ways to think about playful spaces in New Westminster.

The Photo Exhibit and Public Presentations

The leadership group brainstormed ideas for the photo exhibit and put forth a range of creative possibilities for showing their work. We secured funding for the photo exhibit through the BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit at BC Children’s Hospital to mount the photographs on canvases and create a free-standing display. Since I had limited time to work with students at the end of the project (we had maximized our time together in the school), I put together most this exhibit, incorporating the ideas we discussed as much as possible. I did so with the support of staff at the BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit who helped format the photographs and produce materials, including a title poster for the exhibit.

Fifty photographs were mounted on canvases and displayed along with their accompanying captions, quotes from the focus groups, questions generated during our group discussions, and a few related material objects (e.g., bicycle wheel, artificial turf, tree branch, soccer ball) (e.g., Figures 9.12 and 9.13). A city staff person also helped us put these photographs/captions on an interactive map, a version of which was printed and displayed next to the photo exhibit. The exhibit, entitled “Friendly for Play?” was displayed for a month at their school, a week at the school district office, and a week at city hall (Figure 9.14). It was also put up at a conference focused on children’s play (see Chapter 10).
Figure 9.12 Photo Exhibit Panel 2. Photograph by author.

Figure 9.13 Photo Exhibit Panel 1. Photograph by author.

Figure 9.14 Photo Exhibit in City Hall Foyer. Photograph by author.
Members of the leadership group prepared and delivered presentations to both the New Westminster City Council and the Board of Education for New Westminster Schools. In these presentations, the students discussed their work on the project and offered recommendations about increasing the child-friendliness and play-friendliness of local neighbourhoods. The presentation to city council included a call to better engage children and youth in municipal decision-making, especially when those decisions directly affect young people. Students cited some upcoming opportunities for this sort of engagement, including the city’s plans to re-locate a local skatepark, upgrade playground equipment in Queen’s Park, and re-develop the Canada Games Pool. They suggested that even young children can ‘have a say’ if they are approached in fun and interesting ways. They also made specific recommendations regarding: fixing perceived playground hazards; adding street lights to particular areas; making sidewalks wider/safer near their school; building a bike park; and installing more underground parking in local shopping malls. In response to the presentation, the mayor noted that some segments of the population – including children – are not regularly engaged in public consultation processes. There was discussion about how young people can provide valuable perspectives to the city and examples of how feedback from students had been important to the development of projects such as the New West Youth Centre. The council expressed appreciation for the students’ presentation and encouraged students to participate in the city’s Youth Advisory Committee. They also passed a motion for the students’ recommendations to be forwarded to city staff for follow up and reporting back.

**Project Wrap Up**

Following the public presentations, the leadership group helped develop a short ‘project feedback’ questionnaire for the larger group. The questionnaire focused on student experiences of each session (rating of poor, okay, good, excellent for each) and also asked what they liked most/least about the overall project, what they learned, and recommendations for how we could make a project like this better next time. All but one of the 48 respondents rated their overall experience with the project as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. Many indicated that the most
enjoyable aspects of the process were: taking photographs, learning about photography, going on a neighbourhood walk during school time, and having an opportunity to talk with the mayor. A number of participants wrote that they learned about their right to have a voice in community decision-making and appreciated this opportunity to share their ideas. On the other hand, some participants indicated that one of the least enjoyable aspects was writing captions for their pictures – and that doing this activity during school time felt like ‘school work’. A few also said they were uncomfortable speaking in front of others during the focus group. In informal follow-up conversations, some students expressed interest in making future presentations about the project, joining the Youth Advisory Committee to City Council, and participating in community consultations in the city.

After students completed this questionnaire, we had a short (approximately 20 minute) in-school gathering to wrap-up and celebrate the project. We also held a final meeting of the leadership group. At the meeting, group members indicated that they were interested in seeing how city staff would follow up on their recommendations. Many members also expressed interest in making public presentations regarding the project and getting involved with similar initiatives in the future.

**Project Follow Up**

In follow up to the students’ presentation to city council, city staff produced a report that outlined their responses to the students’ specific recommendations. For example, in addressing concerns that the sidewalk on a busy road near their school was too close to heavy traffic, the Engineering Department noted that this issue would be considered in an upcoming transportation plan. Similarly, the Parks and Recreation Department indicated that they would respond to concerns about playground hazards in Queen’s Park in their longer-term planning. The report concluded by recommending that the City of New Westminster continue to engage and consult with students from this school. Following the release of the report, three city staff members met with several participants from the project leadership group regarding the recommendations they made to city council. At the meeting, staff shared the report and talked
with students about other ways to get involved in municipal activities (e.g., the city’s Youth Advisory Committee, community consultations). The meeting also created a connection between city staff and the school’s Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club (supporting LGBTQ2S+ and gender questioning kids, and their allies). As a result, a community engagement consultant later met with this group to discuss their recommendations for making a nearby pool/recreation centre more inclusive. These recommendations were incorporated into a preliminary community consultation report for the redevelopment of the facility.

While it is difficult to capture the ripple effects of this sort of project, these follow-up activities suggest how the project connected with other happenings in New Westminster associated with urban child-friendliness. Since the issues raised by children as part of this project touched on various matters of concern in the city, there were multiple openings for the work to spark new thought and action. For example, members of a citizen’s group dedicated to improving walkability in New Westminster took note of the photo exhibit photographs/captions related to pedestrian safety and wondered how to better engage young people in discussions and initiatives related to this important issue. They subsequently contacted the participants’ school to explore possibilities for co-hosting an event and working together. As well, research interviews, informal discussions with city staff and council reports suggest that the student presentation to city council had: helped staff identify some unexpected things that matter to youth in their neighbourhoods; pointed to outreach into schools as an area for development; and provided an example of how children can be trusted to make contributions to their communities if given opportunities.

Importantly, the images and narratives offered by students in the participatory research project suggest that children are well positioned to offer site-specific information about play spaces as well as nuanced thoughts about play encounters associated with these spaces. The student participants attended not only to the elements of play spaces, but how things acted together in embodied ways that adults might not be aware of. Their work suggested that play encounters are complex and contingent upon material-discursive arrangements (e.g., neighbourhood atmospheres, play equipment, safety messages, plants, memories, weather,
nonhuman animals). Participants also gestured to the ways that playful action shifts over time, or across seasons, or with wear and tear of play structures/equipment. In a similar vein, some students specifically pointed out that play spaces do not necessarily involve fixed play equipment and that it might be beneficial to play in loosely constructed and non-designated play environments. To help explain their comments, students also provided examples of how playful improvisation takes place, how play features might be used in unintended ways, and some unexpected things are pulled into playful action. Finally, students identified problems and concerns with play spaces, recognizing how some play spaces might be both ‘friendly’ and ‘unfriendly’ at the same time.

Although some of the follow-up activities described above might also be conceived as research results, I have included them in this chapter, as the participatory project (consistent with other forms of participatory research) was a fluid process that did not have strict boundaries between research phases. For example, forms of analysis took place when students offered ideas about their own and others’ work, selected photographs that were interesting/important to them, and generated narratives and questions related with these photographs. As well, in developing and delivering public presentations, members of the leadership group engaged in knowledge creation and knowledge sharing. It is also worth noting that encounters and insights emerging through the participatory project variously made their way into subsequent research-related activities. Since the participatory project connected with a range of matters associated with urban child-friendliness (beyond play), insights generated through the project are part of multiple chapters of this dissertation (e.g., concerned with moving, learning, caring and more). The project also informed research interviews with people involved in developing and implementing the CYFC strategy, an aspect of the research that I outline below.

Interviewing

The intent of the research interviews was to explore the process of moving the CYFC strategy forward in New Westminster. I was interested in how things worked together to
advance the aims of the strategy (or not). This included exploring how the pursuit of child-
friendliness, as embodied to some extent in the CYFC strategy, might relate with a range of
important issues, concerns, and realities in the city.

Through talking with people in the community, including a city planner who was
responsible for overseeing the CYFC strategy, I identified people who were well positioned to
discuss the strategy and its unfolding in New Westminster. I interviewed 21 people who were,
to some degree, involved in developing and implementing the strategy, including those working
in the municipality, school district, community agencies, government bodies, and non-
governmental organizations. These interviews (lasting between 45-60 minutes) had a similar
base of questions, focusing on: how interviewees’ work related with the CYFC strategy; how the
strategy fit with the unique context of New Westminster; what they thought was working
and/or not working in terms of implementation; and what they had learned so far.

While semi-structured, the interviews were also intended to be conversational and
iterative. As such, each interview had a unique trajectory that included different follow-up
questions and emergent lines of discussion. As well, some of the interviewees were connected
with the school-based participatory project (e.g., set-up aspects of the project; attended public
presentations given by students). Thus, encounters and insights from the participatory project
also made their way into our discussions. Across the interviews, there was an emphasis on what
the strategy might do in the city, fueled to some extent by a delay in the strategy’s
implementation. For this reason, interviewees often talked speculatively about their intentions
and ideas for working with the strategy. In addition, conversations flowed to other related
topics in the city (e.g., playground design, motor vehicle traffic, the colonial history of the city,
dynamics of working with others, the feel of particular neighbourhoods).

As the study shifted from a qualitative approach toward a more post-qualitative one, the way
these interviews worked as part of the research shifted as well. For example, while I was still
looking for patterns in the interviews, I was less concerned with overarching themes and more
interested in how things were related. Importantly, over time I came to conceive of the
interviews as encounters that helped configure the research beyond language and discourse.
These encounters were entangled with a range of heterogenous (human/nonhuman, material/discursive) bodies and realities. I began to (diffractively) think the interviews through other research-related happenings, including those associated with the school-based participatory project. In this way, the interviews became different across the course of the research – working on the inquiry and helping make new connections.

Thus, while the chapters on ‘practicing’ and ‘working’ (Chapters 19 and 20) relate most explicitly with the initial interview questions and discussions, I have included quotes from the interviews throughout this dissertation. The interviews work together with elements of the participatory project (e.g., children’s photographs/captions, focus group text, accounts of research encounters) to help shape the inquiry and this document. In this way, the empirical aspects of these interviews and participatory project provide a basis for, and are entangled with, the more post-qualitative elements of the inquiry. As suggested in previous chapters, this hybridity – a tree and rhizome sort of relationship – is intended to provoke insights, make connections, produce further encounters, and open up new pathways of praxis.

**Experimenting**

The process of weaving together empirical and conceptual aspects of this inquiry resonates with the ‘experimental’ projects of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. For Deleuze and Guattari, experimentation is creative process that taps into the potential (i.e., the virtual) that always exists in the world, but is not yet conscious or identified (see Chapter 6). It involves following lines of thinking/doing without knowing in advance where they might lead. As suggested by Todd May (2005), “perhaps there is more going on in our world than is presented to us. We don’t know. The only way to find out is to experiment” (p. 72). Such experimentation involves being open to unexpected directions that the research might take – in this case, experimenting with different ways of approaching child-friendliness through a relational ontology. The hybridity of this work resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) suggestion to “lodge yourself on a stratum [yet also] find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight” (p. 161). In the spirit of this kind of experimentation, in Part IV of this
I put together a series of chapters that involve thinking, writing and making connections related with the participatory project and interviews that were part of this research. The chapters are modest explorations of some of the problems and potential associated with child-friendliness in New Westminster. While they include elements that might be found in more traditional qualitative studies associated with child-friendly cities and participatory research, they also, to varying degrees, involve extensions (or lines of flight) into more posthumanist thinking/doing.
PART IV: TREE/RHIZOME EXPERIMENTATION

Part IV (Chapters 10-22) is composed of a series of experimental writing pieces that are intended to provoke thought and create new connections related with this inquiry. Taking up a range of topics and concepts, the chapters explore the workings of the CYFC strategy and the potential associated with it.

In addition to engaging various realities associated with CYFC strategy, Part IV is also a modest exploration of how on-the-ground participatory research might be thought and done through a relational ontology. Each chapter outlines encounters and diffractive thinking that emerged through the inquiry and experiments with how new connections might be made through different strands of posthumanist and new materialist thinking. As part of this, the chapters include students’ photographs and narratives from the participatory project, transcribed text from research interviews, archival material, newspaper articles, photographs taken in city locations, bits of poetry, scholarly texts, field notes, and students’ feedback on their experiences with the project.

In a nod to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) book, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, the chapters relate with one another, but are not necessarily sequential. Although they can be read in the order given, other rhizomatic pathways might also be taken through them. They are also heterogeneous, and thus have different structures, lengths, styles and ways of approaching the research. While distinct, the chapters in Part IV are intended to intra-connect and work productively together in assemblage.
“We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects”

(Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 294)

I sat on a wooden bench inside the main entrance to City Hall. Positioned across from the photo exhibit (Figure 10.1) from our participatory research project, I was waiting to meet with a person who worked for the city. I had arrived early, as I was curious to see how the display was working with the space. I took the opportunity to notice how people were relating with the arrangement of images, narratives and objects. I was not viewing things from afar, but was immanently part of what was happening. Some people walked by the exhibit without engaging it. Others seemed to negotiate it as an obstruction to the typical flow of travel up and down the stairs. A few people paused to have a look. They took different pathways in doing so – moving around the tall metal structures and travelling between them. One person held up a
phone to take pictures. Another reached out to touch a living plant that was hung on one of the panels near photographs of flowers and grass.

More and more I was considering how I might re-conceptualize the inquiry to include these sorts of sitting-on-the-bench-and-noticing moments. I puzzled over how to account for the embodied and embedded encounters that were becoming part of it, as well the posthumanist and new materialist thinking that was seeping in. I also recognized that it was a privilege to hang around this public space for a period of time – noticing and thinking, but not doing anything in particular – without being seen as out-of-place or loitering. I wondered if this would be different if I was a young person. Or a group of young people? Making noise? With dirty clothes? With darker skin? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In any case, no one was asking me to ‘move along’ so I took out my notebook and started writing. This writing went in two different directions – one related with mapping and the other with loitering. Below I consider mapping as it relates with the photo exhibit from our participatory project, and in Chapter 17 I take up subject of loitering in research and the city.

The Photo Exhibit in Space

Through attending to how the photo exhibit worked in this City Hall space, I began to consider it relations with other bodies and realities in new ways. This included its embodied connections with people, as outlined above. However, such connections also extended to elements associated with the space itself (e.g., stairs, wall plaques, tables) and more (e.g., desires, histories, policies, traffic patterns, open park plans, the CYFC strategy). Physically, the photo exhibit itself changed as photographs shifted, the soccer ball was moved, and the plant slightly wilted. However, importantly, the photo exhibit also changed over time in a situated way (e.g., in relation with events, people, patterns of light and sound). The boundaries between it and these other elements was porous and subtly shifting – things were intra-connected. It was a body connected with other bodies and an ‘assemblage connected with other assemblages’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).
Mapping the Photo Exhibit Across Time and Space

Over time, I worked with others to put up various versions of the photo exhibit in different locations. Each time, it was differently configured and worked with the context in unique and emergent ways. For example, students in the participatory project suggested displaying their work in a glass case where artwork was typically shown at their school (Figure 10.2). They indicated that the canvases would be safe and highly visible in this busy location near the main school entrance, a location next to bin for storing scooters and the table where hot lunches were picked up. Students could see their work (although there was only room for some items), as well as share it with other students or visitors to the school.

Figure 10.2 Photo Exhibit at the student participants’ school. Photograph by author.
“A lot of them talked about it for a while afterwards... Especially when they saw their pictures over there [pointing to display case across from the school office]. And watching them walk by with friends who weren’t in the class and they would be like, ‘Oh what are those?’ and the kids were able to talk about them.”

--from interview with school employee

The photo exhibit was also put up for an afternoon event at BC Children’s Hospital and squeezed into the small lobby of the New Westminster School Board office (Figure 10.3). In the school board office location, it became connected with conversations, board meetings, water, photographs, conflict, play, politics and more. It was pushed aside to make room for a large marimba and a celebratory gathering of people the night the school board passed a Sanctuary Schools Policy – the night that students from this project also made a presentation to the Board of Education (see Chapter 18).
At an International Play Association Conference, photo exhibit items were attached to fencing donated by a local company in the City of Calgary (Figure 10.4). As well, it became connected with a storm and a large tree branch (found next to the road after the storm) which was attached to the panel with pictures/narratives related with climbing trees. At the end of the conference, in a rhizomatic turn of events, the branch and the fencing became part of mobile adventure playgrounds (and children’s play) in the city.

The photo display was malleable and had no prescribed structure. It was a temporary body with various material-discursive elements (metal, photographs, stories, questions, turf, branches) that intra-acted with other human and nonhuman bodies in each location. These temporary and partial connections helped define the photo exhibit in each moment and influenced the additional connections it was able to make. At the same time, the students’ photographs and narratives – and our collective work together – became part of other events and becomings. This attention to shifting identities and realities is something that emerged as important in this inquiry and my movement toward thinking and doing from a relational ontology. Through
attending to (and writing about) seemingly mundane aspects of the research, I started to map and create various pathways of thinking/doing that became important to its unfolding. For example, in noticing to how the photo exhibit worked over time and across various spaces (above), I started working with the following idea that is important in posthumanist thinking – a simple assertion with weighty ontological implications: *What an entity/body is, and what it becomes, depends on its relations.*
**Chapter 11. Engaging: Beginning to Think Engagement Through Materiality**

“I felt initial resistance when I went on the walk with the two different groups. At first, I think they were kind of treating it like a joke, maybe because they were thinking of this as a school project: ‘I have to do this because I’m in class, and nothing’s going to come of me walking through the community, taking pictures and talking about it afterwards’...And then once we got past that, like we needed to get everyone focused and you could tell that the wheels started to turn, and they started to invest more in the pictures they were taking, why they were taking them and what they wanted from it. And then when we did the focus groups where they came in and they talked about their pictures, they wanted their peers to listen and understand their opinions. And I think that the most successful sort of cherry-on-top finish for the kids was when they were in City Hall and when they presented to City Council...and they heard the Mayor say we are passing a motion to have the city look further into your set of recommendations. And I remember looking and I think it just really clicked. And for them, I wished all of them could have been there, because I think then they realized I mean ‘these important people in New Westminster listened to us, they asked us questions, they engaged with us, and they told us what they were going to do after’. So, they sort of received the action that they probably didn’t think they were going to get.”

--from interview with school district employee

This chapter focuses on the engagement of young people in the participatory project that was part of this research. While a number of avenues could be taken in exploring this engagement, here I work with the above quote from a school district employee who was actively involved in the project. Specifically, I take different pieces of the quote, and use them as departure points for thinking through various aspects of student engagement with the research. As part of this, I emphasize connections between the participatory project and child/youth engagement practices in the City of New Westminster. I also point to some of ways
that relational ethics (i.e., ethical action that is embodied, situational and relational – see Clandinin et al., 2018) were entwined with student engagement. Although the focus here is primarily on human experiences, at times I also gesture to my growing sense that engagement-related happenings were connected with materialities and a range of nonhuman bodies and forces.

School-Related

“I felt initial resistance when I went on the walk with the two different groups. At first, I think they were kind of treating it like a joke, maybe because they were thinking of this as a school project.”

In thinking through the above statement, I consider how children’s engagement in the project was influenced by its connections with school-related realities. In creating an initial plan for the project, I was grateful for the assistance and expertise offered by school district staff, administrators and teachers. Integrating the research with existing school activities presented opportunities to creatively meet curricular goals in a way that connected with community issues and was hopefully fun for the students involved. It also made it easier to reach kids who might be interested in participating and to secure in-class hours for the project over a period of time. The materiality of the school (e.g., classroom space, meeting space, access to technology) were an important part of this.

On the other hand, organizing the project in this way resulted in an initial project plan that did not include student input. Although the research was meant to complement inquiry-based learning, the question initially driving the inquiry – What places and things in your neighbourhood are ‘friendly’ or ‘not friendly’ for play? – did not originate with young people themselves. While there are various possible configurations of participatory research, with different degrees of engagement (i.e., there is not just one pure form of this kind of research), the level of participation does matter to the process and what comes from it (Chawla 2002;
Clark & Percy-Smith 2006; Corkery, 2017; Hart, 1997; Wallerstein et al., 2018). In the case of this study, it took time before students became more invested in the research project.

“Yep, oh yeah. You have to show up more than once. The first time they’re just going to stare at you.” --from interview with school employee

To their credit, student participants took up the question initially posed and found various ways to make it relevant to their neighbourhood experiences (as highlighted across other chapters of this dissertation).

“(The project] made me want to explain to others about these places.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

Setting up the research in a way that might seem like a ‘school project’ had other implications in this context, including, importantly, whether students felt they could choose not to participate in research activities without consequence. Thus, carrying out the project in this school context required revisiting the choice to participate at regular intervals and treating assent/consent as a process rather than an event (e.g., Alderson, 2012; Warin, 2011). While I re-stated at different times that participation was voluntary, and tried to show this in practice (e.g., not pressing for answers or assuming participation), the established expectations and norms at the school ran counter to this at times. When I checked-in with students in smaller groups, the prevailing (paraphrased) answer was: even the parts that are less fun/interesting are better than school work. From this I took that the level of engagement in the project varied across people and activities, but that students were willingly participating. However, I still wondered whether the school context made it less likely that they would feel free to opt-out of particular activities. I therefore tried to make adjustments during the course of the project to avoid or mitigate this.
“[What I liked least about the project was] writing the stuff about the pics.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

“[What I liked least about the project was] when we had to present. I’m a very bad public speaker”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

For example, after hearing from some students that they felt uncomfortable about either writing down narratives to accompany their photographs (e.g., indicating that this seemed like a school assignment with a deadline) or speaking in focus groups about their photographs (e.g., indicating that they felt pressure to ‘present’ their work in a public speaking sort of way), I negotiated an extra 10-15 minute meeting with each small group of 2-3 students to check-in about their experiences, confirm whether or not they wanted to have particular photographs/captions included in the photo exhibit, and decide upon final captions if applicable. The process of working with each small group was different, depending on the students and circumstances involved. In future studies, I would have more up-front conversations with school staff to strategize about how to work together to create an environment where students felt okay to not participate – no questions asked. I would also try to build in various options for participation that students could choose from and move between, depending on the circumstances.

However, while posing challenges, I will also say that carrying out research in this school context helped establish working relationships and navigate emerging ethical issues. For example, given that teachers and other staff in the school had longer term relationships with students, they were able to offer suggestions (e.g., strategies for including people) and provide in-the-moment interventions (e.g., supporting individual students, encouraging respectful communication) that helped us work better together. The importance of having a supportive and consistent classroom teacher was underscored when (due to an unusual mid-year shuffle of school staffing across the province) near the end of our classroom sessions, the main teacher involved with the project took a position at a school closer to home. While other teachers and
school staff jumped in to help with the project, the level of student engagement – and range of options for further engagement – were certainly impacted by this shift.

