

Material knowledges Intra-acting van der Tuin's new materialism with Barad's agential realism

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Abstract

The paper will discuss the theory of Iris van der Tuin's New Materialism together with Karen Barad's Agential Realism. The purpose of this approach is to find differing practices that help to construct a turn to what is considered a relational ontology in which ethics, epistemology, ontology and methodology merged into each other. This new paradigm is a transversal approach that generates genealogies of minoritarian philosophies and feminist theories in order to approach matter as a dynamic, agentic and relational entanglement in which human and non-human practices intra-act equally. As a result, a different point of departure is produced in order to generate knowledge, since instead of thinking through separate entities, new materialism and agential realism depart from the relations of those entities understanding them as dynamic processes. Apart from an active approach to matter, these theories are framed under an affirmative approach to theory making, queering the traditional sense of linearity and moving away from dichotomical binaries.

Palabras clave: new materialism; contemporary feminism; agential realism; diffractive readings; affirmative critique; queer linearity

Resum. *Intraaccionar el nou materialisme de Van der Tuin amb el realisme agencial de Karen Barad*

Aquest article proposa una discussió sobre la teoria del nou materialisme entès per Iris van der Tuin conjuntament amb la teoria del realisme agencial de Karen Barad. L'objectiu principal d'aquest enfocament és trobar pràctiques diferencials que ajudin a construir un gir cap al que s'anomena ontologia relacional, en la qual ètica, epistemologia, ontologia i metodologia s'entenen com a inseparables. Aquest nou paradigma transversal genera genealogies de filosofies minoritàries i teories feministes per entendre la matèria com un entrellaçament dinàmic, agencial i relacional on pràctiques humanes i no humanes intraaccionen d'una manera igualitària. Així doncs, el nou materialisme i el realisme agencial produeixen un punt de partida diferent per generar coneixement que, en lloc de pensar a través d'entitats clarament diferenciades, parteixen d'aquestes relacions com a processos dinàmics inseparables. A més d'oferir un acostament a la matèria com a agent actiu, aquestes teories s'emparen en un enfocament afirmatiu del procés de construcció teòrica, alteren la noció clàssica de linealitat i s'allunyen de binaris dicotòmics.

Paraules clau: nou materialisme; feminisme contemporani; realisme agencial; lectures difractives; crítica afirmativa; linealitat queer

Summary

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*Utrecht, April 2009, Santa Cruz, March 2014,¹
Diffracting classrooms, dialogues, teaching-learning processes. . .me: Do you think this is possible? Iris van der Tuin: let's try to make it in a small essay, and if it works, it will part of your research. . .me: But how do I know that this is the right way to do it. Karen Barad: Try to apply it somewhere else, if you can't you are in the process.*

Contemporary, the fact that society is changing widely and multiply is becoming part of a general knowledge that is widely spread and accepted. Recent events (such as European and North American elections) are orienting a specific move that tends to generalize and globalize specificities across countries (or at least across Western countries). Another example of this is the increased digital mediatization that connects global villages through social networking sites, affecting individuals and transforming these identities into massive communities. That is, a specific material discourse is permeating contemporary society in multiple ways and its speed and effectiveness is making it difficult to detect in which moment a generalized crisis is dramatically affecting local communities and individuals.

Probably as a response, or maybe as a consequence, contemporary critical theory is trying to produce differing analysis to provide explanations for this fast socio-cultural change that is producing stronger hierarchies of power which, instead of being visible at the surface, remain structurally, thus perpetuating oppressive androcentric models. In 2005, Brian Massumi described this situation as “the politics of fear” (Massumi, 2005). Later, Jasbir Puar defined what she considered to be “terrorist assemblages” (Puar, 2007) or what currently Donna Haraway has labelled as “anthropocene” (2015). In Haraway’s words (2015: 160), this situation “marks severe discontinuities; what comes after will not be like what came before [...] our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge.”