It is worth noting that the engagement of adults in the project was also influenced by school-related incentives and practices. For example, some school staff discussed the tension between taking on this project as a way to embrace the new provincial curriculum (focused on competencies and exploring big ideas) and expectations that content be covered in more traditional ways.

“The more I talk to other teachers about what was going on in class, some of them were like: You’re crazy, that takes up too much time. How did you get through the text book? Well, we didn’t. We did other stuff to cover the other things instead of using the text book. And there were others who were like: This is awesome. That sounds like a great idea.”

--from interview with school employee

Methods-Related

“And they started to invest more in the pictures they were taking, why they were taking them and what they wanted from it. And then when we did the focus groups where they came in and they talked about their pictures, they wanted their peers to listen and understand their opinions.”

As suggested by David Driskell (2002), using a variety of creative methods in research can help engage young people and make it more likely that they will feel interested and included in the work. In this study, providing opportunities for students to get out into their neighbourhoods and take photographs was key in creating engagement.

“I liked it when we went on the photo walk and really took notice [of] our community.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire
“I liked getting out of the classroom.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

We were fortunate that the main classroom teacher involved in the study had experience with photography and facilitated an extra in-class session with students on techniques for planning and taking photographs. Students expressed excitement about practicing photography techniques, something many indicated they would use in other settings as well. On project feedback questionnaires, students commonly commented on how much they enjoyed taking photographs and learning about photography.

“What I liked most about this project was going around the neighbourhood taking pictures.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

“It was fun learning how to use cameras.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

[I learned] “how to make photos look cooler.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

[I learned] “that I’m good at taking pictures.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

Photography is used as a way of engaging young people in research, particularly participatory research, across a range of contexts (e.g., Catalani and Minkler, 2010; Chio and Fandt, 2007; Ewald and Lightfoot, 2001; Goodhard et al., 2006; Harper, 2002; Piper and Frankham, 2007; Torre and Murphy, 2015; Wang and Burris, 1997). It is also identified as a way to shift power relations between young people and adults involved in research (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2006; Hemy & Meshulam, 2020) and to offer benefits to participants, a principle identified as important in
participatory research (Wallerstein & Duran, 2017). Recently, some inquiry attending to the
materiality of research processes has focused on the agency of cameras and how they
contribute to research assemblages (e.g., Änggård, 2015). Here, cameras and the images
produced through photography work as part of embodied engagements that are not just about
meaning (i.e., what does photography show) but complex entanglements of various human and
nonhuman bodies (i.e. what does photography do) in research.

In terms of communicating with others about their photographs, students expressed a
range of preferences for how to do this. While some students said they were uncomfortable
with the focus groups (and the way we set them up – and what they were attached with), other
students expressed how much they enjoyed talking about their photographs in this way. Many
of the discussions were lively, with people asking questions and adding to others’ stories and
ideas. These focus groups were material-discursive encounters involving a range of human and
nonhuman elements (e.g., configurations of people, tables, chairs, laptop, projector, images,
school expectations, feelings, seating arrangements, behavior norms, hunger, other school
activities, friendship, social hierarchies, and more). For each focus group, this configuration was
different and levels of engagement seemed different to me as well.

City Hall-Related

“And I think that the most successful sort of cherry-on-top finish for the kids was when
they were in city hall and when they presented to city council...and they heard the
mayor say we are passing a motion to have the city look further into your set of
recommendations.”

Multiple bodies and forces connected with students’ efforts to make their voices heard
at the city council presentation. For example, the physical arrangement of council chambers
became an inseparable part of the presentation. Because students did not have access to the
room beforehand (which would be helpful for future projects), I took a photograph (Figure
11.1) of the room to share with them. While it seemed that some efforts had been made over
time to make council chambers less hierarchical (e.g., using non-raised office chairs for council members), the space was still quite formal, suggesting particular rules of engagement and performances of power. Some students described it as intimidating when we were discussing what would happen when we went inside. What made it less so were some of the arrangements that city staff had made for the students, including assisting them with technology and removing chairs to allow them to stand together at the presenter’s desk.

In discussing how Canadian municipalities can better plan with (as opposed to for) children, Catherine Anne McAllister (2011) states that “city officials sometimes claim there is nothing stopping children from making presentations to council or attending community forums. However, it seems clear that these venues are neither welcoming nor appropriate for children” (p. 34).

It can be intimidating to make a presentation to city council – even for adults. One city official I interviewed as part of this study stated, “We say, Come! Make your voice heard! But it’s the same people every time”. While making a delegation to City Council is technically an
option open to everyone, whether or not people are able to exercise this option seems a complex matter involving a range of relations. How things are set up – including materially – can make a difference.

“[I liked] communicating with ‘decision makers’ as it made me feel as if we were [having] a real influence.” --from student participant feedback questionnaire

“I decided that it is very important to voice your opinion which is something I wouldn’t usually do.” --from student participant feedback questionnaire

Since only a few students were involved in making the presentation to City Council, in terms of engagement, it was helpful that the mayor was also willing to come to the school to meet with the entire group. This one hour session, taking place in an environment familiar to students, allowed participants who might not attend the presentation at city hall to connect with the mayor, ask him questions, and even have one-on-one discussions with him afterward. It also gave leadership group presenters an opportunity to meet the mayor prior to the city hall presentation, which (as indicated by some students) helped them feel more comfortable at the presentation. The mayor also encouraged them to make concrete recommendations to city council – a tip that that informed the shape of their presentation. A number of students indicated that the mayor’s visit to the school was their favorite part of the project.

“[I liked] when we talked to Mayor Cote.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

Leadership Group-Related

“And I remember looking and I think it just really clicked. And for them, I wished all of them could have been there.”
Here, I think about the various levels of student engagement in the project. In particular, I consider how the commitment and contributions of the leadership group helped shape the project in important ways – and was hopefully rewarding for those students. I also consider how future projects like this might invite more engagement from a wider range of the participants involved.

“[We could make this project better next time by] Including everyone a bit more.”
--from student participant feedback questionnaire

I was grateful to work with twelve students who volunteered to form a leadership group to help plan and carry out aspects of the project. Our meetings were short (sometimes just 20 minutes) but consistent throughout the project. Students in this group helped plan activities, provided feedback on sessions, generated ideas for the photo-exhibit and made presentations both at school (for the mayor) and in public (to the New Westminster City Council and the Board of Education). They helped shape the project and also make it more engaging for other student participants in ways that were sometimes subtle, but important. For example, they created the teams for the neighbourhood walks, deciding (for various reasons) against both random assignment and letting students spontaneously choose groups. In putting together these teams, they attended to group dynamics as well as inclusivity (e.g., suggesting mostly teams of two and some teams of three). In response, their classmates seemed generally satisfied with the teams and appeared to work well together. At other times, members of the leadership group also made specific efforts to help classmates feel included in project activities (e.g., brainstorm activities, focus groups). They also offered suggestions for making activities more engaging for students and provided feedback about when they were not. For example, they were very honest about when activities seemed uninteresting or boring (e.g., a large group activity meant to identify themes in photographs/captions) and speculating about why this was the case.

However, I am also aware that the leadership group had more opportunities to become engaged in the project than other students. While this might have generally lined up with
student interests, I did not build-in a way to find out if this was the case, nor gauge changing interests, nor invite further engagement by those who did not initially volunteer to be part of the leadership group. As suggested in the quote above (“I wished all of them could have been there”), while all student participants were invited to the presentation at City Hall, only those who were presenting were in attendance. Although this might not be an entirely human doing (see Chapter 12, Snowing), more could have been done to connect the larger group with this presentation and other extension activities. In future studies, it would be helpful to create more opportunities to involve students who do not volunteer to be part of a leadership group, but might be open to participating in other forms of engagement.

Ongoing Engagement

“I think then they realized I mean ‘these important people in New Westminster listened to us, they asked us questions, they engaged with us, and they told us what they were going to do after’. So, they sort of received the action that they probably didn’t think they were going to get.”

In thinking through these last words of the quote, I consider the importance of following up with young people and creating opportunities for future action and engagement. At the end of this project, some students expressed excitement about making contributions to the city.

“I thought for once kids have a say in things.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire

 “[We learned] what things actually need to be improved in our city and how youth can change a community.”

--from student participant feedback questionnaire
“I got to notice more things that needed to improve and I’m happy that city council took in some of our suggestions.” --from student participant feedback questionnaire

“Now after everyone’s positive feedback you want to do more to help your community.”
--from student participant feedback questionnaire

There was also some skepticism about whether their efforts would actually make a difference.

“We did [take action] but it does not really matter because the government could just wave it off.” --from student participant feedback questionnaire

In practice, the follow up to this presentation was mixed in terms of responding to students’ concerns and further engaging them in matters related with children in the city. For example, while city staff produced a report outlining responses to student recommendations and met with several participants about the report, this process stretched into the following school year. As well, some students commented that they were unlikely to take up suggestions made by city staff to sign up for municipal email lists, look up city council meeting minutes, or access recommended links to the city website. An acknowledgement of this was included in the staff report itself, which stated:

While the website is an important part of communicating with the community at large, in order to proactively engage with children and youth it would also be good for City staff to go into schools to collect input on certain initiatives. Children and youth may not visit the City website and/or may not read Citypage to find out about engagement opportunities relevant to them in the community, because they may not have access to a computer, or may not be aware of what kind of information they could find on the City’s website or in The Record newspaper. (CNW, 2017, p. 2)
In an interview, one city staff member indicated that it would be desirable to engage more children and youth, but that current community consultation events were not well suited for this type of engagement. This interviewee further suggested that the *Youth Engagement Toolkit* produced by the Society for Children and Youth of BC as part of their work on the CYFC strategy might be helpful in this process.

“We keep having to find new ways that we can actually reach the voices that are missing in the conversation...but it’s not like we plan engagement events that are very engaging and stimulating and appealing for a fourteen-year-old to come participate in."

--from interview with city employee

While interest in engaging with the city might be variable among young people, as suggested through our research project, young people have a great deal to offer city-making processes and might be open to engagement opportunities that are specifically geared toward them. For example, on their feedback forms for this study, most students indicated that they would be interested in participating in a project like this in the future. In addition, many students expressed interest in making further presentations about the project if opportunities arose. Indeed, a small group of student participants proactively contacted me about possibly attending and presenting their work at a conference on children’s play. Despite some promising communications with conference organizers about this request, we were unfortunately unable to make it happen, as it was determined that the students were too young to sign up as presenters or even attendees at this child-related conference.

“It was a school project, and nobody wants to do school projects later, but it engaged them enough where they wanted to right? It’s a big deal.”

--from interview with school staff
These students expressed frustration at wanting to do more, but not having opportunities to do so. This is something I had not anticipated, and would better address in setting up future studies. Such efforts might involve building more engagement opportunities into the study as well as exploring opportunities for ongoing action in the city. Echoing this idea, in their (2017) book entitled *Children Living in Sustainable Built Environments*, Pia Christensen, Sophie Hadfield-Hill, John Horton and Peter Kraftl discuss how scholars might better work with planners, policy-makers and other urban stakeholders in engaging children:

> How might we engage with the set of feelings that emerged most pressingly in our research encounters: the sense that children and young people wanted more from adult stakeholders? As we have discussed, this kind of feeling was expressed eloquently and urgently by many participants in our project: in their desire to learn more, and understand about the workings of eco-architectures; in their acute feelings of disappointment at the apparently failed promises of planners and policy-makers; and, particularly, in their heartfelt wishes for opportunities to be more involved in community decision-making (p. 188).

While I was grateful that we were able to carve out so much time in the school, setting up longer term partnerships and projects that strengthen connections between various city-related realities would provide students with richer engagement opportunities. This sort of work is already happening in other places that are working to make cities better for young people. For example, through the Growing up Boulder initiative in Boulder Colorado, USA (described in Chapter 3), city planners, community stakeholders and researchers have worked together over a number of years on various projects aimed at involving young people in city planning and design (Derr et al., 2013). Given the collaborative relationships in the City of New Westminster (see Chapter 19), undertaking long term partnerships involving child/youth engagement is something that might be done in relation with the CYFC strategy as well.

Our participatory project offered opportunities to think through how this sort of engagement might happen in New Westminster. With this in mind, in this chapter I have highlighted some relationships between student engagement and the school context,
participatory methods, and ongoing efforts in the city to include young people. In doing so, I have emphasized connections between this research and child/youth engagement practices in the City of New Westminster. In many ways, the lessons learned from this project resonate with those of other participatory research projects with young people. This includes the need to be responsive to particular situations and contexts and the relational ethical issues emerging within them. However, what also emerged from these research encounters was a sense that materiality played a role in child/youth engagement and ethical processes in very real and important ways.

Through these encounters I started to attend more to materialities and the role of objects and space configurations in the unfolding of events. I also started to consider how complex these relations were and how (human and nonhuman) bodies and forces worked together to produce particular arrangements, but not others. I also sensed the ethical implications of these arrangements, such that when I read Karen Barad’s concept of “ethico-onto epistemology” (Barad, 2007), in a very embodied way I more deeply considered her suggestion that relational engagements are always thick with obligations, accountabilities and responsibilities (i.e., abilities to respond) that involve both matter and meaning. This sort of thinking certainly resonates with my experiences working with young people on our participatory project. It also stretches out to various other aspects of the research (as suggested in other chapters of this dissertation) and beyond as I consider how more-than-human relations are involved in the making of realities and worlds.
I sat at my desk perusing news articles about the recent string of snowstorms in the lower mainland of British Columbia. Headlines such as *Snowmageddon!* highlighted how unusual it was for snow to accumulate here in such amounts. I read a blog post from a New Westminster City Councillor entitled *Snowpocalypse?* in which he discussed the challenges of clearing the snow and its impacts on people moving around the city (Johnstone, 2017). In the New West Record, New Westminster’s community newspaper, there were several articles about how the Arenex building had collapsed under the weight of snow (Figure 12.1). This 78-
year old recreation facility, located in Queen’s Park, appeared in some photographs that student participants took for our research project. I recalled walking past the Arenex on one of these walks and a student talking about attending gymnastics classes there when she was younger.

I considered, in this case, how snow was becoming unexpectedly and rhizomatically connected with: discussions about children’s recreation in the city; debates about building maintenance and snow removal practices; material objects (e.g., trophies and historical artifacts that were housed in the building); and new ideas about how the Arenex site might be re-vised/re-purposed. At the same time, I wondered how this snow might influence our research project, recognizing that snow had already become entangled with research-related happenings. The last few sessions with student participants had been delayed for several weeks. These final sessions were focused on identifying possible patterns and questions related to the project, choosing photographs/captions to include in the photo exhibit, and wrapping-up our work together. In addition to these large group activities, the leadership group had committed to developing and delivering presentations to the New Westminster City Council and the Board of Education regarding the project. There were still quite a few things ahead – and the snow became part of them.

Through encounters with snow, I came to better appreciate how nonhuman forces can entangle with research assemblages and work as part of the research apparatus. In this case, snow was not merely a background feature of the inquiry, but actively helped configure it. For example, it influenced the timing of research activities and the momentum of the project, as we shifted our activities to accommodate the snowy conditions. There were also hints that the children’s ideas about their photographs changed over time, as some of them discussed recent snow-related events (e.g., Fig. 14.2). One student commented that it was difficult to come up with questions about the photographs because it had been weeks since our last session. Another student added the question: When will they re-build the Arenex?
The snow seemed especially influential the night when students from the leadership group made their presentation to City Council. We knew New Westminster was due for another round of snow that evening, but did not anticipate that it would turn into a snowstorm. Despite worsening weather conditions, all of the student presenters made their way to city hall. We waited in the foyer of the building near the photo exhibit as the snow fell outside. Some students walked around the display with their families, pointing out their own work and that of their classmates. They practiced their presentation, ate snacks, and excitedly/nervously chatted. One teacher texted his former colleague (the main teacher involved with the project, who had now taken a position at a school closer to home) as her husband drove their vehicle on the highway to New Westminster. There was uncertainty about whether she would make it to city hall in time for the presentation. When the snow intensified and vehicles started getting stuck on nearby hills, there were discussions about how people would get home — about

Figure 12.2 Caption: This is the turf field at Queen’s Park where kids and adults play soccer, lacrosse and many other sports. It is a safe and great location because there are fences around the whole turf field so the ball does not go onto the road if you kick it. The Arenex in the background is not there anymore. I went there since the roof collapsed and basically it’s all gone.

Photograph and caption by student participants.
SkyTrain service and snow tires and gloves. We wondered if the city council meeting would be cut short and the presentation postponed. However, since the students were already assembled and waiting outside council chambers, the meeting schedule was shifted so that they could present early and go home. In this presentation (described in Chapter 9) the students were given an opportunity to talk about their project, make recommendations, and participate in a lively discussion with Mayor and Council. And part way through this discussion, there was surprise and elation when they realized that their former teacher had made it to the presentation and taken a seat behind them.

The snowy conditions became part of how things unfolded that evening and contributed to the intensity of events. Yet, the presence of snow could easily fall-away and go un-noted in research-related accounts, as could other nonhuman aspects of the inquiry (see Latour, 1987; Latour & Woolgar, 2013; Law, 2004). In research descriptions, there is not typically an acknowledgment of weather, seating arrangements, equipment batteries, or cookies. However, thinking from a relational ontology, these elements help configure inquiry processes in important and nuanced ways. This is not to say that weather and other non-living entities have individual agency that can be separated out, identified, and taken into account. Rather, a collective agency emerges between bodies. All bodies (including what we think of as human bodies) are entangled and performing together. Considering agency in this distributive way shifts thinking about who and what contributes to research praxis – and the entanglements of ontology and epistemology (see Chapters 6 & 7). It troubles anthropocentric notions that research is primarily a human endeavor where nonhuman elements serve as background features of, and inert tools for, human action. It shifts thinking about what sorts of things to attend to and document as part of the research process. It also highlights the politics of how certain things get recorded and others go unmarked – and how matter (whether or not it is explicitly acknowledged) is always part of meaning-making and signification processes (Barad, 2007). Importantly, approaching agency through a relational ontology creates openings through which to think about the multiple becomings that emerge through research events.
Chapter 13. **Moving: Thinking School-Related Travel Through Assemblage**

“I think [our] roads overall are designed safely. But then there’s the ‘how does it feel?’ And often roads and intersections don’t feel safe, and that presents a barrier.”

--from interview with city employee

In this chapter, I engage an important topic that emerged in the participatory project and research interviews – children’s school-related travel. Although play was the intended focus of the participatory project, students took numerous photographs and told a range of stories related with getting to and from school. Their accounts related with their playful experiences as well as encounters with motor vehicles and transportation-related infrastructure. In a similar way, many of the research interviews with city employees people also touched on transportation in the city and the *moving* domain of the CYFC strategy.

It was through these photographs, stories and interviews – along with my own encounters moving through New Westminster – that I started thinking more deeply about mobility-related assemblages. Below I arrange some of the images and texts from research interviews and our participatory project (along with other related texts) that are intended to give a sense of some important transportation realities for children in New Westminster. In doing so, I also experiment with using the concept of assemblage in thinking through these images, texts, and their heterogeneous entanglements.

**Moving Vehicles and Moving People**

Planned and built up largely before the rise of motor vehicles, New Westminster has a compact street grid with an extensive sidewalk network (CNW, 2020a). It has curb cuts (graded ramps) on most street corners (Gill, 2019), and is rated overall as highly walkable (Frank et al., 2010). The New Westminster Master Transportation Plan [MTP] (2015) indicates that the

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6 The Queensborough neighbourhood (separated from the rest of the city by a bridge) is viewed and rated as considerably less walkable than the rest of the city (Frank, et al. 2010).
transportation system in the city prioritizes the movement of people (e.g., promoting walking, cycling and a range of transportation options) over the movement of vehicles. Further, the municipality has made significant investments in infrastructure to support alternatives to driving, including creating designated bike lanes. It also funds cycling and pedestrian safety programs in New Westminster schools (MTP, 2015).

“So, having political support to do things that are pushing the envelope a little bit...[We] are certainly not moving cars, we’re not moving cars very efficiently at all. But they’re supportive of that. They get that transit, and walking in particular, are what we need to be fostering and supporting and growing.” --from interview with city employee

“I can’t think of any city that works really well for cars, that also works well for people.”
--from interview with city employee

Yet, vehicle traffic is identified as an issue in the city (MTP, 2015). Located at a convergence point for various transportation networks (e.g., major roadways, highways, transit lines, truck routes, and marine routes), New Westminster is a regional transportation hub (CNW, 2020a). Over time, residents have expressed concerns about traffic in the city, including through a 2013 Ipsos Reid Citizen Satisfaction Survey, which suggested that:

Although the large majority of residents are very happy with the quality of life in New Westminster, over half (51%) of residents identified transportation as the biggest area of concern facing the community....Key transportation issues identified by residents include regional through traffic, congestion, pedestrian safety, lack of cycling facilities, transit access and service, volume of regional truck and vehicle traffic, vehicular safety, as well as air quality, noise, and livability issues. (MTP, 2015, p. 7)
“The number one thing that comes up in New Westminster is people upset about traffic.”
--from interview with city employee

“Next to Vancouver we have the second highest use of public transit in all over metro Vancouver on a per capita basis. So, it’s a community that provides other transportation options that wouldn’t necessarily be viable in other communities. But on the negative side, we are also right in the geographical centre of metro Vancouver and we have over forty thousand vehicles that just drive through our small city every single day. And that obviously comes into conflict with neighbourhood livability and comes into conflict with trying to create environments where we’re trying to encourage kids to feel comfortable walking in the streets.”
--from interview with city official

“You know I’ll obviously walk around in the neighbourhood with my kids all the time in our neighbourhood, but where I can really relax and just let them loose and go out and explore is when we’re on the river because there’s no cars down there.”
--from interview with city official

Travelling to and From School
Resonating with the above concerns about transportation in the city, a number of students in the participatory project took photographs of and discussed issues related with roadway traffic and pedestrian safety (e.g., Figures 13.1 to 13.3). These photographs generated a great deal of discussion in the focus groups, particularly as they related with walking to and from school.

“It’s dangerous because there are cars and you can get run over. I heard some people have gotten killed on that street. I use [the overpass] on the walk to school every day...It’s better than crossing the road.”
--from focus group discussions with students
“When we were walking there on the field trip like I almost got hit by a car. It’s like half the class went in and like a car...sometimes crazy people go really fast.”

--from focus group discussions with students

“I've seen people there and they would run across to the middle but then they would get to the middle and people would be driving really fast, you have to be quick if you were actually trying to j-walk there. It’s not a smart idea to do that because you could get hit.”

--from focus group discussions with students

“There's a lot of streets where you can go to avoid the busy ones.”

--from focus group discussions with students

Figure 13.1 Caption: The sidewalk on this part of McBride is not a friendly place to walk. It's narrow and big trucks come really really close.

Photograph by teacher and caption by student participants.
“I've had it where I'm walking and then a person just turns right in front of me and almost hits me...Yeah, my mom sometimes drops me off.”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 13.2)

“\textit{A kid got hit at that corner and died so that's one of the main reasons I take the bridge.}”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 13.2)
"Sometimes parents want to rush to school so they go a bit over [the speed limit]."

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 13.3)

Traffic was also mentioned in photographs related with playgrounds and parks, as these locations were sometimes identified as safe zones away from roadways. Fences figured heavily in many of these images and discussions (e.g., Figure 13.4).

"It feels more safe and closed, cause like on one side of the field there's like a big cement wall and then a fence at the top and there's a whole field and then there's a bit of a hill and there's a fence there, and fences on all four sides of the field."

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 13.4)

"It's safe because it's in a park. And there's no busy roads near it so you can't get run over."

--from focus group discussions with students
In these cases, fences did not seem to be associated with restraint and limitation, but a sense of safety and freedom to move without fear. While this connection might seem counter-intuitive, it resonates with some other play-related studies that explore how children negotiate space with motor vehicles. For example, in one study of ‘shared surface’ streets, children indicated “a preference for more enclosed spaces with clear boundaries rather than more open thoroughfares where interactions with (generally faster-flowing) vehicular traffic were avoided” (Christensen et al., 2017, p. 97).

It is worth noting that in the context of New Westminster, and this particular neighbourhood, the feelings that children expressed regarding their safety near roadways plugged into real possibilities, as large trucks have jumped dividers to crash into city parks (Dobie, 2018), and pedestrians have been struck by vehicles near their school (“11-year old”, 2010). This is not to say that all children in New Westminster do, or should, live in fear of being
hit by motor vehicles, but that experiences of moving through neighbourhoods are highly contextual and that children have unique perspectives on and senses of travelling along and through city streets. For many of the children involved in this study, negotiating road traffic was a regular part their travels to and from school. Yet, this relationship did not just involve vehicles, nor the human motorists who drove them, but arrangements of heterogeneous bodies and forces. They might be thought of as complex travelling to/from school assemblages.

**Mobility-Related Assemblages**

Thinking in this way, the photographs taken by children in this study suggested multiple intermingling assemblages at work in their travels. For example, drawing on the *Number One bus on an afternoon in July* assemblage (discussed in Chapter 6), Figure 13.5 below might be conceived as a *going to the coffee shop after school* assemblage. In the moment this photograph was taken, a range of heterogeneous elements (both seen and unseen) were at work. This includes children, a crosswalk, trees, moving cars, speed, parked vehicles, street lamps, weather, light, store signs, covered walkways, curbs, parking space requirements, driver’s agendas, zoning bylaws, feelings and more. This assemblage is necessarily entangled with a range of other assemblages – perhaps *grocery shopping* assemblages, *smoking under the awning* assemblages, *tree* assemblages, *digestion* assemblages, *family* assemblages, and *road network* assemblages. The painted crosswalk itself can be viewed as an assemblage that is at the same time material and discursive. It has elements of both matter (e.g., paint, asphalt) and meaning (e.g., communicating messages of ‘slow down’ or ‘stop for pedestrians’). The asphalt works here as part of the *crosswalk* assemblage and the *parking lot surface* assemblage, and may temporarily become part of a *car moving through the parking lot* assemblage, and multiple other assemblages. These assemblages are always in flux and act together to make things happen (i.e., they have collective agency). The assemblage *going to the coffee shop on the way to school* cannot be reduced to its parts (e.g., child+crosswalk+parking lot+cars) but is relational and is defined by its connections in the moment.
“It’s a really busy parking lot and it could be unsafe. And like when I walk through the parking lot I don’t feel that safe either because sometimes I go to Starbucks and my dad picks me up there and I don’t really feel safe walking across the street there. Sometimes it’s really full and people need parking and they’re just trying to get parking and they’re driving around.” -- from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 13.5)

Conceiving of children’s travels to and from school in this way is not simply an interesting way to think about things, but it also has practical implications. For example, it points to the complexities of children’s movements in the city, and the how approaches to encouraging kids to move in certain ways (e.g., walking, cycling, taking transit) need to be context sensitive. It also suggests that the realities of this travel are material-discursive (see Christensen et al., 2017), and that both matter and meaning need to be taken into account when considering children’s mobilities, with the understanding that they cannot be neatly teased apart (as suggested by the assemblage example above). As well, considering how fluid assemblages intra-
act and shift can also help us think through the ways that children’s movements change across circumstances and time, and in connection with other bodies. Importantly, it also points to the potential benefits of considering children’s embodied movements with/through complex city-related assemblages in practices of design, planning, and programming.

“You have a way that you think they should go, where all the infrastructure is in place and it’s all dead clear. And then there’s the way that makes the most sense for them to go....And often it’s different. So, I think it’s really important for us to think like they do, to the extent possible. Because even if we design it differently, they’re gonna follow the path that makes most sense for them.”

--from interview with city employee

“[There are benefits to] having a strategy like this [i.e., the CYFC strategy], when we’re having a discussion about greenways and sidewalks and such, being told from the strategy, you need to include the viewpoint of an eight-year-old.”

--from interview with city employee

In New Westminster, the city has made efforts to make the city more walkable and encourage active transport for children and others (MTP, 2015). The moving domain of the CYFC strategy, drawing directly from the New Westminster Master Transportation Plan, has goals to develop both infrastructure and programming that promotes safe, active and independent travel. There is also a goal to integrate the needs of children, youth and families into transportation planning in the city, including suggestions to complete child impact assessments and audits of new infrastructure projects. Attending to children’s safe travel to and from school has been identified as one way that cities can support child-friendliness (Gleeson et al, 2006; Tranter, 2018; Whitzman et al., 2010).

The City of New Westminster has worked towards these goals in various ways, including infrastructure, parking, crossing and intersection improvements that relate with children’s
movements (MST, 2015). For example, the city has recently completed a cycling route that physically separates cyclists from vehicles. The city’s engineering department also collaborates with the school district and other bodies (e.g., Translink, HASTe BC) to develop *Best Routes to School* planning (based on the international *Safe Routes to School* movement). This planning includes developing Best Routes to School maps for all schools in New Westminster. It also involves delivering bicycle skills training in schools and other education initiatives.

“School travel plans...So that’s an interactive process between city staff, police, and the school. So, including the school administration as well as the PAC [Parent Advisory Committee] as well as children who have a perspective to share on it as well. So the kids are involved in that planning process. They share sort of how they get to school already. And they help to identify barriers to getting to school by walking, cycling or transit.”

--from interview with city employee

“So we fund cycling skills training and that kind of thing, for various schools. So each year we have a pot of money that goes toward training and that kind of thing...it’s more of a liaison role We don’t have staff that go into the classroom regularly anyways. We do one offs but that’s kind of it. And then engagement apart from that is more general. You know, presence at events and that kind of thing. So yeah, it’s not super active and ongoing.”

--from interview with city employee

Some students indicated that they enjoyed riding their bikes to/from school and did so on a regular basis (Figure 13.6).
On the other hand, other students indicated that they did not feel safe riding their bikes near the school.

"I ride my bike but not to school because I'm not that able to ride on the streets or the sidewalk. I'm kind of afraid to, so me and my friend often just go to the reservoir or something and ride around our bikes there or in my back alley."

--from focus group discussions with students

As well, a few students indicated that particular recommended walking and cycling routes in Best Routes to School maps did not feel comfortable or safe. This included walking on sidewalks near busy roads (referred to above) and a less populated location near an overpass. For example, the photograph in Figure 13.7 was taken on a pathway that is both a recommended walking route to school and an ‘off-street bike route’ in city cycling maps. The student who took

Figure 13.6 Caption: Riding a bike to school is healthy, fun and beneficial to the planet. I wanted to show that more people should ride their bikes to school, work or anywhere else you need to be.

Photograph and caption by student participant.
the photograph found this location scary, especially in the winter when it is often dark in the morning when children are traveling to school.

"I go through it every day and it's not a fun place to be. There's multiple times people have found used drugs and stuff behind there. But it's right beside Canada Games and Justice Institute...It's really bumpy if you're riding your bike because this is a bike path."

-- from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 13.7)

While the Best Routes to School maps were developed with the input of young people at various schools, updates to these maps is infrequent. In the context of New Westminster, particularly in neighbourhoods with heavy traffic flows or that have undergone changes (e.g., through development projects), attentiveness to shifting circumstances seems important. Children have an embodied sense of how their walks to and from school feel and what is related with this travel. They are well positioned to flag unsafe areas, suggest solutions to
mobility issues that have arisen, and share creative work-arounds they have already invented to make their school-related travel safer and more enjoyable. A decision to adopt such an approach would recognize the value of children’s contributions and provide opportunities for people working in the area of transportation planning to learn from children about their movements. As suggested earlier in this chapter, integrating children’s needs into transportation planning might also involve becoming curious about how children move with/through various city-related realities. Thinking with assemblages, such movement is both complex and highly situated, involving a range of material-discursive relationships that are always themselves in motion.
Chapter 14. **Listening: How Might Child-Friendliness Sound?**

“**As a town site, New Westminster is decidedly objectionable. Too elevated, expensive to grade, and heavily timbered, its progress must necessarily be slow; the expansive swamps and marshes so close to it are not an advantage, to say nothing of the music of acres of frogs in spring and the stings of myriads of mosquitos in summer.**”

(Pemberton, 1860, as cited in Scott, 1983, p. 55)

When I read the above text written in 1860 by J. Despard Pemberton (a politician, surveyor and engineer) concerning the proposed site of New Westminster, I imagined what the *music of acres of frogs* might sound like. This perceived noise issue seemed an interesting contrast to the some of the current noise-related realities in New Westminster. For example, the city has engaged in a multi-year ‘train whistle cessation’ process to stop trains from sounding whistles at thirteen of New Westminster’s twenty-two train crossings (Figure 14.1) (CNW, n.d.-k). Railway operations and infrastructure, which are under federal jurisdiction, have
been important to the city since they were established in the late 1800’s. Early settlers fought hard to secure a railway line to New Westminster (Scott, 1983) and this one-time marker of colonial progress is still entangled with the identity and everyday workings of the city today. The railway has implications for industry, government relations, water access, housing development, riparian wildlife, recreation – and soundscapes. With soundscapes in mind, I wonder if some New Westminster residents would prefer the music of frogs to the intermittent, yet incessant, whistling of trains?

**Urban Soundscapes**

In this chapter, I consider sound as it relates with urban child-friendliness. In particular, I am interested in how urban soundscapes connect with the CYFC strategy and a range of more-than-human realities associated with New Westminster. A widely used definition of soundscape is the “acoustic environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people, in context” (International Organization for Standardization, 2014). Soundscapes are described as “composed of all the sounds around us, background and foreground, the sounds we hear and the ones we make” (Steele & Kerrigan, 2017). There is a growing body of research exploring how soundscapes influence the immersive experiences people have in public spaces and places (Kang et. al, 2016). Part of the atmospheres and assemblages of everyday life, experiences of sound are also viewed as highly subjective and contextual (e.g., perceptions of frog songs, train whistles, rain).

Through working with students on the school-based participatory project, I began to be curious about children’s sonic relationships with the city. It was clear from our neighbourhood walks, and my own walks through New Westminster, that soundscapes varied widely across and within neighbourhoods. Even though the city is geographically compact, the neighbourhoods are diverse and have their own *feel*, of which sound is a part. Even particular streets that are adjacent to each other can have very different arrangements of sound that vary with times of day and circumstances. For example, the street running alongside the students’ school was a designated truck route. Thus, at the edges of the schoolgrounds (from early
morning to evening) the collective sound of motor vehicles driving on the busy road was punctuated by large trucks accelerating and braking. However only a short walk away were residential streets and green spaces where vehicle sounds were less dominant (e.g., Figure 14.2).

Students also sought out quieter spots to relax and play in nearby parks (e.g., Figures 14.3 and 16.4).

*And [the dog park] is good because it's closed off so there's not a lot of noise or cars.*

--from focus group discussions with students

*“[The rose garden] is a good place to read...I would go read a book there.”*

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 14.3)
Figure 14.3 Caption: We took this photo because it shows the beautiful flowers in Queen’s Park Rose Garden. The fresh air and the scenic environment makes it a welcoming place for children to play.

Photograph and caption by student participants.

Figure 14.4 Caption: The rose garden is sometimes overlooked, but it is a true beauty. The roses are exquisite to look at and smell amazing, even if it’s rainy you can come over to relax under the gazebo.

Photograph and caption by student participants.
"It’s quiet. There are benches and places to sit and maybe eat...If you’re older you just go there hang out with friends and stuff...You’ll sit there and talk and it's pretty too."

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 14.4)

Sound was also mentioned by people who participated in research interviews as part of this study.

“I think that New West has some pretty amazing natural areas. They’re really beautiful and I’m talking particularly about the Glenbrook ravine. So you actually go down and you have this feeling like you’ve totally disappeared out of the city because you don’t hear the city.”

--from interview with city employee

“[New Westminster] is investing money on the crossings’ safety to get the railroad companies comfortable enough...to be able to run and not blow the whistles, which particularly when you are in close proximity is very very loud. And we’ve got thousands of residents on New West that live in close proximity. Well, they’ll get the whistle ten times a day and sometimes at three in the morning, so there’s that liveability impact.”

--from interview with city official

These varied sound-related experiences and realities piqued my interest in how sound might be related with urban child-friendliness and the CYFC strategy in New Westminster. In searching through the CYFC strategy document, I noticed that sound was mentioned as a consideration in housing design (i.e., soundproofing) but not addressed in other areas. However, the New Westminster Master Transportation Plan (MTP, 2015), which informs the moving domain of the CYFC strategy, does outline the municipality’s aim to reduce noise pollution and vibration associated with transportation systems. In providing a rationale for this, the plan states that “road traffic is the biggest cause of noise in many cities, which can exacerbate stress levels, increase blood pressure, cause sleep disturbance and negatively affect mental health” (MTP, 2015, p. 8). The plan also notes the concerns of some New Westminster residents about noise
associated with vehicle movements through local neighbourhoods. Some of the photographs/captions from student participants in this study (examples above) seemed to plug into this issue of road traffic sound as well.

Of course, urban noise is not the only way to explore children’s relationships with city soundscapes, and some have critiqued the preoccupation with noise in sound-related studies of cities over time (e.g., Kang et al., 2016). Others have argued that reducing levels of sound in urban environments does not necessarily improve the quality of life of people living there, emphasizing the possible positive benefits of being immersed in vibrant and bustling soundscapes (e.g., Herranz-Pascual et al., 2019; Kang 2007; Steele et al., 2019). Thus, while traffic sounds – and the contrast between traffic-dominated soundscapes and quieter soundscapes – seemed particularly salient in the context of our neighbourhood walks, there are other ways to consider children’s sound-related relationships. Indeed, as outlined in other chapters, the children who participated in this study enjoyed playing and hanging out in lively (non-quiet) environments in their neighbourhoods as well.

With this in mind, I wonder if attending to soundscapes might offer some important, but perhaps overlooked, insights about how children’s lives are arranged and how they unfold in the city. Here, I consider the range of heterogeneous bodies and forces that connect with and shape children’s lives. From this orientation, sound – and combinations of sounds – are not inert background features to life, but actively help compose it. Thinking through the relationships between urban assemblages and the domain of sound, Israel Rodríguez-Giralt (2009) argues:

Though the power of this apparently intangible domain has generally been under-examined in urban studies, it is our opinion that sound is a central element in the definition and understanding of urban space. It is an important sensory departure point that provides a means of exploring the more ephemeral and shifting elements of urban life (p. 181)

Building on this thinking, I suggest that attention to everyday child-related soundscapes – of all sorts – might support efforts to make New Westminster better for children, and connect with
various domains of the CYFC strategy. For example, in terms of belonging, soundscapes might play a role in creating welcoming places and relate with experiences of inclusion/exclusion in those places. Also, as suggested by the students’ photographs and narratives in this study, soundscapes can relate to moving through the city, both in terms of children’s own movements (e.g., walking to school) and the movements of other bodies (e.g., vehicles, commercial goods). In addition, soundscapes might contribute to how playing happens in the city – where children play, how this play happens, and what gets wrapped up into it. This includes the creation of lively play spaces in childcare centres (the subject of the caring domain) as well as informal locations where playing happens (e.g., city streets). They might also connect with play-related controversies, such as when children’s playful activities are perceived as too loud or disruptive.

To expand on relationships of sound in the living domain of the CYFC strategy, a place where a reference to sound (i.e., soundproofing) does occur, I suggest there might be a benefit to taking sound into account more often in development projects in which children are significant stakeholders, including those involving children’s play spaces as part of community amenity contributions. This could also involve including soundscapes, in addition to visual images, as part of community consultation and decision-making processes. Steele et al. (2020) argue that “sound has been relatively underrepresented in urban design considerations, especially the positive aspects of sound. Yet, a vast body of academic literature on urban soundscape could inform professionals” (p. 646). Moreover, they reaffirm the calls of other soundscape researchers (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; Brown & Muhar, 2004; Payne et al., 2009) to proactively incorporate sound considerations into urban planning and designs in the early phases of projects, rather than reactively responding to noise-related problems after decisions have been made or projects completed.

This recommendation resonates with a recent sound-related controversy over the re-location of a skatepark in New Westminster’s Queen’s Park. While the city did commission a sound study (that focused on decibel levels, but not more complex soundscapes) in proposing a location for the park, it was done so after consultation processes related to the skate park were completed – and staff recommendations had been made (Johnstone, 2018). Here, sound was
entangled with concerns about young people hanging around, making noise, and engaging in conflict with other user groups in the park (see Chapter 17 for a connection with loitering). After delays and heated debates, the skatepark was eventually located in a less contentious location, where no sound study had been undertaken (Johnstone, 2018).

This discussion about taking sound seriously when planning and designing cities leads me to a final connection between soundscapes and the CYFC strategy in this chapter – related with both the engaging and learning domains of the strategy. In terms of the relationships between sound and child-friendliness in New Westminster, I suggest that there is untapped potential in engaging young people in exploring urban sound and the multiple immersive soundscapes that make up their everyday realities. As suggested by Antonella Raddicchi (2019), “the practice of soundwalks with children, and more in general, with communities, should be included in the urban agenda of cities and governments” as part of efforts to make cities more liveable. Engaging children in soundwalks and other sound-related projects (e.g., sound mapping) has the potential to illuminate and connect with important city-related realities.

Such inquiry could involve working with children to consider the complex relations that compose city soundscapes and how they change over time and across locations. It might involve considering how historical events (e.g., the establishment of a railroad) or discourses (e.g., related with ‘progress’) have current sonic implications and how soundscapes have been radically transformed through industrial capitalism (e.g., through industrial processes on/near the river). This could lead to questions about the multiple ways that humans share soundscapes with nonhumans and how lives are entangled though sound and other senses. Relatedly, such inquiry could involve exploring how the sonic refrains of the city (e.g., frog songs, traffic sounds, building construction, street music) help map out territories, create intensities, and perform politics. It might also extend to questioning what sorts of sounds (e.g., particular bird songs; traditional Indigenous songs) have been silenced, displaced or lost – and where they might have re-emerged.

In this way, learning to listen closely to/with the city has the potential to lead to different thinking/doing in relation with child-friendliness, the affective qualities of urban
spaces, and more than human relations. Becoming attuned to the sonic aspects of urban life might also lead to rhizomatic lines of inquiry that have not yet been pursued – creating new openings, connections, and sound-related compositions.
Chapter 15. Playing: Rethinking Affordance Through a Relational Ontology

"Play is spatial and situated in the environments which children pass through in their everyday lives. Such spaces are not simply neutral physical containers for activity but rather are relational achievements brought about by immediate encounters and movements between bodies, materials, symbols and so on, each with their own trajectory and force to affect and be affected. Spaces are created by the ongoing and contingent performance of everyday life." - Stuart Lester, 2014, p. 198

One way the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy has been taken up in practice is through the design of outdoor public play spaces. As suggested in Tim Gill’s (2019) case study on child-friendly planning and design in New Westminster, the city has produced “visible improvements to play spaces with several bespoke, site-specific designs” (p. 27). These improvements, along with strategic policy initiatives such as the New Westminster Childcare Strategy and Family-Friendly Housing Policy, are aimed at making New Westminster better for children as well as retaining families with school-age children in the city (Gill 2021; Ross, 2015). This attention to public play spaces also works with goals in the playing domain of the CYFC strategy, particularly the goal “to increase accessibility of play opportunities” for children and youth (CYFC, 2016, p. 63).

“So nothing about this is off the shelf. It’s all been designed and built for this particular park. So it’s really very sculptural and it’s made out of large local timbers, like big kinds of raw logs. And it’s probably higher than most playgrounds...[kids] can use the play equipment in really unexpected and kind of creative ways. And really use their own experience and use imagination. It’s not the kind of playground that you use in one way.” --from interview with city employee
In this chapter, I return to the *playing* domain of the CYFC strategy (a focus of the participatory project with children outlined in Chapter 9) and take things in a more conceptual direction. In particular, I engage with a concept that is often associated with children’s play – *affordance*. Commonly used by those who design outdoor play spaces, affordance is foregrounded too in research associated with child-friendly cities (e.g., Arlinkasari & Cushing, 2018; Broberg, Kyttä & Fagerholm, 2013; Clark & Uzzell, 2002, 2006; Jansson et al., 2016; Gill, 2021; Kyttä, 2003, 2004; Sandseter, 2009; Whitzman & Mizrachi, 2012). My interest in further exploring the concept of affordance was sparked, in part, by noticing children’s playful encounters on neighbourhood walks during our participatory project. As well, in various aspects of the participatory project, including the leadership group’s presentation to city council, students expressed a desire to hang out in spaces that offered a variety of opportunities for play and fun. While only one interviewee specifically mentioned the word affordance, the desire to build fun *into* parks and playgrounds made its way into several research interviews with those involved in planning and designing play spaces in New Westminster.