Contemporary feminist theory and critical theory has developed what can be considered a new paradigm that shifts what we understand by epistemology, ontology, methodology, politics and ethics by moving beyond and with a

1. The paragraphs in italics represent conversations and reflections in between my personal memories with these authors and imaginary dialogues that they could have between them. It is a way to alter geographical space and linear time in putting together three different people in three locations. It is inspired in the conversations reproduced by Barad (2010) between Bohr y Schrodinger.

strand of monist minoritarian philosophy that helps to understand these currents changes. This paradigm is referred to as new materialism (van der Tuin, 2015; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Rogowska-Stangret, 2017; Revelles-Benavente et al., 2014; Colman, 2014; Palmer, 2014). This paradigm has grown in between these fields of knowledge and encompasses a transversal vision of knowledge that attempts to engage with the world through processes, relations, affects and intensities that push pre-established dualisms to the limits, producing instead affirmative critiques and dynamic methodologies that pursue queering linearities rather than static results. Although this terminology might seem complicated and abstract at first sight, in this article I will provide a cartographical exemplary of some of the solutions (or rather current engagements) that this paradigm offers inside what is considered in this special issue as material knowledges. In order to do this, I will provide a diffractive reading (Barad, 2007; van der Tuin, 2011) of two different but complementary strands of these material knowledges: new materialism and agential realism (Barad, 2007). The commonalities of these two strands are not coincidental. Rick Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012: 29) refer to this last one as synonymous of an immanent move that enfolds matter and meaning.

Participating in this constellation of ideas, this paper will materialize an invisible material bridge *intra-acting* between Santa Cruz (California) and Utrecht (the Netherlands) in order to produce a diffractive dialogue between agential realism and new materialism. In spite of being two contemporary branches of the same cartographical material knowledge, I claim that exploring in detail Iris van der Tuin's new materialism and Karen Barad's agential realism enables a move towards what is considered a relational ontology in which ethics, epistemology, ontology and methodology merged into each other. As a result, a different point of departure is produced in order to generate knowledge since instead of thinking through separate entities, new materialism and agential realism depart from the relations of those entities, understanding them as dynamic processes. Nevertheless, this point of departure is always already a relational process with the researcher in place, echoing Haraway's situated knowledges (1988), which is why the reader will encounter a feminist vision of both trends that proves the entanglement between ontologies, methodologies, epistemologies, ethics, politics and the researcher as part of the phenomenon to be studied and not above this phenomenon (Barad, 2007).

Understanding that phenomena only occur during the relation and not as separate entities, which is what "intra-action" stands for (Barad, 2007: 33), implies that the structure of this article will be slightly different from a traditional comparative "classification" (van der Tuin, 2015: 28). Therefore, I will depart from a methodological strand common in both, which is the explanation of diffractive readings. Secondly, I will divide the article into three differing tools that reinforce a feminist political strategy that permeates the work of both van der Tuin and Barad. This is part of my singular entanglement with these authors. I cannot understand new materialism and agential realism as different from contemporary feminist theory, they are *intra-acting*. These three

tools are affirmative critique, processual relations and affects as empirical intra-actions to produce affinities instead of identities. As previously stated, I cannot understand these three strands of material knowledges (new materialism, agential realism and feminist contemporary theory) apart from each other, which is the reason why I prevent the reader from finding an account of classificatory practices that provide similarities and differences between these two authors. I argue that understanding them diffractively provides a differing political methodology in order to engage with the (in)visible neo-liberal practices that structure unexhaustive hierarchies of power which hinder a feminist pursuit of “change” (Colman, 2014).

1. Diffractive readings

A diffractive reading is a methodology that has a genealogical trace in feminist contemporary theory. As mentioned in both van der Tuin's (2011) and Barad's work (Barad, 2014), diffraction is a methodological strategy designed by Donna Haraway (1988) in “Situated Knowledges”. An example of the embracement that this methodology has had in contemporary theory is the special issue in *Parallax* “Diffracted Worlds – Diffractive Readings: Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities” (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014). Nevertheless, in order to follow a genealogical approach (van der Tuin, 2015) of diffraction to understand the methodology that will be followed in this article, it is necessary to depart from Haraway's definition.