Although affordance is a concept with a lineage, ontological orientation, and set of practices that are in many respects distinct from the posthumanist (and related) approaches I use in this dissertation, given its associations with child-friendliness, I began to wonder about the potential of considering it through a relational ontology. I was interested especially in how new ways of conceiving the *in-betweenness* of affordance might have both theoretical and practical implications for child-friendly play spaces, including the site-specific designs undertaken in connection with the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy. Below I experiment with this re-thinking, starting with a history of the emergence of affordance as a concept. At the end of the chapter, I return to the context of New Westminster – and the CYFC strategy that is a focus of this inquiry – and address how a shift in conceptualizing affordance might be useful.
The Emergence and Use of Affordance

Informed by James J. Gibson and Eleanor J. Gibson’s ecological approach to perceptual learning and development (E.J. Gibson, 1982, 2000; J.J. Gibson, 1979; J.J. Gibson & E.J. Gibson, 1955), affordance is taken up in various ways across disciplines and projects, including environmental psychology (e.g., Heft, 2001; Stoffregen, 2000) and interaction design and technology (e.g., Norman, 1988). In work related with child-friendly cities, affordances are commonly understood as “the perceived functional opportunities and restrictions concerning a person’s actions in a given environment” (Kyttä et. al, 2018, p. 2). This includes the ability of humans to engage with material elements of the world through actions such as: turning, grasping, pushing, throwing, sitting, running, leaning, moulding, sliding etc. With the idea that affordance-rich environments are more child-friendly, researchers have employed the concept of affordance in classifying and developing typologies of environmental child-friendliness (e.g., Heft, 1988; Kyttä, 2004). In practice, affordance is employed in efforts to maximize children’s use of designed objects and spaces (e.g., climb-ability, walk-on-ability, dig-ability, hide-in-ability) (Heft, 1988). Affordance is also used in theorizing how child-environment relationships might be more enriching and responsive (e.g., Heft & Chawla, 2006).

James J. Gibson (1979) put forth the concept of affordance as a way of considering how the functional features of environments relate with the perceptions and actions of animals within those environments. Emerging first in his work on visual perception and applied later in ecological theories of development, he described affordance in this way:

The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or for ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. (J.J. Gibson, 1979/2014, p. 119)

Affordance theory was, in some ways, radically relational. As J.J. Gibson (1979/2014) stated:

An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior.
It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer (p. 121).

J.J. Gibson located affordance neither in the environment nor the individual, but within and between both. This breaking with subject/object dichotomies challenged the pre-given separation of animals and environments, suggesting that their relations were fluid and ever-shifting. He stated:

When in use, the tool is a sort of extension of the hand...This capacity to attach something to the body suggests that the boundary between the animal and the environment is not fixed at the surface of the skin but can shift. More generally it suggests that the absolute duality of “objective” and “subjective” is false. When we consider the affordances of things, we escape this philosophical dichotomy.

(J.J. Gibson, 1979/2014, p. 35)

This ontological blurring of people and their environments is largely unacknowledged in the wide range of inquiry that has since taken up the concept of affordance.

In practice, affordances are often configured as intrinsic properties of objects and settings. Since the concept holds such applied potential, there are pragmatic reasons for placing affordance in identifiable locations rather than a more nebulous in-between. This seems especially salient in practices of design, where people might reasonably aim to design affordances into the material world. This is not to say that researchers and practitioners have not grappled with J.J. Gibson’s notion of the in-between. For example, Marketta Kyttä (2003) wonders how to deal with the contradiction “that, on the one hand, affordances exist independently of the perceiver in the ecological reality and, on the other hand, they exist only in the relationship between the perceiver and the environment?” (p. 49). In thinking through this, she looks to Harry Heft (1989) in suggesting a distinction between potential and actualized affordances, stating “potential affordances become qualities of the environment, and actualized affordances become individual relationships with the environment (if one is allowed to use such un-Gibsonian terms that separate the individual from his environment)” (Kyttä, 2003 p. 49).
As suggested here by Kyttä, it can be hard to work with the notion of subject-environment inseparability and the in-betweenness of affordance. James and Eleanor Gibson themselves operated within positivist frameworks that did not sit easily with this inseparability. However, the importance of treating affordance as more than discrete person-object transactions and of attending to complex relations persisted in their work over time. For example, in her (2000) article entitled *Where is the Information for Affordances?* Eleanor Gibson insisted that “the information for affordances is in events, both external and within the perceiver” (p. 53). She claimed that the full value of affordance as a concept could only be realized through considering events and context. Further she likened the practice of extracting affordances from happenings in the world to ‘a grin without a cat’ – invoking a line from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* in which, upon seeing the floating disembodied smile of a cat, Alice muses that she’s often seen a cat without a grin, but not a grin without a cat. Implied here is that affordances cannot be separated from the complex relational circumstances through which they are produced.

**Taking Up the In-betweenness of Affordance Through a Relational Ontology**

In her chapter entitled *Affordance Theory in Outdoor Play* Jane Waters (2017) similarly argues that simplistic interpretations of J.J. Gibson’s *space between* fail to acknowledge the richness of child-environment interactions. She calls for increased complexity in the application of affordance theory in research and practice pertaining to outdoor play and learning. As part of this, she acknowledges the efforts of some researchers to bring emotional, social and cultural elements to the concept of affordance (e.g., Kyttä, 2004), indicating that such work considers the characteristics of individual children and as well as wider sociocultural influences on environmental encounters. Waters also suggests that new materialist thinking, such as that employed by Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2010) in her intra-active pedagogy, might be added to sociocultural readings of affordance to address the nuance and complexity of child-environment relationships. In doing so she especially highlights the possibilities of re-considering the agency of nonhumans in creating affordances.
While a suggestion that new materialist concepts can be readily tacked onto sociocultural understandings of children’s play can be seen as problematic (see Lenz Taguchi, 2014), there seems to be some unrealized potential in considering the in-betweenness of affordances through the relational ontology of new materialisms and other related approaches. Doing so invites thinking about the complex intra-active qualities of playful events rather than focusing on human-object interactions or material objects themselves as tools for human use. As Lenz Taguchi (2014) states, “playing becomes a collective assemblage where imagination and material discursive desire and knowing intra-act with bodies and matter in a space where binary distinctions between humans and non-humans, adults and children are blurred” (p. 85). This sort of intra-active thinking troubles the very notion of the individual child and the pre-given separation of child, environment and action that is commonly referenced when considering affordances in play. The child and the environment are not pre-existing and strictly bounded, but temporary assemblages that are continually in the process of becoming-with (Barad, 2007).

From this orientation, affordance is fluid and relational – a process involving multiple bodies operating with and between. In a way, this thinking turns J.J. Gibson’s noun (affordance) back into a verb (affording). Such an approach assumes that there are no fixed identities, nor purposes, nor prescribed sets of actions of bodies. Thus, affordance/affording not only points both ways, but many directions at once. In terms of planning and designing for play, this suggests that considering events, circumstances, and complex arrangements of bodies are vital to understanding and facilitating playful encounters.

**Affording in New Westminster**

Thinking in this way, efforts to plan and design lively play spaces in cities would necessarily attend to how play is created through complex collective action. In New Westminster, cultivating an attention to particular play contexts already happens in many ways. For example, in research interviewees for this study, a number of people specifically pointed to
the importance of planning and designing parks and play spaces that are uniquely tailored to neighbourhoods.

“So we can do different things depending on that sort of neighbourhood context and that population and those users.” --from interview with school district employee

“(The playground) is essentially surrounded by low-rise low income housing, a lot of it rental...these families use the park more than anyone because they don’t have backyards. They don’t have other outlets to be outside...I think it’s the most important park in the whole city.” --from interview with school district employee

“If you listen to what the community’s saying, you could do something really interesting and could be a real hub for the community, a real place where people like to meet and hang out and gather and their kids like to be there and parents like to sit there cause it’s comfortable. It’s shade or sun or a diverse range of things to do for kids who are different ages. Like that to me is a park that builds community. And there’s something for everyone. I think that’s really important.” --from interview with city employee

“And it creates a sense of place within the neighbourhood or community...I think for me, being part of parks, I take a lot of pride in the fact that our design or play spaces are creating place.” --from interview with city employee

What a shift in thinking about affordance might contribute to these efforts is a more situational sense of how playful bodies create – and are created with/through – play. This implies attending to the way that (entangled) bodies (human/nonhuman, material/discursive) work together to create playful happenings and how arrangements transform across space and time.
As suggested by Wendy Russell and Stuart Lester (2017):

Space is not a neutral or static container for action. Rather, it is constantly in the process of being produced, always in the process of becoming through entanglements of bodies, desires, affect, material and symbolic objects, and so on – everything that coalesces at that mo(ve)ment to produce that space at that time (p. 6).

They argue that ‘planning for play’ involves noticing to the “more general conditions under which social, affective and material resources may facilitate the expression of children’s playful desires, what may be referred to as ‘play enabling spaces’ or the ‘playful feel of space’” (Russell & Lester, 2017, p. 9).

With the idea that play spaces and play encounters are fluid and relational, helping to set the conditions for play becomes a nuanced and ongoing activity. The process of affording for play involves becoming attuned to situated and in-the-moment realities – to the in-betweenness of playful action and the complex circumstances through which it is produced. It also implies contingency and making room for emergent (perhaps unexpected and rhizomatic) playful becomings. For example, this process might involve noticing the arrangements through which a fence is used for: climbing, leaning, stopping a ball, keeping things out, attaching a lock, hanging artwork, or supporting a vine. It might involve considering the relational complexities of whether a skateboard becomes connected with: recreation, transportation, creativity, racing, conflict, fun, inclusion, exercise – or how it might be used as a seat, a doorstop, a weapon, a gift, or a bird perch. It might further include examining the discourses associated with the skateboard (e.g., public messages, personal meanings, political debates) and how they are entangled with materiality (e.g., the construction of benches or metal ledge guards).

Approaching affordance/affording in this way might involve leaving loose spaces where creative action might emerge in-between bodies. Along with this, there is an implied curiosity about the virtual field through which a loosely defined patch of grass might come together with jackets (becoming goal posts) and a child (becoming goalie) and another child (becoming friend) and a ball (becoming lively) in an encounter (becoming playful). Such playful becomings are the stuff of child-friendliness.
Chapter 16. Learning: Inquiring with the City

[Colin] Ward and his colleagues created an entirely new discourse and practice around the belief that children would learn more by getting out of the classroom to map and explore the places in which they lived. In doing so they could investigate how utilities and public amenities such as water, power, sewage, housing and social services were supplied, what was private land and what public, how councils worked, what were the principal shops and trades in the neighbourhood, who was responsible for traffic management and so on. Such a programme of work has never been bettered. (Worpole, 2014, p. 50)

The learning domain of the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy includes the goal “to improve knowledge of the city and its role” (CYFC, 2016, p. 39). Proposed actions under this goal involve working with the school district and schools on joint projects to help young people learn about the city, including: engaging city staff in educating children and youth about their work; exploring opportunities to link this learning with curricular goals; organizing class visits to city hall; and facilitating child and youth attendance at meetings of the New Westminster City Council or Board of Education.

In this chapter I explore possibilities for how children might learn with the city of New Westminster in ways that resonate with learning-related goals in the CYFC strategy. In doing so, I particularly highlight children’s relationships with infrastructure, city flows, and civic processes. As part of this, I include photographs/captions from students in the participatory project as well as narratives from people who work in/with the municipality regarding such learning-related activities. I note that some of these kinds of learning activities currently happen in various forms, including through collaborations between city stakeholders. I also suggest that children already engage in learning about/with the city through everyday events and happenings. I close the chapter by pointing to learning opportunities that exist (and might yet exist) through attending to urban assemblages and more-than-human relationships.
Learning with City Infrastructure

While I was working on this research in New Westminster, there were indications that some actions under the *learning* domain of the CYFC were already underway. For example, a community school coordinator who collaborated on this research accompanied a class of fourth grade students (ages 9-10) to the New Westminster Public Works Yard during *National Public Works Week*, an annual event that takes place in municipalities across North America. As part of this visit, city staff prepared demonstrations to show some of the behind-the-scenes activities involved in making the city run (e.g., how water gets into homes, how a stop sign is made). Students learned about a range of infrastructure-related work performed by the municipality, such as: street maintenance, water quality protection and monitoring, wastewater treatment, planting trees, public vehicle and equipment maintenance, garbage collection, and recycling services. This visit to the works yard provided an opportunity for the children to consider a wide range of day-to-day, perhaps taken for granted, activities that keep the city running. In highlighting how children’s lives – and other lives in the city – are entangled with flows of water, electricity, traffic, waste, and more, this sort of encounter also featured some of the hidden materialities that are part of urban assemblages.

Over time, connections between urban child-friendliness and the everyday workings of cities have been made in scholarship related with child-friendly cities. For example, in a case study of efforts to make the city of Denver, USA, more child-friendly, Kingston et al (2007) argue:

Municipal engineers’ areas of responsibility are vital to children’s health, happiness, long-term development and even survival: the provision of clean water, sanitation, drainage, waste collection and clean air; the types of energy used for cooking, heating and lighting; transportation planning; the siting of parks and open spaces; and human settlement upgrading (p. 97).

It is worth noting that public works activities were implicit in the photographs and narratives put forth by students in this study, including the maintenance of public parks (e.g., Chapter 9), snow removal (e.g., Chapter 12) and safety of streets (e.g., Chapter 13).
Public Works Yard was even specifically identified by some students as a play space (Figure 16.1).

One group of students described how they inhabited the parking lot and areas outside of the public works yard in the evenings and on weekends. These students talked about waiting for the stream of vehicles to leave the parking lot at the end of the work day so that they could hang out in the paved and grassy areas outside the main entrance (Figure 16.2), as well as use an old basketball hoop (since removed) in one corner of the site (Figure 16.3).
Figure 16.2 Caption: This place is kid friendly on weekends because there are not any cars so you can ride your bike. And way down there’s a basketball court.

Photograph and caption by student participants.

Figure 16.3 Basketball hoop (since removed) in New Westminster Works Yard parking lot. Photograph by author.
These photographs/captions are a reminder that while the city has put a great deal of effort into creating children’s play spaces, young people hang out and play all over the city, including locations that might seem the exclusive territory of adults. Similarly, these photographs/captions also suggest that in addition to participating in organized educational opportunities (e.g., school visits to the works yard), children learn about the workings of the city through their everyday travels as well. This thinking echoes that of Colin Ward, an influential figure in the child-friendly cities movement (see Chapter 3). In his (1978) book *The Child in the City*, Ward outlined how cities offer a rich range of informal learning opportunities for children that cannot be found in classrooms. He also highlighted how children can creatively contribute to city-making, sometimes inventively disrupting and transforming the intentions of adults responsible for city planning and design (Lester, 2014).

**Learning About Civic Processes**

In interviews with people involved with the CYFC strategy there was indication that city staff were working on other ways to promote city-related learning, including engaging young people in examining, and participating in, civic processes.

“The other thing I’m working on as part of that strategy, implementing it, is exploring curriculum opportunities for students to become more knowledgeable about municipal government and to facilitate opportunities for city staff to be involved in that type of curriculum...so basically offering teachers to have city staff come into their classroom and talk about an area of the city...to pitch that to the school board and then to various departments of the city.”

--from interview with city employee

“I think it’s really important as early as possible [for young people] to understand how a city works, and understand how to be engaged in their community.”

--from interview with city official
“[Making the city more child friendly might include] going back into the classrooms and talking about what cities do and how children can be involved.”

--from interview with city official

“We can be telling them about what’s happening in the city and also asking them to contribute to what we’re working on.”

--from interview with city employee

In 2019, in partnership with an organization called CityHive, the City of New Westminster launched *New West City 101*, an experiential civic engagement program aimed at teaching youth (aged 13-18) about their city, how municipal government works, and how young people can engage with the city about matters that are important to them. This after-school program is designed to help youth explore “how the city is run and how decisions are made, as well as learn about topics including parks, housing, land use, the local economy, transportation and sustainability planning” (CNW, 2019, para. 2). Run by city staff, council members and community partners, the program also provides young people with opportunities to co-design projects and present their ideas to city council, city staff, and members of the community.

**Learning from Children**

This opportunity to design projects related with civic processes and issues in the city was identified by some interviewees as important.

“It’s banal to just say listen to [kids]. I mean, they don’t have as much wisdom in things like public policy, but if you get kids involved, kids will get involved in public engagement, youth advisory committees, things like that. They’re really smart...Wow, they’re really smart, and they are really well educated about the world and about their role in the world...and they know what they’re worried about. And listening to them, it’s worthwhile.”

--from interview with city official
“I think a lot of these projects can be done informally... it doesn’t have to be huge things, but I like the idea of class projects, encouraging them to think and dream about what they could do in a city.”

--from interview with school district employee

As suggested in other chapters of this dissertation, young people are well positioned to provide insights into aspects of cities that might escape the notice of adults. In this way, they can be valuable partners in exploring the complexity of cities. For example, in our participatory project, the students identified issues that were not only relevant to them, but also considered what might be challenging or important to others (Figure 16.4).

**Figure 16.4** Caption: *This is on the sidewalk on second street. This is dangerous. Because any people on scooters or people on skateboards will have a more difficult time. The city could at least put a wood board to cover it up.*

Photograph and caption by student participants.

“It’s making it harder for people who are disabled in wheelchairs or people on scooters or skateboards. It’s blocking the ramp down.... There are like five more down... They’ve
been there for a while...I do a paper route, so around here it's just hard pulling the wagon around.” – from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 16.4)

To some degree, the Youth Advisory Committee to City Council provides opportunities for city staff and Council members to learn from young people.

[The Youth Advisory Committee] were an engaged interesting group...just how excited they all were to learn and be in this world. And then have this interesting discussion on what they all want over the next twenty-five years in the city and what challenges they think the city should be tackling. It was great to hear their ideas.”

--from interview with city employee

“So the OCP [Official Community Plan] process, we haven’t had a lot of that voice [young people] in the process. ...We went to the Youth Advisory Committee and that was really our connection to that perspective.”

--from interview with city employee

**Learning with Children**

However, beyond participation in the Youth Advisory Committee and traditional municipal consultative processes (e.g., surveys, roundtable discussions, consultation events, open houses), young people might also be engaged in more collaborative learning processes in the city. Thus, meeting goals in the learning domain of the CYFC strategy might involve more engaged and participatory processes – learning *with* young people to explore aspects of city life. This sort of learning might also might involve more fluid arrangements of working together, co-learning and multigenerational connections.

“When you talk about child and youth friendly, it’s child and youth friendly supported by adults that are engaging and want to engage with children and youth.”

--from interview with city employee
“I think a lot of adults are terrified about engaging young people and I think whenever I’ve seen it done well it’s a very inspiring and invigorating process for the adults working as well...It just really helps them kind of see things differently and they’re often very impressed and surprised with some of the things that come out of kids mouths.”

--from interview with partner organization employee

“I’m learning. I don’t know, I mean, I’m learning...It’s interesting to chat with [youth] about what government is and what we can and cannot do. And to see the light come on in their eyes about that.”

--from interview with city official

“It would be amazing to see [the city and school district working together on engagement activities with kids], but from what I’ve seen of cities and to a lesser degree the school district, they don’t figure what would actually be fun for kids. They just think it’s a good idea and they’ll try something and then it’s usually not cool...by engaging with the kids first to try to figure out what could actually interest them would probably be the smart move.”

--from interview with school district employee

This sort of engagement is compatible with learning approaches in the recently revised education curriculum in British Columbia which encourages more flexible, active, project-based learning rather than the prescriptive transmission of information. Thus, this learning might be akin to some of the participatory, inquiry-based, community-based and place-based learning processes that students are becoming more familiar with in schools. Such learning would not only involve the sharing of knowledge, but asking questions and grappling with problems related with the flows of city life.
“In this day and age, especially with the new curriculum being so cross-curricular and so open and inquiry-based, administrators will look for something like [a participatory project] because it’s easy to take across a lot of different curriculums, right?”

--from interview with school district employee

This orientation to learning lends itself well to examining the material-discursive workings of the city and questioning habitual ways of thinking about and relating with urban assemblages. It resonates with Colin Ward’s suggestion that youth engage in more informal forms of education by getting out of classrooms to exploring the connections between neighbourhood streets, buildings, utilities, amenities, social realities, issues and politics in cities (Worpole, 2014). In this way, ‘a learning city’ offers opportunities for various sorts of emergent learning to take place. It is a city where children learn with adults, but also with each other, various bodies, city flows, the nonhuman aspects of urban assemblages. It is the sort of learning implied in Hillevi Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) intra-active pedagogy, where learning emerges through intra-actions of material-discursive bodies and through an awareness that everything is intra-connected.
Chapter 17. Loitering: Hanging Around in the City

“Loiter: to stand or wait around idly without apparent purpose; to travel indolently with frequent pauses.” (Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.)

Carrying out this inquiry involved hanging around in public spaces/places as well as walking and wandering through the City of New Westminster. In the participatory project, students also meandered through neighbourhoods noticing things and taking photographs. Many students commented (in person and on their feedback forms) that they would like to spend more time walking and exploring in this way. Many of their photographs/captions were associated with hanging out in public locations, travelling to and from school, and carving pathways through their neighbourhoods. Students identified particular places (e.g., schoolgrounds, the community centre, a local coffee shop) where friends could meet and hang out for periods of time. They linked features of these locations (e.g., open space, places to sit, temperature, friendly staff) with child-friendliness.

“[The coffee shop is] a good place to hang out after school because it’s in the open and a lot of people in it and it isn’t a scary place at night really. The people who work there are friendly. We go there and buy something, like a drink or something to eat and talk with friends.” --from focus group discussions with students

Similarly, some students also talked about hanging out inside and outside of fast food restaurants (Figure 17.1) after school.
“Sometimes we walk over to McD’s to hang out after school or to do parkour outside at the tables.” --from focus group discussions with students

The students also seemed aware of where (and when) young people were not welcome to gather. For example, students who regularly played in the parking lot of the New Westminster Works Yard (discussed in Chapter 16) said they waited for the departure of employees at the end of the work day before inhabiting the space. Students from another walking group noted that prickly bushes were sometimes planted in public places where kids were not supposed to play/hang out. They took several photographs in a tree above some prickly bushes outside of the community centre (Figure 17.2).
One group speculated about rumored ‘mosquitos’ (devices used to deter loitering – especially loitering by young people – by emitting a high frequency sound) near the Queen’s Park picnic area.

“[Her] mom who is like not 12 could not hear the sound, but [we] could like hear the sound and it was like super high pitched...there was a really weird ringing noise whenever you walk underneath it. It like hurts your ears. It's weird...like to keep us away or something...It's only in the little picnic shelter. It lets off a high-pitched noise. It was weird.” --from focus group discussions with students

The concept of loitering has been widely associated with youth and other marginalized groups in cities (e.g., Akiyama, 2010; Buck-Morss, 1986; Wafer, 2017). As Karen Malone (2002) states,
“hanging around in groups on street corners talking, playing or simply observing others is viewed as inappropriate in the structured ordered streets of our cities” (p. 162). Many other researchers have made similar observations about the labels, negative stereotypes and moral panics that have been invoked about young people and others who loiter (e.g., Lees, 2003; Poutanen, 2002; Rosenthal, 2000; Schissel, 1997; Staeheli, 2010). Citing Malone (2002) and Gill Valentine (1996), the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy states that “youth are often portrayed as ‘intruders’ in and ‘illegitimate users’ of public spaces” (p. 15).

In surveys used to develop the CYFC strategy, only twenty-six percent of youth (compared to fifty-six percent of parents), felt that children and youth were viewed positively in the city (Ross, 2015). Youth surveys included comments such as “youth are viewed as a nuisance” and “in groups, adults look at you differently” (CYFC, p. 20). In public consultations about the development of a new Aquatic and Community Centre in New Westminster, some Indigenous youth reported being asked to leave community facilities for ‘loitering’ (CNW, 2019). As well, in public consultations regarding the possible re-location of a skatepark on the site of the collapsed Arenex recreation building (see Chapter 12), some community members were apprehensive about young skateboard park users occupying this space, citing concerns about “personal safety for other park users, risk of vandalism, potential for bullying of youth aged members of some organizations, perceptions of noise generated at the site, [and] potential for vandalism/graffiti” (Johnstone 2017, para. 4).

The CYFC strategy and various related plans in the City of New Westminster include statements about making public spaces feel more inclusive and inviting for people of all ages. The belonging domain of the CYFC strategy focuses on supporting intergenerational interactions through environmental design (e.g., ‘public realm installations’ like parklets and street furniture) and the animation of spaces (e.g., festivals and other events). The strategy states that doing so fosters a sense of place attachment and belonging for young people, suggesting that “integrated public spaces that are welcoming and accessible to children and
youth are critical to help them understand how society works and their place within it” (CYFC, p. 15).

Yet, despite these aspirations, I wonder (as suggested above) about the discomfort some young people feel when congregating in public spaces in less structured ways – or in undesignated locations – or at particular times of day. I wonder what would happen if children and youth were actually encouraged to gather, with others, in a wide range of public locations in looser, more spontaneous ways. *Might loitering even serve some purposes in the child-friendly city?*

The practice of loitering, while predominantly viewed as idle and unproductive, might not only help young people feel like they belong, but also give them opportunities to notice, question and engage with the rhythms and flows of city life. For example, how might hanging out in public space spark curiosity about how others move through the city – about who is included and excluded? And why? Might loitering (as suggested in Chapter 17) help children explore the material-discursive workings of the city? What might children learn about negotiating space with other bodies? Might this include being curious about nonhuman animals (e.g., coyotes) that are also encouraged to not to linger in local parks and relations with these animals (see Chapter 21)?

In our participatory project, a number of students pointed out tensions between children and other people (pan handling at a local strip mall, smoking on benches in a park next to the school, sitting in the underpass) who might themselves be viewed as loitering (e.g., Figures 17.2 and 19.3). While these tensions were not explored as part of this project, it seems to me that they could be taken up in generative ways that might promote understanding, learning, and an appreciation for the complexities of inhabiting and composing the city with others. It was clear from our focus group discussions that some of the participants were noticing and feeling these complexities, and were up for discussing and debating them.
Figure 17.3 Next to the benches in the park near the school. Photograph by teacher.

Figure 17.4 Caption: This is an unhealthy area for schoolers when smokers are around at Nutrition or Lunch. It’s hard to breathe in the nice and cool and air when the gassy stink cloud is near.

Photograph and caption by student participants.
“Some people smoke there and sit and it feels weird.”
-- from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 17.3)

“No, there are many homeless people. (crosstalk) No. There's some of them. No, I've never seen anyone homeless there...I saw like five when I went through like drive through...How do you know they're homeless?...Because they're like "oh give me some money please."
--from focus group discussions with students

“It’s a really complicated thing. And having that discussion with them was great because it wasn’t just about smoking, it’s also about the people who are hanging out in the park looking sketchy...and you realize that it’s not just about the smoking.”
--from interview with city employee

Of course, not all loitering is the same – nor always good/bad. It can be productive, but is not necessarily so. It can be associated with a range of feelings: joy, amusement, playfulness, fear, contempt, boredom. It can be disruptive. It can have connections with crime, threatening behaviour and anti-social activities. It can be subversive (i.e., breaking some rules) but not in a threatening way. It can be associated with complex and thorny issues like homelessness. What loitering becomes in a public space seems to have a lot to do with the connections it has with other things – to its connections with other assemblages.

Thus, in a city working toward child-friendliness, it is worth being curious about how loitering is linked with a range of (human and nonhuman) bodies and what else might be considered when trying to make public spaces feel more welcoming for people of all ages. This might include an interest in how material arrangements in the city work with subtle and not-so-subtle messages to ‘sit and stay awhile’ or ‘move along’ or ‘this place is not for you’. It might involve considering how racialized or otherwise marginalized bodies are identified and are encouraged to move or not move through these spaces. It might require thinking about the
value of unstructured space and time, and for thinking too about why unstructured opportunities to hang out and loiter might be undervalued. It might also involve considering the alternatives people have to loitering, and what other opportunities might be created. In this way, loitering might be approached, not as a problem to be fixed, but as an avenue for exploring city-related assemblages and realities – and their potential to change and become different.
Chapter 18. Practicing: Child-Friendliness in (Material-Discursive) Practice

The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. —Karen Barad, 2003, p. 822

In this chapter I take up how child-friendliness is done in practice, and suggest how materiality might be taken more seriously when considering practices involved in moving forward the CYFC strategy. I begin by describing the collaborative practices that helped set-up and shape this research, and follow this with a brief discussion about how these activities can be framed through traditional notions of ‘communities of practice’. I then turn things in a different direction and explore how such practices might be alternatively conceived through Karen Barad’s (2003, 2007) concept of material-discursive practices. I outline how I became curious about the ways that materiality was part of various (seemingly human) practices involved in this research – as well as the CYFC strategy. The implications of thinking with material-discursive practices flow into Chapter 19, which takes up how policy is done in practice.

Working Together

A research planning group was crucial in making the participatory project that was part of this study possible. Comprised of a social planner from the City of New Westminster and three coordinators from New Westminster Schools (District 40), this group participated in setting up and carrying out aspects of the project. Each of these people, in different ways, worked across various bodies in the city to help shape this part of the research and move it along. In addition to providing guidance on the project, the social planner made connections with people in New Westminster regarding the mayor’s visit to the school, photo exhibit at city hall, and students’ presentation to city council. The school district staff introduced me to school
administrators who were open to research collaborations and also assisted with neighbourhood walks, taking notes for focus groups, setting up the photo exhibit, scheduling the students’ school board presentation, and offering insights about the emerging project.

All of these people were also, directly or indirectly, involved in developing and implementing the Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) Strategy. The social planner was responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the strategy in the City of New Westminster. The staff from the school district had provided input into the strategy, particularly the learning domain which connected with school activities. School district staff had also facilitated the distribution of surveys to children and parents/caregivers to inform the development of the strategy. This collaboration between the municipality and school district was described as a common occurrence in a small city where people who carried out child-related work often knew each other and relied on each other to get things done.

“I think that every committee I sit on – which is probably six I can think of off the top of my head – in every one of those committees, there’s someone from the city and school district on those committees together. So with a city this small, the collaboration is really really important”. --from interview with school district employee

While the CYFC strategy was developed by the municipality, the goals and actions are necessarily connected with a range of bodies in the city. This includes multi-stakeholder groups (e.g., Kids New West Committee, Public Partners Child Development Committee, Healthier Community Partnership Committee, Community Poverty Reduction Committee) that regularly work together to support children and youth.

“If we didn’t have that close relationship with these not-for-profit agencies, if we didn’t have this relationship with the city, it would be impossible to do the work that we do.”

--from interview with school district employee
“If we are already working on something somewhere and it can be connected to something and supported by it, then we’re gonna make those connections to make it easier – we’re all kind of working together to do things.”

--from interview with city employee

Through working with the city and school district on the participatory research project, and interviewing people involved in the CYFC strategy, I became increasingly interested in how this collaboration happened. While the described relationships were most often human-focused, I was also curious about how materiality and more-than-human entanglements might be part of these processes.

**Communities of Practice**

In thinking through the workings of the CYFC strategy, I first consider how material-discursive practices relate with *communities of practice* that have emerged through organizations that support children and youth in New Westminster. Communities of practice are commonly understood as groups of people who "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wegner-Trayner & Wegner-Trayner, 2015). The concept, put forth by Lave & Wegner (1991), has been taken up in a number of ways over time by organizations, governments, professional associations, educational bodies, social sector groups, and funding agencies (Buysse et al., 2003; Wegner-Trayner & Wegner-Trayner, 2015). Ideally, these sorts of communities create connections across different disciplines and professions as people learn together, share expertise, and engage forms of collective action toward improving practice. The collaborative work that happens in New Westminster in relation with young people is very much in line with these communities of practice.

Many people who I interviewed were part of inter-sectoral groups that regularly met to discuss and jointly work on child-related issues in the city. These groups typically included representatives from health, education, municipal government, provincial government, social
services, and community organizations. Some of these planning tables were started, in part, to satisfy requirements from funding agencies for organizations and groups to collaborate on projects and initiatives.

“I think New Westminster is now a highly collaborative community. I’d think if you go back 15-20 years ago, that wasn’t necessarily the case. There’s probably the main impetus that really got everybody working more collaboratively was the Children First Initiative, which was funding from MCFD [Ministry for Children and Family Development]. That was early childhood money. And out of that, they actually funded coordinators in many communities in British Columbia to establish these tables focusing on early childhood...so really wanting these community tables that would look at and develop strategies for those specific communities.”

--from interview with community organization employee

Some interviewees pointed to ways that governance and leadership enabled such collaboration across organizations and other groups.

“Because in New West, Council’s very supportive of healthy outcomes for the community, they’re not opposed to the staff working with health...It’s easier to sort of come up with new ideas and say ‘hey, let’s explore this’...It feels as though they’re just very free to do stuff, as long as they’re in certain guidelines, obviously. But they’re very free to follow through on sort of the unique and different challenges that really help the community.”

--from interview with employee with partner organization

Several interviewees identified how important it was to have a social planner in the city, particularly someone who prioritized community collaboration and was skilled at making connections.
“I think having someone from the city who actually shows up and is at a community table on a regular basis, and can bring information and can ask for feedback, and really believes in consultation and getting the information you need before you make decisions on how to move forward, I think is really important. And I’m sure lots of social planners do that, but we never had anybody like that before.”

--from interview with school district employee

“So having a social planner who’s committed to making changes that will support the overall health of the community is really important. I don’t think we would have gotten where we are now if it hadn’t been for that...And he got a lot of support because there’d been a lot of people who’d been banging their heads against the wall for many years because we didn’t have that support at city hall before.”

--from interview with school district employee

One interviewee suggested that funding opportunities, in addition to strong working relationships between people in the city and various funders, were an impetus for the development of the CYFC strategy in New Westminster.

“[The person working at the funding body] just went off and called [a person working in the city] and had a conversation with them about the viability of the project from their perspective, and then got back to me. He said ‘Yeah, we’ll do it, but they’re going to chip in some money and this is what it’s going to look like’ And, Okay!”

--from interview with partner organization employee

A number of interviewees also suggested that regular practices of collaborating in order to get things done in this highly connected city helped set the conditions for the CYFC strategy to emerge. As such, the various domains of the strategy connect with, and are already part of,
other work that is happening in New Westminster (e.g., child care initiatives, recreation programming).

**Material-Discursive Practices in Relation with the CYFC Strategy**

While practices are typically conceived in human terms (e.g., focusing on human-centred meanings, beliefs and understandings), I suggest that there might also be value in bringing a more material sensibility to thinking through how communities collaborate and mobilize around child-related issues. Specifically, I wonder about the possible benefits of using the concept of material-discursive practices in considering the workings of the CYFC strategy. This involves a curiosity about how different realities associated with the CYFC strategy get made in practice, and how matter and meaning are entangled with these processes.

The concept of material-discursive practices (Barad 2003, 2007) (closely related with *material-semiotic practices* – see Haraway, 1994; Law, 2019) is used by scholars working from a relational ontology to consider how realities get made through entanglements of matter and meaning. In putting forth the concept of material-discursive practices, Karen Barad contends that the world comes into being – and is continually reconfigured – through intra-actions that are both material and discursive (Barad, 2007). Here, materiality includes the full range of (organic and inorganic) matter that co-constitutes the world. Working with Michel Foucault’s concept of *discursive practices*, Barad is clear to point out that *discursive* implies more than language. It involves systems of thought that enable and constrain what can be said (e.g., ideas, attitudes and beliefs about what counts as meaningful) and that actively work – with matter – to produce realities. Barad suggests that “discourse is made possible through specific material practices” (Barad, 2007, p. 148) and that world-making is a dynamic performative affair that is always material-discursive.

There were hints that people interviewed for this study considered materiality in their working relationships with others, if only in passing. For example, the interviewees below suggested that material elements (e.g., shared space and resources) were part of tensions in partnerships to deliver children’s programming.
[We] have very strong working relationships in terms of sharing spaces and staff, or coming up with new programming ideas or things that way. It gets funny when you look at resources, in terms of resource sharing...Who’s going to pay for the toilet paper, right?” —from interview with school district employee

“And sometimes they’ll want to do something internally at their school or at their site that will disrupt our programmes. So that’s when it disrupts that communication and we have to call and say ‘we have a contract’, we’re supposed to be in that room but there’s a bunch of tables and chairs set up for some type of meeting...So that disrupts the flow of the relationship back and forth. But that’s like any good marriage. You’re going to have your differences now and then.” —from interview with city employee

Interviewees gave other examples where collaboration involved sharing or shifting material elements in order to meet collective goals, as in the example below where staff from the city and school district worked together to move and outfit an unused portable to address childcare needs in a particular neighbourhood.

“I’m looking at Queensborough where there’s such a lack of daycare. The school district and City and Westminster Children’s After School Society were able to work together to get a double wide portable so that they could double the amount of kids they put in daycare down there. [The city] had a grant to furnish it. The school district bought the portable.” —from interview with school district employee

A number of interviewees discussed how shared physical spaces, such as the co-located youth/seniors centre and the city’s three Early Child Development Hubs facilitated collaboration among community partners as well as serving communities. For example, referring to the hub in Queensborough (which includes a community centre, elementary and middle schools, library, childcare, outdoor play space, community kitchen and more) the interviewee said the following.
“The school district owns the schools and operates the schools, but we’ve got a relationship where we can have access to the schools...So it’s having that hub. The hub is a physical structure, but the hub is also the whole campus...So it really is looking at providing services here and coordinating and working together and everything under one roof basically.”

--from interview with city employee

Thus, materiality was subtlety entwined in the various stories they told about collaborating with others, building community, and working in partnership to support children in the city.

Material-Discursive Practices – An Experimental Exercise

With materiality in mind, at the end of one of our research meetings, I chatted over tea with two community school coordinators about the research project. I showed them a book I was reading called Planning Matter, Acting with Things. In this book, Robert A. Beauregard (2015) takes up the idea that things are important to city-making in ways that are subtle, but important. Thinking with new materialism (e.g., Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory) he produces lists (or 'ontographies') of elements that go into work related with urban planning. The lists include material objects as well as processes, laws, tools and places. For example, Beauregard puts forth the following list/ontography related to the work of a planning director:

Planning director, hazard mitigation, pedestrians, historic district, zoning ordinance, coastal zone management, certification, impact fee, car sharing, green buildings, AICP examination, endangered species, vacant lot, marina, planting, scale model, noxious facilities, eviction notice, interest rates, slum, access ramp, developers, staff directory, scenic views, street glare, trips, light rail stop, grants, air rights, BID, townhouses, cell phone tower, parking space, lease, trash, square footage, soccer stadium, residential conversion, Livable Communities Act (1995), retention pond, site survey, plan amendment, shopping mall, license fee, land use lawyer, payroll, redevelopment authority, value capture, disaster plan, city council, cars, abandoned factory, New Urbanism, speed bumps, riverfront parks. (Beauregard, 2015, p. 15)
I showed the coordinators the above list and others from Beauregard’s book and we talked for a while about the ways that the material world is part of everyday work practices. I asked them if they might be willing to experiment with generating a similar sort of list related with their work. They were open to this and quickly came up with the following:

Community school coordinator, human touch, glass window to the playground, students, hallway, school entrance/exit, comfy chair, tea kettle, travel mug, cell phone, texts, emails, space heater, laptop, morning meet and greet, tables, chairs, scissors, paint brushes, basketballs, school staff, teachers, administrators, schedules, caring, giveaways, snow pants, granola bars, reporting relationships, funding applications, vulnerabilities, curiosity, parents, program space, gym, first aid kits, emergency procedures, safety protocols, invoices, financial policies, shifting protocols, purchasing cards, Association of Community Education, school models, community of practice, value-in-kind calculator, funders, Parks and Recreation, Parent Advisory Committees, bi-monthly check in, census data, population health data, day camp, after-school programs, training, permission forms, program registration systems, subsidies, curb-side conversation, park knowledge, background knowledge, working relationships, trust, diversity, connection moment, diagnosis, support, flexibility, cooking programs, physical literacy, parent nights, drama program, big buddies, skills, leadership development, deals/bartering, leveraging, shopping list, instructors, staff meeting, guest speaker, personal invitation.7

Looking at the list, I considered how the very human-focused work of a community school coordinator (e.g., starting with human touch) was also very much wrapped up with the nonhuman. I was also struck by the wide range of elements, some of which were very different from each other (e.g., granola bars, funding applications, trust), that went into the material-discursive practices of their everyday work.

7 I shortened and re-ordered this list (both in consultation with the coordinators and on my own) after the first draft.
I wondered about the possible benefits of taking materiality more seriously when considering practices in the city related with the CYFC strategy. In their book, *Urban Cosmopolitics: Agencements, Assemblies, Atmospheres*, Anders Blok and Ignacio Farias (2016) suggest that “cities do not amount to objects existing ‘out there’, but that they are made and unmade at particular sites of practice, brought into being via concrete relations, materials, knowledges and engagements” (p. 1). Thinking with Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers and others, they suggest that multiple bodies and forces work in assemblage to compose urban common worlds. They argue that the limits and forms of cities are created through these practices, including the conflicts and compromises that arise when worlds and realities intermingle.

Thinking with assemblages, and the entanglement of both matter and meaning, I considered the practices involved in carrying out the CYFC strategy. This thinking is not necessarily incompatible with conceptions of ‘communities of practice’ and how they are taken up in New Westminster. It does, however, turn things around and emphasize how materialities help compose what we think of as (human) practices and the projects associated with them. Moreover, there is an ontology (i.e., a relational ontology) at work when thinking with material-discursive practices that I suggest might create some interesting openings for considering how the CYFC strategy works, and might work, toward change. In Chapter 19, I further explore how matter and meaning are entangled in practice, and the potential of approaching the CYFC strategy through the related concept of multiplicity.
Chapter 19. Working: ‘More than one, but less than many’ CYFC Strategies

Realities are performatively enacted in practices. If this is right, then since there are many different kinds of practices then there must presumably also be many different kinds of realities. Though doubtless realities and their practices overlap, what is realised varies from place to place. This suggestion is politically important. It not only tells us that other realities are possible, but also that to practise method is to enact particular realities and choke off others. It is (there is no choice) to engage in ontological politics.

--John Law, 2022, p. xvi

In this chapter I explore how the New Westminster CYFC strategy might be conceived through multiplicity and outline the implications of doing so for considering the workings of the strategy. I start by re-engaging with the concept of multiplicity (discussed in Chapters 2 and 6) and briefly outline how it has been used in the area of policy. I then consider some possible benefits of working with the CYFC strategy – and realities associated with it – as multiple and shifting. As part of this, I draw on a 2014 case study by John Law and Vicky Singleton that considers the workings of a particular policy through the concept of multiplicity. I also draw on narratives from research interviews with people involved in developing and implementing the CYFC strategy in New Westminster. It is worth noting that I work with interview texts in this chapter as a way of thinking through the plausibility and potential of considering multiplicity in relation with the CYFC strategy. Thus, the quotes are not meant to be representative (e.g., of themes or realities), but instead to perform together in assemblage and help create new connections.

Multiplicity Revisited Through Policy: The Case of a Particular Health Policy

The concept of multiplicity is taken up by Gilles Deleuze in his (1987) book with Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, as well as other works (see Deleuze 1987). Put concisely, the concept of (qualitative) multiplicity is the idea that all things
are made up (partially) of other things (see Chapters 2 and 6). Thus, what we think of ‘things’ or ‘entities’ are not unified wholes, nor are they the sum of their parts. Rather, they are entangled in relations of mutual becoming. They are ‘more than one, but less than many’ (Deleuze, 1987; Mol, 2002; Strathern, 2004). Thinking with multiplicity, Deleuze suggests that there is no single coherent reality, but countless mutually entangled and interfering realities (May, 2005). As Law (2004) states, “one could imagine multiple versions of the real (which is not the same thing as multiple perspectives on the same reality)” (p.36).

In their 2014 article “ANT, multiplicity and policy”, John Law and Vicky Singleton use actor network theory and feminist material semiotics to explore how the concept of multiplicity can be employed in critical policy analysis. In doing so, they use the case of a British policy enacted in 2001 in response to a foot-and-mouth health epidemic. Starting with the idea that realities are made through material-semiotic practices (Haraway, 1994, Mol, 2002), they argue that the ‘policy context’ was not comprised of one reality, but multiple entangled realities. They further argue that practices and realities gave rise to multiple policies. Here, they don’t use multiple in a quantitative way (i.e., there were a bunch of separate policies at work). Rather, they plug into the concept of qualitative multiplicity and suggest that the policy itself was a multiplicity. Thus while it might have seemed that there was a single reality regarding the epidemic to which there was a singular policy response, they assert that multiple realities produced multiple policies in practice.

The concept of practices is important here, as (akin to material-discursive practices) material-semiotic practices involve entanglements of matter and meaning. As discussed in Chapter 18, the arrangements that are produced through such entanglements produce different realities (i.e., consider how the ‘ontographies’ of Planning Director and Community School Coordinator in Chapter 18 might produce different realities in practice). In Law and Singleton’s example, they argue that foot-and-mouth disease assumed different forms in farms, barracks, laboratories, veterinary offices and government committees. The disease was not just perceived differently in these contexts, but became different through material-semiotic
practices that were unique to those contexts. These practices involved a wide range of heterogeneous elements:

- animals, living and dead; barns and fields; captive bolt guns; slaughter men, vets and farmers; the nightmares of children; railway sleepers and flames; bloated carcasses; notices served on farmers; official paperwork; tissue samples, laboratory tests, epidemiological data-bases and computer simulations; organizational arrangements; phone calls; news releases; ministerial statements in parliament. (Law & Singleton, 2014, p. 382)

They assert that there was no singular foot-and-mouth disease, but a multiplicity of foot-and-mouth diseases existing at the same time. The realities associated with foot-and-mouth disease in this case (e.g., the epidemic, the government policy related with it) were also conceived as multiple. Similarly, they suggest that the policy was done/practiced differently in particular locations and circumstances, and thus became a different thing/entity in those locations and circumstances.