Haraway's book *Modest Witness@Second Millenium* (1997) provides a tentative point of departure to understand diffraction and what is the sense of diffraction that these two authors have taken as an inspiration. According to Haraway (ibid.: 16), “[d]iffraction is an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world.” This optical metaphor emphasizes “the production of difference patterns [instead of] reflexivity.” (ibid.: 34). Thus, diffraction is a point of departure, our situated knowledge as researchers, and instead of trying to think through it from an objective distance, we move towards it within differing patterns by entangling ourselves with the research process. Quoting Lynn Randolph's oil on canvas, Haraway (ibid.: 273) adds the following “diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogenous history, not about originals.”

For feminist theory and politics, the nostalgic gesture has always been very criticized (Braidotti, 1996; van der Tuin, 2008; Hemmings, 2011) because it is tempting to look back to a past of which women were never a part. Nevertheless, diffraction is not a move towards a cartographical past following a linear conceptualization of time, this is a consequence of conceiving history as a heterogeneous process and not a canonical one. Diffraction conceives time as an intra-action of past, present and future, so these are not ontologically separated but agential entanglements. That is, history as such cannot be part of a passive reality because it has never sit still for us to look at. History is a determined construct in which different discourses of power (Foucault, 2013)

merge with each other and intra-act in order to make visible certain things and invisible others so that the logics of power can remain intact. Feminist thinking has re-iterated this past in order to make visible also those who remained invisible and altered this "History" from within.

This is what Iris van der Tuin produces in the many different exercises of diffractive readings that she has performed so far (van der Tuin, 2011; 2014; 2016a; 2016b; Hoel & van der Tuin, 2013). According to van der Tuin (2014: 241), "Reading insights diffractively allows for affirming and strengthening dynamic links between schools of thought (screened memories) or scholars that only apparently work toward the same goals." She brings to the present different philosophers who were part of differing movements by intra-acting past, present and a future goal in contemporary feminist theory and critical theory studies. Rather than interacting with the conglomerated canon that philosophy provides for researchers to observe, van der Tuin offers an active review of this History through presenting other others intra-acting from within this canon, producing a revitalization of the canon and promoting its liveliness.

At a table: Barad, van der Tuin, different master's and PhD students, UNESCO, Paris (Santa Cruz, Utrecht, Paris, Barcelona, etc.)

Barad: History of science has demonstrated how important are all the elements partaking in one experiment for its success or failure, how different can be one reading from one scientist from another, and what are the possible consequences of all this processes. . .drugs with double side-effects for women because they were not tested on female rats because they could biased the whole experiment due to their periods.

van der Tuin: History is not there for us to look at it. . .Rather, it finds us through differing technological and wireles waves. . .Infinite algorithmics searches that provide unknown philosphers. . .Iterations at work.

Or. . .what if the way knowledge is contemporarily created and reproduced is only a manner to go towards old futures based upon failed representations of reality. . .

Opening the loop: thinking through. . .van der Tuin & Barad: opening the new pasts in order to entangle with present-futures. . .The surprise of the past that we find in the future.

The twist that Barad brings to this definition in order to iterate the reworking of the concept itself comes from quantum physics (Barad, 2007). She provides a very enlightening metaphor in order to shed light upon the necessity of understanding phenomena in terms of their dynamic nature and not as just a simplistic static result. That is to say, her explanation of diffraction comes from the paradoxical nature of light itself, as a wave and a particle which are at the same time both mutually excluding properties from an ontological perspective. The two slits detector allows knowing the differing nature of light once everything is being processed and only during that moment, entangling, at the same time, the measuring apparatus, the "object" of the observation, the

researcher and the result. All of which is caused by the diffractive nature of the light rather than reflected. Thus, she moves away from representationalist practices that mirror nature and reproduces them in a passive way (Barad, 2003) to move towards a dynamic engagement produced in determined spacetime frames (Barad, 2001). In her words, “diffraction is not only a lively affair, but one that troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/inorganic and animate/inanimate” (Barad, 2014: 168).

This produces significant differences to a conceptualization of a feminist methodology. First, she indicates how the iteration of particular concepts and quantum entanglements differ depending on how they relate to each other. This is the case with “diffraction” itself, which “at times [...] it will be an object of investigation and at other times it will serve as an apparatus of investigation” (Barad, 2007: 73). In this article, it serves as an object of investigation because it is helping us to shed light upon a feminist political toolbox thanks to the work of these two authors. This object of investigation is, at the same time, entangling with other factors that make it impossible to discern clear boundaries between them. That is, the work of these authors effectively shares homogeneities and even, at times, the same genealogies, since they refer to each other’s work quite frequently. Therefore, as Barad (2007: 88) explains, “diffraction [...] does not concern homologies but attends to specific material entanglements.” Diffraction is used here to attend to specific material entanglements produced in both in order to see what is the *new* in new materialism that can open up a feminist toolbox of political strategies, which, at the same time, is my own cartography as a feminist researcher born and raised within feminist new materialists’ work.

Coming back to how I started defining “diffraction”, to conclude I would like to iterate again Lynn Randolph’s (in Haraway, 1997: 273) description to continue with the following statement: “[d]iffraction is a narrative, graphics, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings.” Diffraction is a political technology. Therefore, diffraction is a feminist methodology that enables a consequential meaning within the entanglement of our object of research. That is, it is a quantum literacy that iterates political technologies, feminist technologies, which alter our narratives without pursuing an origin but a heterogeneous history, in which heterogeneity and history itself cannot be understood away from the relation between past, present and future, the same as the multiplicity and differing patterns that intra-act within the present. Like I said at the beginning, my take on diffraction can only be feminist and new materialist and cannot be understood without these elements. That is why in the following sections I will present how producing this diffractive reading between van der Tuin’s work and Barad’s work produces a different kind of feminist history intra-acting with present and future in order to design political technologies that produce social changes that matter. I argue that three of the many political tools that can compose a quantum entanglement for new materialist feminist politics are affirmative critiques, the

queering of causality and affinities instead of identities. Diffracting these two authors will articulate a definition for a conceptual-political box that matters to contemporary feminist theories.

2. Affirmative critiques

In her most recent work, van der Tuin affirms (2015: xvii) that her pursuit is to find “an affirmative, intra-feminist generationality of transformation.” This book is van der Tuin's declaration of feminist purposes in what can be considered a genealogical new materialist approach to feminist theories and minoritarian philosophies describing what is at stake in new materialist theories and feminisms. In fact, it provides an alternative canon for theory making and political transformation based upon what consolidates a new materialist school and her subjectivity as a new materialist and feminist researcher. Based on this work, the route to follow enables two particular paths: one is to contextualize (and because of that *putting new materialism to work* as she claimed in a previous work – Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012); two is the generative approach to affirmative critiques as intra-acting affinities instead of ontological scissions.

Nevertheless, this was already present in her very beginnings as researcher. By re-reading and contextualizing Simone de Beauvoir, van der Tuin (2009b) begins to explore what is to be an undutiful daughter by starting to establish what are affirmative critiques (one of the main tools of the feminist new materialist toolbox). Relating her own subjectivity as a feminist researcher with multiple *Simones de Beauvoir* (the anti-feminist one of her time, the multiple ones being translated, the a-woman-is-not-born-she-becomes, etc), van der Tuin relates her own *herstory* as a feminist researcher, her development, with a contemporary reading of Beauvoir that exploits multiple connections and revitalizes the incredible work that Beauvoir did in her time by situating it with the present. Thus, in bringing to the present, or rather moving to the past, or materializing a feminist future, van der Tuin settles the need to engage with a never total past in a never total present to move towards a never total future. Sometimes, this move implies engaging in differing ways than the authors of the texts were imagining... But the past never sits still.

Utrecht, 2009: van der Tuin, Lyotard, and the exhaustive condition...