Law and Singleton consider how events might have unfolded differently if policy-makers had treated the policy as a multiplicity and considered the various co-existing realities that were entangled with it. In discussing the relationships between ontology and enacting policy, they argue:

If we imagine the world as ontologically multiple, then what it is to make, to struggle with and to ‘transfer’ policy starts to change. We also argue that if policy makers were to recognize this, then policy would change its character in interesting and provocative ways. (Law & Singleton, 2014, p. 380)

Thinking with multiplicity, policies are not just perceived differently by people, but are actually done differently in practice (Law & Singleton, 2014). Thus, policies are not singular fixed things, but are multiple and shifting, connected with multiple realities. They are ‘more than one, but less than many’. In line with this thinking, a number of other studies have explored policies as multiple and fluid assemblages rather than stable bounded entities (e.g., Freeman, 2009; Lendvai & Stubbs, 2009; Singleton, 2005, 2012). In the remainder of this chapter I take up this
thinking as well, as I consider how the CYFC strategy might be conceived as a multiplicity entangled with a range of realities and practices.

The CYFC Strategy – A Unifying Framework?

The CYFC strategy was often identified by interviewees as a unifying framework that provided a vision for work related with child-friendliness in the city or a lens through which child-friendliness might be viewed. It was also described as way to capture and organize the various child-related activities that were already happening in the city and provide direction for future action.

“As a city we’re doing such good things in a lot of different areas around childcare, child development, around youth engagement, but we didn’t have an overall vision...[We were] doing all these good things but not really doing it in a coordinated manner or in a deliberate manner or according to a larger vision...as a city [the CYFC strategy] provides us a direction for moving forward.” --from interview with city employee

“It’s all working toward a bigger vision rather than each different department doing their own thing.” --from interview with staff at partner organization

However, aside from this overarching sense of vision, in further discussing what the strategy might do in the city, the responses became more specific and associated with the everyday practices of interviewees particular sorts of work.

So child and youth friendly communities for me are communities where children and youth can move around in a way they feel safe, that’s convenient for them and that’s comfortable for them. And more importantly than that, that their parents feel safe having them navigate somewhat independently, depending on what age they’re at...I think it is already quite child and youth friendly because it’s so compact.”

--from interview with city employee
“I think what the [CYFC] strategy should be doing is making it easier for families and children in the community to be able to grow up healthy.”

--from interview with school district employee

“I think what I would like [the CYFC strategy] to do is to provide us with an opportunity to have an ongoing dialogue about what best serves children and youth, as well as an aging population as well as people with disabilities. But it’s a platform for an ongoing conversation.”

--from interview with city official

“So in conjunction with this [CYFC] strategy there was also the Family Friendly Housing Policy that was done to try and complete that holistic picture and really work on making New West a sort of community that others should benchmark themselves against, by doing all these things to look at child and youth friendliness.”

--from interview with city official

“It’s really framing our decision-making and negotiating to make sure we’re keeping children and youth in mind while we’re designing and building this city.”

--from interview with city employee

“It’s part of a bigger piece in the city of New Westminster where we have a broader goal to be the community that can be home to people in all stages of their lives”

--from interview with city official

“The great thing about this strategy is, even without that understanding of the social determinants of health, it’s there. So I think that’s a great thing. They’re doing it without actually saying it.”

--from interview with partner organization employee
One way to conceptualize these diverse responses is that interviewees have different perspectives on the workings and goals of singular CYFC strategy. Another way to conceptualize this diversity, thinking with Law and Singleton’s (2014) case study, is that interviewees are part of different realities and are working with different CYFC strategies in practice. The idea here is that realities are made through situated practices. While various realities are entangled and might even coordinate to some degree, they are uniquely configured through particular arrangements of matter and meaning (Law and Singleton, 2014). Here again I think with the ‘ontographies’ for Planning Director and Community School Coordinator from Chapter 18, wondering also about the material-discursive arrangements and realities produced in association with ‘parks and recreation’, or ‘engineering’ or ‘landscape design’ in the City of New Westminster.

Multiple Realities

It is worth noting that in the context of these research interviews that ‘different realities’ were not unthinkable. For example, more than one interviewee talked about young people inhabiting different realities/worlds than adults.

“[Youth] live in a whole different universe than we do...they live in a different world and have different concerns.” --from interview with city official

In addition, many interviewees also indicated that they thought people in the municipality (and other organizations in the city) often operated in silos that were separate from each other. While these were not framed as realities as such, the lines drawn around these silos connected with particular areas of practice.

“The way cities are traditionally set up, and New West falls right into this category, we tend to be silo’ed organizations where Parks and Recreation does their thing and Engineering does their thing, Planning does their thing. And there’s connection, but
ultimately departments are doing their own thing. And I know we’ve been trying to
break down those silos in the city.” --from interview with city official

“[We are] trying to change the organizational culture so that people work more
collaboratively and less in silos.”
--from interview with community organization employee

“Schools are set out to be schools and recreational centres are set out to be recreational
centres.” --from interview with school district employee

As suggested by Law and Singleton (2014), realities are not just multiple, but are always shifting
and changing. Thus, thinking with multiplicity might help illuminate the politics involved in how
certain things become more (and less) real in practice. These sorts of ontological politics (see
Mol, 1999) or cosmopolitics (see Stengers, 2005) or urban cosmopolitics (see Blok & Farias,
2016) were touched on in various ways in the research interviews.

“Policy only matters when it hits the budget. Right, if you don’t spend the money on a
policy, it doesn’t exist.” --from interview with city official

Shifting Realities – Children’s Rights, Child-Friendliness, and Family-Friendliness

An example of these sorts of shifting and contested realities can be identified in how
the, somewhat controversial, emphasis on children’s rights in the CYFC strategy document
shifted subtly to a focus more on family-friendliness. A number of interviewees gestured to this
shift, and discussed the ongoing negotiation between about whether, and how prominently,
children’s rights would be featured.
“The word ‘rights’ at all. That was a big one. From the beginning he was like ‘child rights? I don’t know if we want to put something that strong in here’. Like he understands how to move the pieces through, which means he also understands how politicians are going to react, and upper management, and I think a word like ‘rights’ just rang a warning bell...not that he has anything against people’s rights, but it’s just like ‘I’m gonna get pushback on that’....But he did mention to us, it might have been a year into the project where he said ‘You know, I really didn’t understand the child rights thing, but now I really get it. I really see why it’s important’.”

--from interview with partner organization employee

While children’s rights were eventually integrated and heavily featured in the CYFC strategy document, I had a sense from our conversations that some people were struggling to figure out how to make these rights ‘real’ and that there was great variability in how people connected children’s rights with everyday practices and with the CYFC strategy.

“[The CYFC strategy] is grounded in child rights, so that was really important. Going back to 2010 we did a New Westminster Children’s Charter and I know we have them hanging up in our civic facilities, but this makes it a little bit more real, that there is a strategy that’s built around child rights.”

--from interview with city employee

“I was aware of child rights but you know I never really thought of them in the context of planning”

--from interview with city employee

“From a city perspective I think there was a period where we had to get comfortable and a better understanding of what [child rights] are and how they relate to our day to day work and the strategy.”

--from interview with city employee
“When you talk about children as rights holders, it elevates their status as citizens...So I think the education process [around child rights] in itself helped bolster the importance of a child-friendly strategy even more than the data around child development or any of those pieces, because it’s a conceptual switch” --from interview with city employee

“Yeah, I would say personally no. We never work with that connection [to children’s rights]...never specifically do we talk about it.” --from interview with city employee

However, while the connections between the CYFC strategy and children’s rights were variable and unsettled across these interviews, connections with family-friendliness were often made. Some interviewees even used ‘child-friendly’ and ‘family-friendly’ interchangeably.

“The whole issue of creating that family-friendly community has been intertwined and, I would say, has actually been one of the driving factors in the development of the Official Community Plan we’ve been working on.” --from interview with city employee

Although child-friendliness and family-friendliness are not mutually exclusive concepts, they are associated with different realities and politics. In practice, they also do different things in relation with the CYFC strategy. For example, as suggested above, child-friendliness is commonly associated with children’s rights and UNICEF’s child-friendly cities. On the other hand, in the context of New Westminster, family-friendliness is often linked with health imperatives, child development frameworks, and the concept of 8-80 Cities (an age-friendly framework based on the idea that making cities great for eight-year-olds and eighty-year-olds will make them great for everyone).

Thus, this use of family-friendliness with, and in place of, child-friendliness in interviews made me wonder about the ontological politics (Mol, 1999) at play in relation with the CYFC strategy. How were certain things (e.g., children’s rights) becoming more and less ‘real’ in practice? How were realities overlapping, conflicting or cohering? What realities were
emerging? Indeed, in Tim Gill’s (2021) book *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities*, the Mayor of New Westminster is quoted as saying: “When we talk about building a walkable community it is not in isolation from building a *child-friendly community or what you call an 8-80 community*. These are completely linked” (p. 34, emphasis added). Ontological multiplicity offers a way of thinking through how certain realities get made, how they intermingle with other realities, and how they shift over time.

**Multiple CYFC Strategies**

Taking this concept of multiplicity further, working with the idea that multiple realities exist in relation with the CYFC strategy, it is also possible to consider how multiple CYFC strategies are being enacted across different locations and circumstances (e.g., municipal departments). Thus, it is not just that there are many ways of understanding or viewing a singular CYFC strategy, but that various CYFC strategies are being *done* in practice.

In thinking through this, I consider the responsibilities that various departments have for implementing aspects of the CYFC strategy, and how these collective activities were often described as rolling up into one overall (singular) strategy.

> “*It was broken down into departments, so Parks and Rec was ‘playing’ and Engineering was ‘moving’.*” --from interview with partner organization

However, interviewees also suggested that particular departments had their own ways of getting things done in relation with the strategy. Thus, the material-discursive practices employed in these departments were necessarily unique and varied. Thinking again with the work of Law and Singleton (2014), such differences produce not only multiple realities, but also *multiple policies in practice*. Thus, in keeping with the concepts of assemblage used throughout this dissertation, the CYFC strategy becomes a different thing in connection with particular arrangements of matter and meaning. Put another way, the strategy assemblages are different from location to location – although there will be overlapping connections between them. Thus,
in an everyday way, the planning department might be operating with a different CYFC strategy than the engineering department. Again, the difference here is not about interpretations, nor about taking on different pieces of a singular cohesive strategy, but is an ontological difference – and this sort of difference matters in how the CYFC strategy unfolds and what it becomes.

**Working Across Realities and CYFC Strategies**

In interviews with people working the in the city, people talked about the importance of working together with others to move forward the CYFC strategy. Many talked about the importance of collaborating across departments and becoming part of their work (*i.e.*, material-discursive practices).

“*It’s small and staff get to know each other and you work together on different committees. You can move it forward a lot quicker and you can break down some of those silos.*”

--from interview with city employee

“*When you start to work across departments and build relationships and it’s so easy, much easier, you know who to contact, and their working style.*”

--from interview with city employee

“*The spoke in [this] wheel has to be the spoke in other people’s wheels.*”

--from interview with city employee

Some people were identified as especially adept at working in-between and generating connections with (*the realities and material-discursive practices of*) other’s work.
“So he’s got a very good skill in working with the community but also working internally. I think he’s quite logical and strategic in much of what he does. Which, like, engineers relate to that.” --from interview with city employee

However, some also indicated that this work could be difficult, especially when priorities (and realities) did not align.

“Working together with other departments in our city could be improved. It’s not that people don’t want to work together, it’s just that their priorities may not be the same.” --from interview with city employee

“So we’re constantly, I mean internally competing cause we all have our different pet things that we’re trying to move forward. And have to be quite strategic on what project...we push the hardest.” --from interview with city employee

Some interviewees who worked across departments suggested that this process required curiosity and negotiation, and how this happened varied (in practice) across different departments.

“I do so much work with Parks and Rec. it is almost seamless...You work on reports together, you can you know, ask someone to do a favour and they ask me...some of the other departments it’s a challenge.” --from interview with city employee

“And it’s thinking about the how we change the culture of engagement in New Westminster, so that if you’re an engineer it doesn’t mean that you’re necessarily doing the same process that planning is doing, but recognizing that there’s still a role for you to have in communicating with the public or whoever you’re impacting.” --from interview with city employee
“I’ve had to contact different departments within the city and create meetings with them and talk about their processes with them and create work for them...you have to be pretty savvy to ask people to work on your things with you.”

--from interview with city employee

The Potential of Approaching the CYFC Strategy Through Multiplicity

Conceptualizing the CYFC strategy through multiplicity has implications for how bodies in the city work together toward child-friendliness. Law and Singleton (2014) argue that approaching policy through ontological multiplicity creates possibilities for thinking/doing policy and politics differently and producing change. They suggest that this requires an acknowledgment that multiple realities are at work, stating that “in practice even a single policy enacts different realities. If we think we’re dealing with a single reality when we try to implement a policy, then we’re simply deluding ourselves” (Law & Singleton, 2014, p. 391).

When the existence of a single reality (or ‘policy context’) is not assumed, then the search for multiple realities seems a prudent and important task. In the case of the CYFC strategy, this might involve exploring the array of complex assemblages associated with the strategy and how they relate with other knotty issues in the city. It might involve asking which realities are being actively worked with (and thus made more real) and which are not (and thus made less real). As well, it might involve maintaining curiosity when encounters across realities are discordant, contradictory and incompatible. Such curiosity would provide alternatives to thinking that some people just don’t get it or that certain ideas are not realistic (i.e., are not consistent with particular realities). This sort of orientation would also require regularly returning to the CYFC strategy and examining how realities related with it have shifted and changed over time.

In addition, approaching the CYFC strategy through multiplicity would involve acknowledging that multiple policies are likely at work – and then exploring the webs of practices associated with them. Law and Singleton (2014) argue that there is no general approach to this, and that such endeavors can only be undertaken situationally. As suggested
above, a move toward working across and between departments is already happening in the city – and has been carried out to some extent in relation with the CYFC strategy. Building on this process, working with multiplicity might prompt people to take an interest in the material-discursive practices involved in their own work. In addition, thinking with multiplicity (although it is hard to think with!) might assist with efforts to better appreciate, and create respectful engagements with, the work of others. This would necessarily involve exploring the materialities of practices, including how they differ, overlap, and productively coordinate across areas of work. Such examination might be especially helpful when attempting to collaborate across disciplines where practices (and associated realities) may be quite different.

I will conclude by returning to the idea that the CYFC strategy presents an opportunity for people in New Westminster to work together to make the city better for children and youth. What I have argued in this chapter though, that extends this claim, is that approaching this work through multiplicity might generate possibilities for collaboration that have not yet been explored. This sort of approach has the potential to create more nuanced and contextualized engagements among those working with the CYFC strategy. It might also encourage the cultivation of practices that are responsive to the complexities, fluid relations, and shifting realities associated with child-friendliness in New Westminster.
Chapter 20. **Belonging: Creating Sanctuary in the City**

*Now we are at home. But home does not pre-exist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile centre, to organize a limited space. Many, very diverse, components have a part in this, landmarks and marks of all kinds.*

--Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 311

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8 The Be/Longing exhibit at the New Westminster Museum combined immersive artworks with everyday artifacts and stories to explore themes of ‘belonging and longing to be at home’. Various artists and community members (including children) worked together over time to create the exhibit. The introductory exhibit panel read: “This display seeks to illustrate the power that everyday objects have to tell us more about who we are, and better understand complex ideas like identity, inclusion-exclusion, discrimination, and in/justice in a colonial society. We invite you to examine each exhibition as a standalone experience but to also notice the part each layer plays in weaving together a pattern – even when in opposition to each other”. The press release promoting the Be/Longing exhibit stated that home was more than a dwelling, but also “a place of belonging, where safety, security and identity are upheld. At a time of increased immigration and displacement, home might be a new and challenging place. Home may also be on unceded territories” (Mcmamus, 2018, para. 2).
In this chapter, I explore connections between the Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) strategy and school district Sanctuary Schools Policy in New Westminster – a connection that was also made the night that students from the participatory project delivered a presentation to the Board of Education (see below). As suggested in Chapters 18 and 19, the concept of material-discursive practices can be useful when approaching policy from a relational ontology. With this in mind, I argue that the CYFC strategy and Sanctuary Schools Policy are connected, not only in principle, but in practice. I further suggest that situated practices related with these policies, and their associated politics (i.e. ontological politics or cosmopolitics - see below), mark and reinforce which realities and bodies ‘belong’ in the city – and that this matters.

An Unexpected Encounter – Sanctuary

Students from the leadership group had finished delivering their presentation to the Board of Education and most had already headed home. After saying goodbye to some of these students in the front lobby of the building, I made my way back to the board meeting that was still in progress. The room was packed with people, so I stood near the door. Inside, a child held a sign in the shape of a butterfly that read, “Mariposa. La mas bella cuando pasa la frontera. Mira como va bailando” on one wing. On the other it said, “Butterfly. The most beautiful one when crosses the border. Look how it dances.” Numerous others held butterfly signs with words such as, “You have to understand, no one will put their child on the boat unless the sea is safer than land” and “Access without fear”. The Board of Education was discussing a proposed Sanctuary Schools Policy, aimed at giving all children in New Westminster access to education regardless of their immigration status.

I could see two students from the leadership group listening intently to the presentation. It was getting late, but they had asked the mom accompanying them if they could stay. Several community members spoke in support of the draft Sanctuary Schools Policy. As part of this, some people shared personal stories of being unable or afraid to access education because of their (or other family members’) immigration status. One young person shared their
experience of watching other children walk to school in the morning, and longing to do this as well. This discussion supported the idea that while the B.C. School Act technically allows all school-aged residents in the province to attend school, some families do not send children to school out of fear that they will be separated from their children or forced to leave the country. After comments from board members, and a brief amendment to the document, the school board unanimously adopted the Sanctuary Schools Policy that evening. The first policy of its kind in the province, it outlined the school district’s commitment to providing education to children regardless of their immigration status. It also specified that the district would not share information with federal immigration authorities or allow Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officials or immigration authorities to enter schools or school district facilities unless required by law (NWS, 2017).

Connections in Policy and Practice

While supporting children with precarious or no immigration status is not specifically named in the CYFC strategy, such support is implied in its overall vision – to create a city that “is a child, youth and family friendly community in which all children and youth are able to reach their full potential (CYFC, p. 5, emphasis added). The Sanctuary Schools Policy connects with this vision and other goals in the CYFC strategy through encouraging access to education for a small, important, and perhaps invisible, segment of the child/youth population who might not otherwise be included. Likewise, associations can be made across several domains of the strategy, including most saliently the belonging domain which focuses on ensuring that “children, youth, and families feel connected to and part of New Westminster” (CYFC, p. 21). However, both the working and engaging domains of the CYFC strategy also point to the need to support, include, and engage children and families who have immigrated to Canada. As well, the education domain highlights Article 28 of the UNCRC, which asserts that children have the right to education, including the right to access resources that will help them succeed in learning (UNCRC, 1989). Creating further connections between these policies seems appropriate and important in the context of New Westminster, where population growth is
driven largely by immigration and where refugees make up a larger proportion of newcomers than in other cities in the region (CNW, 2020a).

In terms of practice, as suggested in Chapter 18, the municipality and school district in New Westminster frequently collaborate on local initiatives, including those associated with immigration. For example, they work together to operate a Welcome Centre located at the New Westminster Secondary School – providing access to programs, support, and services (e.g., settlement services in various languages) for newcomers. The City of New Westminster has also endorsed a Sanctuary City Policy that, among other commitments, supports “residents with uncertain, precarious, undocumented or no immigration status to access City facilities, programs and services” (Mcmanus, 2021d). The importance of this ongoing collaboration between the city and school district is underscored in a recent newspaper article entitled “CBSA detention of migrant mom outside B.C. school prompts call for sanctuary zones” (Little, 2021). The article describes how supporters of undocumented migrants rallied at a New Westminster school where the CBSA had followed and detained a mother who dropped her child off at school. Advocates at the rally called on the CBSA to respect the sanctuary policies of the city and school district, making the following remarks:

We want to be a welcoming and inclusive city. We too are a sanctuary city, and this is not what we want to see in this community,” New Westminster City Councillor Chinu Das told the crowd, “Respect the sanctuary zone designations — not enter, not follow people, not call schools requesting information about migrants.” Kathleen Carlsen, chair of the New Westminster District Parent Advisory Council added “All children have the right to education without fear. All families should be safe. The role of the district parent advisory council is to support all families, regardless of their immigration status. (Little, 2021, para. 14-16)

At this event, the Sanctuary Schools Policy and Sanctuary City Policy were invoked together to highlight justice and equity issues for those with precarious or no immigration status – and to advocate for changes in CBSA practices related with children and their families in New Westminster.
A 2021 report to the New Westminster Board of Education on the Sanctuary Schools Policy indicated that since its enactment in 2017, the policy had been used to help a modest (unspecified) number of children enroll in New Westminster schools (NWS, 2021). The report also noted that the school district needed to change some everyday practices in order to better support the policy (NWS, 2021). While such practices might be typically framed as human activities, as suggested in previous chapters, they can also be conceived as material-discursive more-than-human doings. In this case, such practices might involve: sanctuary zone designations, everyday objects, registration forms, physical spaces, identification requirements, admission procedures, stakeholder groups, religious and community leaders, medical professionals, legal processes, translated text, electronic data bases, tenancy agreements, utility bills, Ministry of Education policies, funding claims, complaints mechanisms, accountability measures, review processes, communication plans, and more.

The material elements of these practices influence how the policy unfolds and its potential to make a difference for children in New Westminster. For example, the physical set-up of the School Board office helps produce an atmosphere or ‘feel’ that might welcome certain bodies into the space, but not others. In addition, the report to the Board of Education (referred to above) highlights how standard application forms used in the school district might discourage families with precarious or no immigration status from registering children in school. Also, as suggested in the newspaper article above, practices of respecting sanctuary zone designations near schools are intended to materialize and spatialize the notion of ‘sanctuary’ implied in the Sanctuary Schools Policy. These materialities (and their entanglements with discourse) help produce realities and mark out territories associated with belonging in the city.

**Ontological Politics**

As suggested in Chapter 19, how we draw lines around who and what belongs in the city can be conceptualized through ontological politics (Mol, 1999) or cosmopolitics (Stengers,
As suggested by Ignacio Farias and Anders Blok in their (2016) work on urban cosmopolitics:

Studying the ontological politics of urban assemblages...involves looking at what is included and what is excluded from different enactments of the city, which entities are made present, and which are made absent...put succinctly, cosmopolitics implies a politics of the cosmos, a politics of exploring and provisionally settling with does and does not belong to our common (urbanized) worlds (p. 7).

Cosmopolitics speak to the multiplicity of realities operating in the city at any given time and how they intermingle, interfere, and cohere to some extent to compose ‘common worlds’ (Latour, 2004). They focus on world-making processes, including the conflicts and compromises that arise when realities and worlds come together. They also point to the complexities of organizing city life and making it welcoming and habitable for a range of bodies and entities.

In terms of child-friendliness in New Westminster, attention to cosmopolitics (among other imperatives) involves acknowledging and responding to the realities of children and families with precarious or no immigration status. As suggested in the CYFC strategy and this document, the child-friendly city is a place for all children, including those who have are traditionally pushed to the margins of urban life. Working with cosmopolitics in this context implies a curiosity about everyday practices and refrains of life associated with children (e.g., walking to and from school) and how they mark out territories of belonging and being ‘at home’ in the city.

Thinking with cosmopolitics, Blok and Farias (2016) argue for forms of inquiry that attend to how urban realities are composed and the (human and nonhuman) parties who have a stake in urban common worlds, but are not insufficiently acknowledged. In considering this sort of inquiry, I am reminded of the students (described at the beginning of the chapter) who chose to stay in the room to witness stories of those who were unable or afraid to access education because of immigration status. I wonder about the untapped potential of involving young people in inquiry that invites curiosity about, and investment in, the multiplicity of realities that compose the city. As suggested by Driskell (2002), engaging children and youth in
shaping urban environments is not only about facilitating participation in particular change-making initiatives, but also opening up opportunities for them to connect and learn with others. While the focus of this chapter has been on human lives, there are also more-than-human implications in considering who and what belongs in urban common worlds and the child-friendly city. With this in mind, in the following chapter I explore some connections between the lives of children and nonhuman animals in the city.
Chapter 21. Caring/Fishing: Expanding Circles of Care to Nonhuman Animals

[Diffraction] refers to this first moment of being lured into doing creative research. And this moment happens behind one’s desk during planned periods of doing research, but then it can actually also happen when you are in the supermarket, or walking around in the forest, or you’re sitting on the train reading a random newspaper that was left behind by someone...[It’s] a tool that leads to you respecting the entire idea of never really knowing when the research starts and it also points at the necessity to unpack what this moment entails in all its fullness. -- Iris van der Tuin, 2020, 15:25

In this chapter I take the caring domain of the CYFC strategy in a different direction, as I explore connections between nonhuman animals, children, and urban child-friendliness in New Westminster. At the beginning of this chapter the child moves ‘out of focus’ (Kraftl, 2020) as I engage with historical accounts of the city, the river, and the white sturgeon. Here, I operate with the idea that a range of heterogeneous elements (a river, sturgeon, colonialisms, marsh life, history, children, caring, child-friendliness, etc.) can relate with child-friendliness in ways that matter. From there, I follow lines of thinking associated with caring and multispecies relations in cities before focusing back on our participatory research project and children’s relations with nonhuman animals in New Westminster.

As part of this, I also write about encountering things (i.e., a historical book, a photograph) in the process of this inquiry that forced me to think (Deleuze, 1994; May, 2005), yet I did not know what to make of this thinking beyond having a sense that it might yield something interesting or important (see Chapter 7, Onto-epistemology). Thus, in this chapter I also trace the process of returning to this thinking multiple times, diffractively churning things through differently with each return. As suggested by Iris van der Tuin above, diffractive moments can happen through everyday encounters and unexpected moments when you “feel that you are on to something and you have no idea what it is, but you have to research what
you have just found or experienced” (van der Tuin, 2020, 19:00). She suggests that such moments come when you sense something (e.g., ‘the virtual’ – see Chapter 6), but you are not quite able to grasp it. In addition to identifying some of these moments, this chapter also (partially) maps how my thinking associated with care, species relations, and child-friendliness shifted over time and how thinking otherwise about these relations challenged my human-centred habits of mind. As a playful experiment, I consider this process through the notion of fishing. Casting a line and fishing for...something (but I don’t know what, yet)? The pace of this chapter is a bit slow (like fishing perhaps), as I let out the line a couple of times, in some fashion, before reeling things back in.

**Casting a Line**

While looking through documents at the New Westminster Museum and Archives I found the following book on display: *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of The City as It Was* (Hainsworth & Freund-Hainsworth, 2005). The book opens with the following text, under the heading *The Lay of the Land*:

> Imaginary visitors looking down upon the landscape that would become today’s New Westminster would see before them topography both familiar and foreign. They would see a rolling bench land rising steeply northwest from a southwestern bend on the Fraser River. Varying in elevation from three hundred to four hundred feet above sea level, this bench land is dissected by numerous minor and a few major creeks, their canyon courses draining into British Columbia’s largest river. The Fraser River carries its combined flow from half of the province’s vastness past what would become the city of New Westminster. From its high point at the split of the river’s channels, the city has an uninterrupted view, both up and downstream and across the south shore. It makes a commanding landmark to anyone travelling the river or within to monitor those who travel so. Foreign to such visitors would be the extreme density and profound size of the trees and natural undergrowth thickening and entangling the high ground, obscuring the views so enjoyed by those in the city today. First growth Douglas fir and Western cedar
tower where there are now quiet residential streets and homes, apartment towers, and commercial buildings. Swamps, marshes, and wetlands would be clearly visible along the river’s shore, rich in birds and other wildlife that feed upon the abundance of this inter-tidal and floodplain region (pp. 8-9).

After pouring over this book, filled with curated photographs and stories related with New Westminster’s history, I returned once again to the introductory paragraph above. While the focus was on the landscape, I could not help but notice the insertion of imaginary human visitors. I considered how hard it can be (for me, and perhaps others as well) to consider the identity of a place without centering humans. I thought about the nonhuman life in and near the river described in this introduction and how this life has persisted and shifted over time. I sat down at a large table and experimented with writing an alternate ‘lay of the land’ that shared some language with the above passage, but did not star human visitors. Here is what I wrote (with some revisions):

*Water birds flying above the landscape that would become today’s New Westminster would see a rolling bench land rising steeply from a bend in the river below. These birds would feed in the intertidal mudflats and gather in vast numbers in the estuary. Vegetated marshes would merge into dense underbrush, growing thick and entangled beneath towering trees. Sea lions would bark and slip into the river current. Fed by numerous streams, the water would flow, teeming with plankton, salmon, oolichans and sturgeon. The river would then split and cut networks of channels into the delta plain before rising over and mixing with salty ocean.*

I put aside this alternate text as I walked through the museum, taking photographs and making notes. I re-read it later while waiting to board the Skytrain, dissatisfied with the words on the page. De-centring the human was not as simple as removing humans and human-centred names (e.g., Fraser River) or concepts (e.g., estuary) or simply saying tree rather than Douglas

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9 While this text does not specifically identify who these ‘imaginary visitors’ are, such stories of visiting vast wild ‘foreign’ lands are characteristically colonial. It is important to acknowledge Indigenous peoples have lived in this area for over ten thousand years. The colonial notion that the land here was unoccupied (i.e., ‘terra nullius’) prior to European settlement has had devastating and enduring consequences for Indigenous peoples in Canada – and has been condemned by Indigenous groups and others (Assembly of First Nations, 2018).
fir and Western cedar. And there was still a hovering omniscient gaze. I was after something more here, but couldn’t identify it. I tucked away this writing/thinking experiment in a notebook. Folded and crumpled, it worked on the inquiry.

**Letting the Line Out – River of Life**

Months later, I came back to this thinking and to the book *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of The City as It Was*. I had borrowed the book from the library and was reading *Chapter 2, Our River of Life*. The opening lines were “The Fraser River was both the lifeblood and the highway of British Columbia in the 1800’s, and New Westminster had the best seat in the house to reap its benefits while shaping its use. The river defined New Westminster” (Hainsworth & Freund-Hainsworth, 2005, p. 28). This chapter focused on the various ways that the river, especially the fishing industry, helped establish and define the City of New Westminster, creating prosperity for some (but not others). Reading this chapter, I considered the intra-relationships of river-life and city-life. Among several photographs associated with the fishing industry – largely depicting people standing amidst large piles of dead fish – was an image of a group of men posing behind a white sturgeon at Monk’s Fisheries (Figure 21.1). The caption read:

> This photograph depicts curiosity and catching a sturgeon on April 22, 1925. It was not the first sturgeon caught here, nor would it be the last...Dave McWaters and Sam Evans acquired the fish and planned to put it on a Canada-U.S. tour, and it was reported to have toured throughout British Columbia. (Hainsworth & Freund-Hainsworth, 2005, pp. 34-35)

Looking at this photograph and accompanying narrative, I considered how the sturgeon was framed as a curiosity or spectacle of sorts – a creature ‘both familiar and foreign’. I again thought through the complex relations between human and nonhuman life in New Westminster. My thoughts especially drifted to species relations and their intra-actions with colonial relations in New Westminster and how they have persisted and transformed over time.
Letting the Line Out – The Sturgeon

Later, thinking with the photograph at Monk’s Fisheries, I looked up information about the white sturgeon. I learned that it is the largest species of freshwater fish in North America and has been around since the age of dinosaurs. Sturgeon can grow up to six metres in length and live for over one hundred years. Importantly, the last remaining population of white sturgeon in the world lives in the Fraser River, and their population is in decline (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2014). A quick online search yielded recent photographs that had similar compositions to the image from Monk’s Fisheries above – groups of humans posing with a sturgeon hoisted in front of them. In these photographs the sturgeon were alive, as people are only permitted to ‘catch and release’ these fish in the Fraser River, due to their endangered status.

Further following this line of inquiry, I learned that the Guidelines for Angling White Sturgeon in British Columbia included directions to ‘play sturgeon quickly’ in order to reduce stress on the fish (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). I also found a study linking catch and release practices to sub-lethal effects (i.e., stress) on sturgeon, suggesting that repeatedly...
catching these fish has effects on their well-being and possibly the survival of the species (McLean, et. al, 2019). I located several news articles, websites and blogposts indicating that the sport (and business) of these catch and release practices were controversial.

Recent measures have been taken by the Province of British Columbia to protect white sturgeon. For example, over the last few years the provincial government has closed spawning channels on the Fraser River for periods of time as a precautionary measure to ensure the health of white sturgeon populations. In a (2019) CBC news article related with such a closure, Mark Angelo, a river conservationist, indicated that habitat loss in the area was adversely affecting sturgeon as well as other river-related life. Regarding human relationships with Fraser river ecosystems, he insisted, "We have to find a better way to care for that area, to protect it" (Hernandez, 2019, para. 5, emphasis added).

**Handling with Care**

In responding to Angelo’s call to care, I grapple with how to conceive of caring relationships involving an area, or a fish, in a way that is not anthropocentric (i.e., human-centred), essentializing, moralizing, or sentimental (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Taylor, 2013). In attempting to do so, I consider Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s work on care in thinking through human/nonhuman intra-dependencies and responsibilities. Drawing on posthumanism and Donna Haraway’s work on multi-species relations, Puig de la Bellacasa (2012, 2017) thinks through the complexities of cultivating ethical and caring more-than-human relations. As part of this, she suggests that humans have obligations to care for entities less able to make their concerns known in human-dominated worlds. However, she insists that this sort of care is not about moralizing, but engaging in everyday practices of care that are sometimes messy and fraught. She identifies such care as “a vital affective state, an ethical obligation and a practical labour” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 197). In a less human-focused take on Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher’s (1990) widely used definition of care, she conceptualizes care as the relational engagements that “maintain and repair a world so that humans and non-humans can live in it as well as possible in a complex life-sustaining web” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 97).
Picking up Puig de la Bellacasa’s notions of affect, ethics and practicality, in his work on species extinction and multispecies relations, Thom van Dooren (2014), suggests:

As an affective state, caring is an embodied phenomenon, the product of intellectual and emotional competencies: to care is to be affected by another, to be emotionally at stake in them in some way. As an ethical obligation, to care is to become subject to another, to recognize an obligation to look after another. Finally, as a practical labor, caring requires more from us than abstract well wishing, it requires that we get involved in some concrete way, that we do something (wherever possible) to take care of another (pp. 291-292).

Van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose use this thinking in their work with on multi-species relations in cities. They consider how nonhumans are involved in the making and storying of places and may themselves have their own stories, place-related attachments, and ways of making spaces meaningful. They state:

It is clear that learning to live with nonhuman animals in city places is a vitally important task for our time. As more and more land is developed, and more and more people move into cities, urban environments are becoming increasingly important habitat for many species, while also providing the only encounter that many people have with nonhuman animals. (van Dooren & Rose, 2012, p. 17)

This focus on multi-species relations disrupts human-centred notions of city life and acknowledges that urban assemblages necessarily include nonhuman animals that have their own lives to live. In this regard, it is worth noting that while cities are largely viewed (by humans) as human places, even in very dense urban environments, human animals are far outnumbered by nonhuman animals (Marchesini, 1997). Moreover, animal species are entangled with complex assemblages that create dependencies, ‘response-abilities’ (Barad, 2007, Haraway, 2016), and imperatives to care. In her 2008 book *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway wrote about human/nonhuman animal relations and introduced the concept of *multispecies justice* that is increasingly used in work associated with multi-species relations (e.g., Celermajer et. al., 2021; Tschakert et al., 2021; van Dooren et al, 2016).
In the 2021 book, *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*, Danielle Celermajer considers ‘the politics of care’ in multi-species relations. She asks:

What does it mean to care across species lines, against a backdrop of a history of domestication that is itself fraught with domination?...The singularity of the earth, now pervaded with the artefacts of human life, also means that there is no longer any place where others could live entirely free from the effects that humans are having on them. Even those animals and ecosystems we call wild, and that live, in theory, independent of us, are now infused with the atmosphere we (or perhaps more accurately some of us) have made. We, the ones who claimed to be bringing progress to the whole world, are ubiquitous. (pp. 172-173)

Celermajer goes on to discuss the difficulties of negotiating human/nonhuman relations in ways that are ethical and responsive to historical realities, power imbalances, and complex more-than-human interdependencies.

**Reeling It In – The Participatory Research Project**

Concepts of care and multispecies justice became part of my thinking as I considered the relationships between children and nonhuman animals in our participatory research project. While on their neighbourhood walks, students took several photographs of nonhuman animals. Many of the photographs were part of highly urbanized encounters with non-domesticated animals, such as squirrels and birds (Figure 21.2). In our focus group discussions, some students also talked about encountering animals in their regular travels through neighbourhoods. These animals were associated with everyday assemblages of ‘walking to school’ or ‘time with family on the weekend’ or ‘hanging out at the park’.

“There's like so many different playgrounds but you can also see wild life, like crows and squirrels. The beautiful wildlife of a crow!”

--from focus group discussions with students
Students’ photographs/captions also touched on relationships with urban ‘wildlife’, such as coyotes that roam in local parks (Figure 21.3). Discussions about coyotes largely focused on threats to human safety.

“I think you see [coyotes] mostly at night though. Those animals don’t come out at like day when there’s a whole bunch of people.”

--from focus group discussions with students (re: Figure 21.3.)

“It is surrounded by a tall fence which keeps animals that could harm you out of your play space. I think that this is a safe place to play.”

--from focus group discussions with students
In addition to non-domesticated animals, a few students also highlighted their relationships with domesticated/companion dogs (Figure 21.4). These dogs were featured as part of play activities, as well as conflicts emerging through the more-than-human arrangements of parks and city streets. In a classroom activity where students were asked to generate questions related with their photographs, one student asked: *What if dogs had more rights?*

“There’s this kind of ravine and it’s pretty populated and there’s like three treehouses there so me and my older sister we and my dog, we always bring my dog for some reason, we’d go there and we’d look at the treehouses.”

--from focus group discussions with student
“There’s a rule on Queen’s Park that you have to have your dog on a leash unless you’re in the dog park, because the other day this boy was riding his bike and he had his leash off the dog and the dog was running around and it ran out into the street and almost got hit by a car.”

--from focus group discussions with students

“But it keeps dogs, like people with dogs away from your kids playing...The dogs could chase after the kids or something and then there's a huge freak out from the parents being mad at the person with the dog.”

--from focus group discussions with students
In terms of other domesticated animals, some students took photographs of the Queens Park Petting Farm, a city-owned facility where people could see and pet/handle animals such as goats, cows, rabbits, chickens and ducks (Figure 21.5).

![Figure 21.5 Caption: This is a fun and friendly place to go because of the variety of animals. It’s also fun because you can touch the animals and if anything should happen the staff there is always willing to help. Photograph and caption by student.]

Originally installed as a zoo for wild animals and exotic pets in the early 1900’s, this location has housed animals in various configurations over time, including serving as a petting zoo/farm for the last several decades. Notably, the City of New Westminster temporarily closed this attraction in 2020 and is currently in the process of re-visioning the space, possibly as a sustainability-related demonstration and learning space. While insisting that “the comfort and care of the animals has always been the City’s top priority” (CNW, n.d.-i, para. 3), in a press release the city also acknowledged that it can no longer sustain proper animal welfare practices in the petting farm.
In 2021, in a nearby location in Queen’s Park, the city installed a public art collection entitled *Welcome to the Zoo*. This collection of steel animals is meant to reference the history of the former Queen’s Park Zoo as well as relationships between early settlers and wildlife. Commenting on the exhibit, the mayor stated that the artwork “draws attention to the impact that human activity has had on the natural world” (CNW, 2021, para. 3). Since children and nonhuman animals have been part of assemblages of entertainment and spectacle in this location for over 100 years, it is not surprising that zoo-ness and an emphasis on settlers continues to seep through into current realities. It remains to be seen what the space will become, but it is sure to be a learning space (regardless of its form) that will plug into species relations.

Continuing to think with assemblages – and extending things in another direction – there were also subtle intra-species implications in photographs/captions that did not directly feature nonhuman animals. For example, during focus group discussions related with the Queen’s Park turf field (Figure 21.6), in addition to discussing play, some students attended to the materiality of the field itself.

“Grass has dirt...when it’s mixed with water it makes mud and you can slip but turf you can’t, because there’s not mud. It’s just tires.”

--from focus group discussions with students

Well sometimes the turf makes you itchy, like the fake grass and the black dirt it makes you kind of itchy sometimes...except turf gets everywhere like those little, it gets in my shoes...Can you have artificial grass without the little pellets?”

--from focus group discussions with students
These students made connections between their play experiences and the ‘little pellets’ or ‘tires’ that were part of the turf field. As suggested throughout this dissertation, such play encounters are entangled with an array of bodies (human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic) acting together. In this case, the turf field might bring this play encounter into association with: rubber crumb, debates about environmental impacts of artificial turf, marketing messages, government reports, sustainability discourses, heavy metals, policies, regulatory limits, microorganisms, earthworms, temperature, recreation planning, tire recycling practices, storm drainage, microplastics and more. As suggested in the first chapter of this dissertation (in the example of a child-with-tire swing play encounter), such tire-related play is also entangled with the lives of children (and others) in parts of the world where tire rubber is sourced and deforestation is taking place. In the case of New Westminster, this sort of play might also relate with life in and near the river, including freshwater ecosystems and the lives of fish.
Reeling It In – Species Relations in New Westminster

My recurring fish-related thinking made its way into how I engage with the above photographs and narratives put forth by students. I think about the multiple ways that children’s lives are entangled with nonhuman bodies, including various species of nonhuman animals. I consider how nonhuman animals have been used for spectacle and entertainment in Queen’s Park over time – and how material-discursive colonial realities have persisted and become enfolded with these relations. I wonder about Indigenous traditions, knowledges, and practices related with multi-species relations on this land. I think about the potential of paying closer attention to everyday multi-species relations.

I also wonder: If the child-friendly city is a learning city, as suggested by many scholars, practitioners and people I interviewed for this research, then how might learning related with species relations happen? In discussing how to work with children to cultivate a ‘natureculture common worlds’ sensibility, Affrica Taylor (2013) suggests that such learning practices could:

Foster children’s dispositions to include all members of their common worlds natureculture collective, to trace threads of connection between themselves and others in their common worlds, to be curious about the differences of others in these common worlds, and to work on the challenges and opportunities thrown up by these relations of difference. This kind of pedagogy would encourage children to situate themselves within the real worlds in which they live. It would show them ways of acting together with the others with whom they share these worlds, to ensure that they collectively create the best possible enmeshed future (p. 124).

This ‘common worlds’ approach explores how children might better live with more-than-human others (see also Hodgins, 2014, 2019; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017). It also addresses intergenerational environmental justice, interspecies justice, and the relational ethics involved in everyday interspecies encounters (e.g., Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). Operating in this way challenges human exceptionalism and the idea that human lives are more valuable than other lives. It is also connected with efforts to grapple with the weighty planetary concerns.
(e.g., species extinction, climate change) and the impact of human activity on nonhuman entities.

In the City of New Westminster, as suggested by the above photographs and captions offered by children in the participatory project, there are a multitude of opportunities to explore multi-species relations. Children are always learning with the city, whether or not we set out specific educational agendas for this learning. Through everyday urban encounters, children learn about the way things work and the relations that matter. Attention to these encounters, and the complex intra-connections of human/nonhuman life in the city, opens up possibilities for fostering more life-affirming multi-species relations.

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Thus, I end this fishing experiment with a simple line of connection, made thick through diffractively grappling with it over time: Child-friendliness and multi-species relations in New Westminster are entangled in complex, historicized, materialized, and storied ways. As children become-with nonhuman animals in the city, it is important to approach these entanglements with curiosity and care.
Chapter 22. Remembering: Revisiting the City as a Site of Learning

“Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers.”

--Karen Barad, in Dolphijn & Van Der Tuin, 2012, p. 5

In this chapter I engage with the process of remembering – with the idea that a wide range of colonial histories are entangled with current life in New Westminster, including the lives of young people, in ways that endure and matter. Here I operate with the idea that doing child-friendliness is a highly contextual and situated activity. I also argue that there is value in making stronger connections between the learning domain of the Child and Youth Friendly Community (CYFC) strategy and efforts to address the colonial past/present of New Westminster. As part of this, I recognize that materiality in New Westminster invites, and in some cases demands, grappling with such complex and thorny realities.

I begin this chapter by briefly outlining how the City of New Westminster is already creating opportunities for children to learn about the histories of the city. I then consider how this might be extended to better connect with colonial entanglements that are making themselves materially known in this place, including through the re-building of the New Westminster Secondary School.

Heritage

New Westminster is commonly identified as a richly storied place with historical significance for the region.