In one of the classes of the “Advanced Course on Feminist Theory” that van der Tuin teaches in the gender and ethnicity program at Utrecht University, she diffractively sits at one table together with François Lyotard (1979), Bruno Latour and Vicky Kirby in order to establish one of the fundamental pillars of new feminist materialism. She explains: *we cannot think of contemporary theory in terms of oppositional logics. The minute that we are negating something, we are predicating our theory upon the logics of that, that we want to move away from.* Let's think mathematical here for a minute, negative numbers multiplied by negative numbers give a positive result, that is the affirmation of this dualist

thinking. Thinking on through oppositional thinking, we can only have the norm and whatever is not the norm, and because of being different from, it is less than (Braidotti, 1994).

This negation is always an affirmation of the norm, because we react against it and therefore, under its rules. Therefore, this affirmation is not only produced towards reading a *her*storical feminist past, but also has to do with the present homogenization of socio-cultural structures, which have proven to be unfruitful for feminist theory and politics. The norm itself is created upon a certain basis that are only materializing a certain hierarchy upon which we will always be the other, or rather the margins upon which Sandra Harding (1986) predicated her standpoint theory. However, if we accomplish its rules, if we accept this negation of it, we will always be repeating the same structures. Margins are unexhaustive, and the minute that they stop being margins, they become the norm and because of that excluding. That is why Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" (1988) was written partly as a response to this oppositional logic. If we think historically, it is general knowledge that History is written by the winners, and it is not objective. Cyclically, when the winners are someone else, they re-write History, and some are left back again in the margins, which is iteratively a partial knowledge.

It is in this trend of knowledge, it is intra-acting with these thinkers that van der Tuin's predicated her affirmative critiques or readings or responses through jumping generations (2009a). Or in Barad's words (2001), this "exteriority within the entanglement." That is to say, affirmation is presented as the possibility of being within your object of study, your own entanglement, by means of relations and not objective distance. For Barad, being in the exteriority within is the condition for objectivity, the condition for responsibility, for being accountable in the world. In her words (2007: 340):

results are possible because the agential cut enacts determinate boundaries, properties, and meanings, as well as a causal structure in the marking of the "measuring agencies" ("effect") by the "measured object" ("cause") within the phenomenon. [...] Objectivity, then, is about being accountable and responsible to what is real.

Therefore, in producing a feminist affirmation, we are being accountable to what is real within our phenomenon. We are producing determinate structures that matter for our understanding of contemporary changes, not reproducing nostalgic moves in which separability is the ontological premise since we were not part of that real, we were not intervening. We can only iteratively intervene and engage with it by means of proximities so that we are inside the phenomenon and not outside. As van der Tuin does with Beauvoir (2009b), Barad does with Butler's performativity (2003: 802) in order to break with the concept of representationalism. Affirmatively, she engages with performativity to explain a material move in which accountability is not based upon the separability of the object of representation (passive matter) and its representation (active language). Rather, she breaks with what she calls representationalism

by re-working Butler's performativity through "posthumanist performativity": "The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions." (Barad, 2003: 802).

Thus, in thinking of affirmation as a process of turning and returning iteratively throughout a continuation of a genealogical process as a new materialist approach, we are implying two things. First, that the intra-action between past, present and future is tangible and only thinkable through each other. Second, the disruption of a linear time in which things correlate to each other as a mean of causal consequences is impossible inasmuch as there is not a time preceding an action, but an entanglement within and without the action. In Barad's words (2014: 168), "[w]e might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes." Therefore, affirmation predicates in how we relate to our different genealogies, how we diffract with contemporary cartographies and how we engage with differing phenomena from within and not without. Affirmative critiques are accountabilities for how feminist research is ethically responding to feminist researchers and the other way around. It is the possibility of multiple processes, and, therefore, the political of feminist new materialisms, its situatedness.