“We’re a very old community and have obviously evolved a little bit differently than most suburban communities.”

--from interview with city official
“As a central gathering place for more than 10,000 years, an early pioneer settlement, BC’s oldest incorporated city (1859), and the first capital of British Columbia, the land of New Westminster and the buildings on it tell a long story. Historic buildings, sites and landscapes reflect the forces that shape a community and are the tangible elements of the past that help make this community unique.” (CNW, n.d.-d, para.1)

The physical arrangements of the city – including architecture, landmarks, public art, interpretive signage, memorial plaques/structures, street names – offer suggestions about the past and current life of New Westminster. As part of this, there are a large number of designated heritage buildings and a heritage conservation area aimed at preserving and celebrating the city’s history. In addition to various annual events with historic significance (e.g., the Hyack Festival, Heritage Homes Tour and Tea, RiverFest, May Day), there is also a tradition of carrying out community-led Jane’s Walks, which are interpretive walks (inspired by the urban theorist Jane Jacobs) where people share current and past stories about local neighbourhoods. As well, the New Westminster Museums and Archives, which operates across three locations in the city, houses objects, photographs and archival records related with New Westminster’s histories. Its mission is “to enhance knowledge and deepen understanding of the City and its diverse peoples – from the First Nations cultures to the multicultural community of today – by illuminating past events, exploring current issues and facilitating conversations around future possibilities” (CNW, n.d.-e).

The City of New Westminster has made commitments to adopting decolonizing practices in various ways. This includes responding to the Calls to Action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and to taking steps toward reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples associated with this land over time. As part of this, City Council has committed to: engaging and developing ongoing relationships with Indigenous nations, bands, communities, and individuals; mandating training for city staff and council members on the history and legacy of residential schools and colonialism; examining the historical actions of the city as they relate to Indigenous peoples; ensuring that the city’s engagement practices and
processes are inclusive and promote understanding and respect for all cultures; applying a social equity lens to ensure that all residents can access, participate in, and benefit from city facilities, infrastructure, programs, and services; and providing the community with opportunities to learn the history and legacy of colonialism (CNW, n.d.-h).

In New Westminster, decolonizing practices also include the naming and re-naming of buildings, streets and landmarks. For example, in 2014, a new school in the downtown area, the École Qayqayt Elementary School, was named in recognition of the Qayqayt First Nation. In 2021, Richard McBride Elementary School (named in 1929 after a man who expressed anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian views during his time as Premier of British Columbia from 1903-1915) was renamed to Skwo:wech Elementary School. Skwo:wech is an Indigenous (Upriver Halq’eméylem dialect) word for sturgeon, a fish that is both a “primary food source for Indigenous communities on the river...[and] also figures largely in the myths and stories of Coast Salish Peoples” (MacLellan, 2021).

In addition, in 2019 the City of New Westminster and the Tŝilhqot’in Nation (one of the First Nations with a connection to the city) co-hosted a ceremony to acknowledge the wrongful trial and hanging of Tŝilhqot’in War Chief Ahan. The ceremony included gatherings at the old courthouse as well as the high school (once a cemetery site) where it is believed that this chief is buried. The event followed the removal of a controversial statue of Justice Matthew Begbie, B.C.’s first chief justice who ordered the execution of Chief Ahan in 1865, and five other Tŝilhqot’in leaders in 1864. In 2020, New Westminster and the Tŝilhqot’in Nation became ‘sister communities’, making shared commitments to relationship building and working together (CNW, 2020b).

New Westminster has also made attempts to recognize the harm caused to other groups (e.g., ethno-cultural groups) by colonial projects and practices in the city over time. For example, in 2010 the city “acknowledged and apologized to the Chinese community for past practices resulting in discrimination and exclusion” (CNW, 2016, p. 29). In addition, in 2021, the City of New Westminster recognized (through interpretive signage, the naming of city infrastructure, and proclaiming a day of remembrance) New Westminster’s role in turning away
a ship, called the Komagata Maru, in 1914 and sending it back to India with disastrous consequences for passengers (Mcmanus, 2021a). In response to the city proclaiming May 23rd as *Komagata Maru Remembrance Day*, a spokesperson for the *Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society* stated “It’s a great tribute to those Komagata Maru passengers who suffered a lot during the tragedy...We can’t undo the past but we can move forward and leave a legacy for future generations by educating them about the past” (Mcmanus, 2021, para. 5).

**Links between New Westminster’s Colonial Past/Present and the CYFC Strategy**

The *learning* domain of the CYFC strategy includes the following action item: “In conjunction with the New Westminster Museum and Archives, place interpretative objects around the city that describe the history, nature and points-of interest in a child and youth friendly manner” (CYFC, 2016, p. 39). While the extent to which the municipality has placed interpretive objects around the city in this way has not been specifically reported on, the city has made efforts to enhance children’s place-based historical learning through objects (and related programming) at the Museums and Archives. For example, the museums facilitate a range of *heritage school programs* for children and youth on-site and in schools, including: guided tours, a mobile museum (i.e., guided explorations of curated objects), Edukits (i.e., educational kits for offsite use), and school-based programs around particular themes (CNW, n.d.-e). While school-based programs are weighted toward settler-colonial content (e.g., Victorian households, the gold rush, the working waterfront), they also include sessions specifically on local First Nations’ cultures and legacies of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. The tensions in this particular mix of educational programs echoes, to some degree, the tensions in New Westminster more widely around both celebrating the past of this ‘Royal City’, yet also coming to terms with legacies of colonial damages, displacements, and erasures.

In addition to formal programming, as suggested in the CYFC strategy, historical learning can also happen through everyday encounters with objects in the city. Such objects, and their material-discursive arrangements, offer an array of opportunities to learn about complex realities, past and present, entangled with the city. This is in line with Claire Freeman’s (2006)
assertion (quoted in the CYFC strategy) that the public realm is “where children and youth learn about society, where they explore it, observe it, absorb its values and gain a sense of belonging” (p. 76). In terms of such learning, there are many aspects of New Westminster that invite questions related with colonialisms – particularly settler-colonialism, a form of colonialism where Indigenous peoples are displaced/erased by settlers who come to stay and claim sovereignty over appropriated land (Wolfe, 2006). In the face of colonial silences and erasures, in New Westminster this sort of learning is sometimes provoked by matter, with very little language to accompany it. Below I outline how materiality associated with the New Westminster Secondary School presents openings for this sort of learning.

Lessons from Underneath the New Westminster Secondary School

In 2021, the newly built New Westminster Secondary School opened its doors to approximately 2000 students in grades 9-12. After many years of negotiation, community consultations, discussions with stakeholder groups, an archeological investigation of the site, and several land transfers with the city, this school had been constructed on a relatively small L-shaped piece of land next to the previous secondary school. This previous school, opened in 1949, was built on top of a cemetery that had not been decommissioned. The cemetery was used in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s as a burial ground for Chinese, Sikh, and Indigenous communities as well as for prisoners, the poor, stillborn babies and patients from institutions (i.e., The Provincial Hospital for the Insane/Woodlands School and Essondale/Riverview) (Golder Associates, 2017).

In preparing to re-place this school, the school district engaged with groups (e.g., Indigenous communities, the Chinese Benevolent Association, the Legacy Initiatives Advisory Council, Inclusion BC) that had a connection with, or history of, ancestral burials on the site (NWS, n.d.). As part of this process, the school district committed to not building on any known burial areas and to preserving the historical significance of the site. They also struck a Memorialization Advisory Committee to advise on how to memorialize the protected areas of the site, indicating that a memorial park would be built on these areas once the new school was
completed. The consultation materials for the project included the following image (Figure 22.1) of the proposed re-configured site.

Now that the school has been completed, the older school will be taken down and the memorial park will be created on the protected areas in several phases over three years. Plans for the park include green spaces, pathways, art, interpretive signage, engraved stones and plaques, gathering areas, and a memorial wall (NWS, 2020, p. 11). There will also be the ability to post stories and memories to the website and the development of yearly programs of memorialization. Designs for the memorial area indicate that the materiality of the site will be used to convey particular concepts (e.g., healing, interconnection, ‘drawing together’).
are also plans to involve students from the school in creating elements of the park and in educational activities related with it over time. Often referred to as a passive park, the material-discursive realities of this space might make it one of the most agentic and active parks in the city.

Importantly, in this case, materiality is not only implicated in the proposed education programming of this memorial area, but has necessitated it. The agency of bones underneath the school (acting in assemblage with other elements) have helped bring about forms of acknowledgement and accountability related with this burial site. They have also sparked difficult conversations about the colonial past/present in the city, including how some people have been racialized and marginalized over time. The undeniable existence of these bones has made some realities more real and some buried stories partially legible. The bones have also challenged existing stories and set the conditions for different stories to be told, and questions to be raised. Since the former school site is now identified as a memorial site, the acknowledgement of these bones has literally changed the map of New Westminster.

Connections with the CYFC Strategy and Child-Friendliness

As suggested through the example of the New Westminster Secondary School, the (material-discursive) configuration of the city invites questioning and learning about important issues, including those related with colonialisms. This example provides an opportunity to think through how histories are not fixed and linear, but are continually transformed in relationship through matter-and-meaning-making. Such exploration also creates new possibilities for thinking and acting in relation with painful colonial histories. In the example of the school it is easy to see how young people are connected with such learning projects concerning these histories. However, I suggest that they are also connected with these issues in unacknowledged ways, through their everyday engagements with and movements through the city. Thus, it might be fruitful to more explicitly connect goals in the CYFC strategy with efforts to address the colonial past/present of New Westminster. Such connections seem especially appropriate
in the context of a city that, as stated in its Official Community Plan, aspires to be both “grounded in the past and forward thinking” (CNW, 2020a, p.27).
PART IV: IMPLICATIONS

In Part IV, comprised of one chapter (Chapter 23), I address some of the implications of this inquiry on research and practice related with the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy and urban child-friendliness. In doing so, I highlight some of the ideas, concepts, and arguments raised in this inquiry as well as make additional connections. In thinking through how the strategy works – and might work – with other bodies toward change, I pick up a central question in Gilles Deleuze’s work: *How might one live?* (May, 2005).
Chapter 23. Conclusion: Living – How Might We?

Our task is to ask and answer afresh, always once more because it is never concluded, the question of how one might live. It is a question we ask and answer not solely with our words or our thoughts but with our individual and collective lives, in an experimentation that is neither guaranteed nor doomed but always in the process of becoming.

--Todd May, 2005, p. 153

In this dissertation, I have explored the complexities involved in striving to make New Westminster more child-friendly as well as some creative capacities associated with these efforts. In various ways this research has taken up the refrain: *How does the New Westminster Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy work with other related bodies toward change? How might it?* In pursing these questions, I have worked with a range of (human and nonhuman) others and followed various lines of inquiry. I have done so with the idea that there are no set answers to these questions, but that partial and situated responses might emerge through engagement and experimentation. I have also operated with a sense that urban child-friendliness is a process – a situated and entangled doing – that is necessarily connected with an array of complex assemblages that are always in flux.

This chapter offers a pause/gathering/conclusion of sorts in an immanent inquiry process where there are no pre-given beginnings or endings. Here, from the middle, I re-engage with aspects of the research, churning them through once again to see what might become of it. Thus, I revisit some of the thinking emerging through this dissertation and suggest further connections with research and practice. I also address contributions and limitations of the inquiry and future directions that might extend from these. As part of this, I think through the concept of *living* as it relates with a key question permeating the work of Gilles Deleuze: *How might one live?* (May, 2005).
Contributing

As suggested throughout this document, a wide range of scholars are working with posthumanist, new materialist and nonrepresentational theories in research associated with children and childhoods. What this inquiry adds to these growing bodies of work is an example of how such theories can be used in relation with child-friendly cities. It also critically explores how this sort of thinking/doing might be further employed in participatory research and practice with young people. In addition, through providing an account of inquiry that shifted from a qualitative toward a more post-qualitative approach, I have also attempted to identify some of the challenges, contradictions, and opportunities associated with thinking differently in this sort of research. In doing so, I have engaged in a diffractive and cartographic inquiry process that incorporates empirical as well as conceptual elements.

This dissertation document offers a series of heterogenous writing pieces intended to provoke thought and create new connections. Each chapter involves an entanglement of arborescent and rhizomatic thinking/doing as the study moves toward a more post-qualitative approach. This includes accounts of how making such a shift challenges my habits of mind and leanings about ‘where to go next?’ in the research. In putting together the chapters, I draw on a range of elements associated with the inquiry (e.g., stories, photographs, interview quotes, archival material, municipal documents) and experiment with configuring things in different ways. As part of this, I continually engage with the material-discursive complexities involved in enacting the CYFC strategy in New Westminster. For example, Chapter 13 (Moving) highlights the ways that matter and meaning are entangled with children’s experiences of moving through the city. This chapter draws heavily on children’s photographs and narratives from our participatory research project, while at the same time exploring how the concept of assemblage might offer something new and useful in relation with children’s travels to/from school.

Working with assemblage, other chapters explore how nonhuman bodies work with other bodies in processes of collective agency. For example, Chapter 12 (Snowing) considers how weather helped create intensities and became part of the research process – a contribution that might traditionally go un-noted. Picking up on another element that might be
missed when considering child-friendliness, Chapter 14 (Listening) makes linkages between urban soundscapes and the composition of city-related assemblages.

Several other chapters focus, in part, on the research process itself and how the sensibilities of the research (outlined in Chapter 7) help shape the inquiry. For example, Chapter 10 (Mapping) follows/maps the photo exhibit from our participatory project across time and space. It highlights an important aspect of working from a relational ontology – that bodies/entities become what they are through their relations. This process of mapping and diffractively thinking through the research (differently) over time is taken up across several chapters. Notably, Chapter 21 (Caring/Fishing) explores how diffractive thinking can work on research and how unexpected encounters can force thought (Deleuze, 1994) that moves research in generative directions.

Chapter 21 is also an experiment in moving the child ‘in and out of focus’ (Kraftl, 2020) in reconsidering relations between nonhuman animals, children, and urban child-friendliness. In doing so, this chapter also picks up strands of thought from Chapter 4 (The City), suggesting that efforts to make New Westminster more child-friendly are necessarily situated and connected with its colonial history. Relationships between New Westminster’s history and current realities are also addressed in Chapter 22 (Remembering) when discussing the burial ground and planned memorial associated with the New Westminster Secondary School. Importantly, this chapter highlights how histories can make themselves felt materially, and are enfolded with the present in important material-discursive ways.

Some chapters feature theory quite prominently. For example, Chapter 15 (Playing) takes the concept of affordance, a concept commonly used in work related with child-friendly cities, and re-considers it through a relational ontology. As well, Chapter 19 (Working) uses the concept of multiplicity in arguing that ‘more than one, but less than many’ CYFC strategies might be at work in New Westminster. However, it is worth noting that these chapters, while concerned with theory, are also very much connected with the doing of urban child-friendliness. For example, re-thinking the concept of affordance has potential implications for children’s play in New Westminster and efforts by city planners and designers to create fun and
lively play spaces. In addition, the concept of multiplicity, while challenging to think with, has practical applications in collaborative efforts to make cities more child friendly. The practices involved in these sorts of collaborations are important in New Westminster, as suggested in Chapter 18 (Practicing).

In terms of other practical concerns, Chapter 11 (Engaging) focuses on the engagement of young people in the school-based participatory research project and its connections with child/youth engagement in the city. Again, assemblage thinking is used here to think through the ethical and relational entanglements involved in engagement processes. Similarly, Chapter 16 (Learning) explores potentials for children to learn with the City of New Westminster, highlighting in particular, children’s relationships with infrastructure, civic processes and city-related flows. The flow of immigration, an important part of everyday realities in this city, is addressed in Chapter 20 (Belonging) which explores connections between the CYFC strategy and the school district Sanctuary Schools Policy. A sense of belonging is something addressed in Chapter 17 (Loitering) as well, a chapter that argues for re-thinking loitering practices in the city and suggests that loitering might even be an avenue for exploring city-related realities. In this chapter I also argue that loitering/hanging around in public space becomes something different depending on the assemblages with which it is connected. This idea – that bodies/entities become what they are through their relations – was explored throughout this dissertation and is crucial to approaching child-friendly cities through a relational ontology.

**Cutting and Limiting**

It is worth noting that much more could be explored in each of the chapters (especially those in Part IV) of this dissertation. Having said this, and following Rosi Braidotti (2019), “any cartographic account is necessarily selective, partial and never exhaustive” (p. 33). Similarly, Karen Barad (2007) suggests that research always makes ‘cuts’ that bring certain things into being and that limit or exclude others. There is a tendril-like quality to many of the short chapters in this document that open up lines of thought, yet only take things so far. The intent is for these chapters to intra-connect and work together in assemblage. They might also inspire
questions, further thought, and novel connections that might be picked up in assemblages outside the defined boundaries of the research.

It is also important to acknowledge that there are various ways to productively carry out studies related with child-friendly cities, including through knowledge projects focused on indicators, normative data, structural inequities, human experiences and more. In some circumstances these approaches might even be compatible with posthumanist approaches. Indeed, this dissertation research is entangled with work emerging through a number of different onto-epistemologies. While such entanglements can certainly present problems and challenges, operating from a relational ontology implies that there are necessarily multiple intra-related realities and practices at play in any given circumstance. Relatedly, as suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), structured/arborescent and unstructured/rhizomatic modes of operating are not dualistically opposed, but are enmeshed and inextricably connected. Thus, within this inquiry, there are elements of both arborescent and rhizomatic practices operating together. In a similar way, as suggested in Chapter 18, collaborative efforts toward urban child-friendliness can also be conceived as entanglements of diverse, overlapping and sometimes contradictory approaches and practices. The idea here is that a child-friendly city is not an entity with particular characteristics, but a doing and a becoming.

**Extending**

“We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects”

(Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 294)

While many things have changed since aspects of the research were carried out, I work with the idea that this inquiry continues to relate with the CYFC strategy and its potential, albeit in ways that are continually transforming. Thus, in various chapters of this dissertation I have suggested
possible directions for future research and practice (e.g., associated with planning, civic engagement, exploring urban soundscapes, learning with infrastructure). However, more than offering identifiable possibilities, what I have attempted to do through this inquiry is explore ways of thinking/doing differently in relation with the CYFC strategy. Thus, through on-the-ground examples, I have employed posthumanist (and related) thought in mapping some of the relational entanglements and possibilities associated with urban child-friendliness in this context. I have operated rhizomatically at times – taking lines of flight and proceeding in unanticipated directions – with the idea that something interesting and useful might emerge through this process. All the while, I have been concerned with potential (i.e., a sense of more or the virtual) that is implicated in asking how the CYFC strategy works – and might work – toward change.

How might we live?

I end this chapter, and this dissertation, with a final connection that offers a closing and several openings. It relates with living (a domain of the CYFC strategy that I have not yet picked up here). A key question that permeates the work of Gilles Deleuze is: how might one live? This is not a prescriptive nor a moral question (e.g., how should one live?), but a creative question suggesting potential and new possibilities for living (May, 2005). For Deleuze, ‘one’ encompasses not only the individual human subject, but multiple configurations of subjectivity, or forms of ‘we’. Thus, the question might also be stated: how might we live? This is a question that resonates with concepts of child-friendly cities as well as the approach taken in this inquiry.

Questions of living are enfolded in research and practice related with child-friendly cities. Such work has focused on improving children’s lives across a number of intrarelated realms (e.g., housing, safe streets, provision of play spaces). Livability has also emerged as a key concept in municipal planning and city-making more broadly (Grant et al. 2017). Related with this are concerns with urban lived experiences, the lived city, and the creation of urban vitalities. As suggested throughout this dissertation, there is also a growing body of
posthumanist, new materialist (and related) inquiry associated with how children might live well with more-than-human worlds (e.g., Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2015; Taylor, 2013). Some of this research specifically focuses on children’s relationships with cities and moves toward child-friendly cities (e.g., Malone, 2018). This work approaches children’s lives in new ways, including re-conceptualizing children’s connections with ‘nature’ and other aspects of their ‘environments’. It involves re-thinking children’s relations with concepts like ‘sustainability’, such as when Pia Christensen and her colleagues suggest that “notions of ‘sustainability’ need to be accompanied or even supplanted by notions of multiple versions of ‘life’ in sustainable urban places” (Christensen et al., 2017, p. 227). This work attends to how matter co-constitutes life and how agency is distributed among various arrangements of human and nonhuman bodies.

In terms of the New Westminster CYFC strategy, the concept of living is taken up in particular ways (e.g., through the living domain focused on housing and neighbourhood amenities) as well as more broadly through references to: standards of living, living space, living in poverty, earning a living, cost of living, balanced life, life events, street life, quality of life, civic life, community life, life satisfaction, life expectancy, life course, family life, full life, and more (CYFC, 2016). Wrapped up with the CYFC strategy are desires for children’s (and others’) lives to become different and to transform in positive ways. Working from a relational ontology, how children live in/with cities is complex and associated with a vast range of bodies and forces. In this way, creating new arrangements for living necessarily involves an array of more-than-human relations, assemblages, and forms of ‘we’. How might we live?

In considering how entangled entities might relate in more life-affirming ways, Braidotti (2020b) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the intra-connectedness of life, suggesting that “‘we’ are in this together, but we are not one and the same” (p. 465). Her approach to affirmative politics highlights “the importance of thinking differently about what we are in the process of becoming” (Braidotti, 2018a, p. 341). In various ways I have taken up this thinking in considering how children and the City of New Westminster are engaged in ongoing co-constitutive processes – the child-becoming-with-city and the city-becoming-with-
child. From this thinking, it is not a matter of deciding whether children’s lives can or should be connected with particular realities (e.g., immigration, species relations, colonial legacies) but acknowledging how their lives are already connected with these things and then asking what more might be made of it. It is worth noting that children themselves make such connections through their everyday encounters (e.g., with animals, water flows, traffic, sound) as well as through their concerns with complex issues such as sustainability and climate change – realities that are increasingly becoming important to many young people, including in the City of New Westminster (Dobie, 2019; Godfrey, 2019).

Thus, in this dissertation I have attempted to make connections with city-related realities that are less typically highlighted in work related with child friendly cities. This goes beyond a focus on children’s play and mobilities, with the idea that child-friendliness can be these things too, but that it can also be more. As part of this, I have aimed (along with others) to produce nuanced accounts of children’s relations with cities – and also explore how their lives are entangled with complex and shifting more-than-human webs of life. I have done so with the idea that the problems and opportunities facing children and cities (and their multiple relations) are knotty and complex – and will certainly require different sorts of thinking/doing going forward. My hope is that this inquiry offers some unique and productive ways of conceiving urban child-friendliness in this context and that interesting and useful things have, and might yet, escape and overspill the bounds of this inquiry.
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