This affirmation process is the materialization of the situatedness of new materialist constellations. In thinking through past-present-future, van der Tuin's (2015) genealogical approach responds to the canonization of scientific knowledge by pushing Haraway's situatedness to the extreme. That is to say, new materialism is the possibility of multiplicity without opposing any canonical texts so far because that would imply continuing with this linearity. Therefore, it is the possibility to produce respond-able acts towards the kind of theories that build our past as feminist researchers. In affirming, rather than opposing, we are iteratively engaging with particular genealogies that become relevant, material and visible only when entangling with the dynamic and processual object of study. It is in this active engagement that new materialism opens itself up to question whatever knowledge was pre-established, in Barad's words the possibility to make "gender-and-science-in-the-making", by providing a situated entrance to the phenomenon to explore. That is why it moves away the oppositional logic, away from the canonization of scientific texts, and towards situatedness, respond-abilities, intra-actions and methodologies of the process which are continually iterating themselves depending on the phenomenon's own becoming.

3. Queering causality

2012: Dolphijn & van der Tuin ask Barad about causality. Ghosts inhabiting the question, cartographical subjectivities interpellating the intra-action, thinking through. . . Bergson's duration, Bohr's uncertainty, Haraway's diffraction, iterating the reworking of the apparatus. . . towards Iris van der Tuin's opening 9th New Materialist Conference: "Environmental Humanities and New Materialisms: The Ethics of Decolonizing Nature and Culture."

As far as iteration goes, it is precisely in Dolphijn & van der Tuin (2012) where Barad states that causality is a dirty word and we need to be more and more precise about what we mean by causality instead of discarding that concept. Barad defines (2007: 148 [her emphasis]), “*discursive practices are causal intra-actions*—they enact causal structures through which some components (the ‘effects’) of the phenomenon are marked by other components (the ‘causes’) in their differential articulation.” Rethinking causality implies rethinking relationality, which she has defined as entangled relations, by which not only subject formation is developed but also the material re(con)figuring of the world. Thus, a causal relation is produced among these, not of origin and end but of mutual dependency.

Causality is not related with linear time and therefore it cannot be conceived as a pattern in which beginning and end follow a certain path. Causality would be the enactment, the actualization of a present, past and future in a concrete phenomenon. “The past is not present. ‘Past’ and ‘future’ are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world’s ongoing intra-activity. There is no inherently determinate relationship between past and future” (Barad, 2010: 261). Instead, she proposes a “queer linearity” based on “complementarity”: “that is, the play of indeterminacy/determinacy is vital to the analysis of measurement interactions.” (ibid: 263).

Van der Tuin’s genealogical approach (2015) has two main implications that radically alter the notion of causality. First, a new materialist genealogical approach invites revitalizations of pasts that never sit still and open up unpredictable futures. Second, it is a diffractive relation between simultaneous elements that do not necessarily share contemporary spaces and times, but which automatically reframe the present and rework past and present. Genealogical approaches are posthuman interpellations that are reworking the research we are doing, while at the same time, modify our own stance as researchers in the particular subject in which we are entangled. That is, they play with the determinacy/indeterminacy of the research process.

If we iterate the work of this article in its becoming, coming back again to (or rather towards) Beauvoir and Butler through van der Tuin’s and Barad’s eyes, this causality becomes materially alive. There are practical consequences in reading Butler through these eyes, because, on the one hand, it has consequences for causality since a representative identification of pieces of reality becomes problematic because of the assumption that there can be an ontological separability. If we think in a posthumanist performance, we are automatically relating already with differing processes in movements and not differing categories that define the world by means of claxifixation (van der Tuin, 2015). A certain causal structure has been agentially cut, which is understanding performativity as in how matter comes to matter and not as a representation of a certain identity. We will come back again to this in the following section (which is why we come back again to, but also move towards...)

But! Let's go back for a second to the present, or rather the past, or an intra-acting future . . . 2017. June. 6th. Iris van der Tuin. Genealogical approaches . . . algorithmic knowledges . . . All a causal relationship?

Deepening on this keynote lecture, one specific approximation to this queer causality comes to the foreground as exemplary: the algorithmic code and how one can be found or find someone else by someone who is not even alive. The web 3.0 is presented precisely as this queer causality. There is not a direct relationship between what someone can be looking for and what companies like Google *suggest* you are looking for. It is not a coincidence but a careful compositional program that is monitoring your preferences and giving you *the* solution, which at times is the only one preferred by the company. Nevertheless, if we go back to Barad here, there is always an exteriority within the apparatus, which in the case of van der Tuin was finding the work of Eva Louis Young (presented as part of a conference presentation in Paris, June 2017). Young was a British philosopher who died seventy-seven years ago and all of a sudden, that moment in which a posthuman interpellation is being produced between Iris van der Tuin and Eva Louis Young, the cartographies of new materialisms are reworked and reworking by a complementation produced within the technological world and Eva Louis Young (in van der Tuin's words) finds her to alter back again new materialist cartographies within feminist theories.

Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to start thinking in different logics (as happened with affirmation and Lyotard's oppositional logic) because it involves taking a closer look at our "traditional" standards as feminist researchers and activists. Causal relationships are the empirical strategies that political movements have followed ever since because they respond a very simple logic: there is a phenomenon initiating a problem, which follows a certain path. If we change the path, we solve the problem. However, if we stop thinking of identities because they fix a certain piece of reality (producing *claxifications*) how do we organize around political problems? How do we think gender? Or how do we think politics?

Let's conclude this section here by turning back to Barad... yet again...

The key is understanding that identity is not essence, fixity or givenness, but a contingent iterative performativity, thereby reworking this alleged conflict into an understanding of difference not as an absolute boundary between object and subject, here and there, now and then, this and that, but rather as the effects of enacted cuts *in a radical reworking of cause/effect*. (Barad, 2014: 173-174)

4. From identities to affinities

This notion of causality has severe implications for the concept that has articulated feminist politics ever since because clear identities with particular and settled problems cannot be solved or understood in a linear way. In new mate-

rialism, the linear logic is twisted once again since it responds to a reflection of reality and the certainty that there is one origin that can be repeated and altered if affected externally. Consequently, we are implying two things here that agential realism and new materialism alike have already argued against. First, that there is a possibility to produce ontological scissions between phenomena happening here/now and researchers (and any other element, such as methodology). Second, that phenomenon are isolated elements when, precisely, the definition of phenomenon involves a shift in referentiality insofar as “the referent is not an observation-independent object but a phenomenon. [It] is a condition for the possibility of objective knowledge.” (Barad, 2007: 120). Thus, there is no possibility for observing from above independent facts that are apparently responsible for feminist social injustices. Likewise, we cannot engage with a particular identity from the outside and the implications for subjectivity become something else (or rather nothing more...)

Van der Tuin responds to this question by means of *interpellation*. That is, “the making of a subject who is always/already a subject – allows for ideological choices and play, but determined by the grid of intersecting positions (e.g. the worker-becoming-anarchist, the bourgeois-intellectual-becoming-worker)” (van der Tuin, 2014: 231). That is, subjects are always/already but in a permanent move that only allows a momentary capture in order to intra-act with something else. The minute that the intra-action is materializing, subjectivities are becoming relational and something else. They are “disturbances”. Using the Bergsonian disturbance, van der Tuin (2014) employs his metaphor to explain how even if the pond is producing certain disturbances, setting the water in motion, that does not mean that the water has never being in motion before. For feminist politics, this has significant consequences because we need to move away from traditional accounts of human subjectivities as if they were the only element that sets things in motion, as if they were there waiting for us, that is waiting for an action to provoke a reaction (traditional linearity).

Moreover, an identity, even when in flux, is always a certain set of characteristics, of *classifications* (van der Tuin, 2015), of components that can be understood separately and mean another thing when thought together, that is, a homogeneity that tends to be compared to something else that is not itself. A clear division is made, a boundary is set Echoing Barad (2014: 168), “particular notions of identity and difference [are] defined through a colonizing logic whereby the ‘self’ maintains and stabilizes itself by eliminating or dominating what it takes to be the other, the non-I”. However, what does it mean that we cannot take identity as if part of a colonizing logic? How do we determine what the political goals are? Does it mean that the feminist identity is indeterminate? Perhaps we need to start thinking about an indeterminate feminism in which difference is the multiplicity, opening up possibilities, the quantum entanglement that enables exteriorities within a neoliberal oppression that becomes articulated via intra-actions, via affects, via intensities. In Barad’s words (2014: 168), “The existence of indeterminacies does not mean that there are no facts, no histories, no bleeding – on the contrary, indeterminacies are

constitutive of the very materiality of being, and some of us live our with pain, pleasure, and also political courage...”

Thus, in these indeterminacies is where we can find new positionalities which alter the way we engage with reality and traditional notions of subjectivities and, because of that, identities. According to van der Tuin (2015: 7): “a subject position is never fully fixed; in its fluidity, it works against the grain of the dominant discourses of malestream society and feminisms based on identity.” Working through identity instead of identities categorizes the work that we are generating by determining what it is that we live, feel and pursue politically. Thus, introducing Colman (2014: 14) in the conversation, “One way to define current feminist new materialist generational work is the desire to be mindful (and careful) not to name things by the outcomes of their relationships before we understand the *how* of the material basis of things.” Situating our bodies as researchers, as feminists, as humans, etc. in the unknown, the unpredictable, but also the accountable and the respond-able. Reworking our position depending on our location, bringing Rich’s “politics of location” (1984) to the limit.

5. Dialogues

To conclude, I would like to finish by dialoguing again with both authors in order to pursue what new materialism and agential realism practice while twisting and emphasizing its feminist nature. Let us turn back again to van der Tuin’s words (2014: 231):

Generating new concepts or traditions, new epistemologies and new futures along dynamic lines, without ‘newness’ being based on oppositional binarism, these concepts, traditions, epistemologies and futures are always generated *with* the texts and projected futures of the past, and *in* the living present as always/already moving towards a future (time cannot be pinpointed, because we are too late when we say ‘now’).

In an effort to produce concepts and/within/with methodologies in order to pursue feminist political strategies, this article was a plea to generate a toolbox with differing concepts that enable an engagement with the world without assuming a newness based upon scientific claims of innovation. Working diffractively through these two theorists allows an un/dutiful (van der Tuin, 2008) work towards feminist thinkers that are changing the way we think about contemporary times in which, indeed, “now” is already late. To this Barad (2014: 168) answers back:

Diffraction is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling. As such, there is no moving beyond, no leaving the ‘old’ behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then. There is nothing that is new; there is nothing that is not new.

In the imaginary table described at the beginning of this article, back again to how we started, van der Tuin interpellating diffraction, Barad diffracting the

new, and relational affinities altering glorious pasts always already present through a queer linearity that iterates the quantum loop. Material knowledges (coming back to the main objective of this special issue) is the opening of multiple possibilities, intensive intra-actions and affective locations which are constantly in a permanent move. Material knowledges are embodied and embedded knowledges, a plea for accountability and relations, a feminist politics of processes, affinities and generational jumps. New materialism and agential realisms are a situated position which entails thinking through feminism in a constant iteration of change. In putting together these two theories, I was not expecting to provide a list of characteristics for these two trends of knowledge, rather to see where they converge, where they correlate and how they make feminist theory formation stronger politically. Diffraction is not about comparison, but rather how things emerge and how material knowledges come to matter.

Diffractioning new materialism and agential realism provides a feminist new materialist knowledge and practice, which does not engage oppositionally with any previous theory (post-structuralism, Marxism, or any other...); neither does it try to engage with a future in a better way than before. Feminist new materialism is engaging with genealogies that visibilize feminist work, engage un/dutifully with feminist thinkers in order to think of the present in its multiplicity, in order to produce interpellations in the neoliberal material discursive change that drives society nowadays. Feminist new materialism does not aim at canonizing new texts and scientific strands, rather it aims at situating oneself within the world in its permanent becoming.

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