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MUTUALLY IMPLICATED
AND INTRA-ACTIVELY ENHANCED COMMONS:
DIFFRACTIVE READINGS OF TYLER'S AND BARAD'S THEORIES

“[...] world and word are mutually implicated, neither having priority of origin nor ontic dominance”.

Stephen Tyler (1987a: 171)

“[...] the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity”.

Karen Barad (2007: 184)

INTRODUCTION: THEORIES AS SIGNIFICANT OTHERNESS

The phrase “significant otherness” comes from Donna Haraway’s *The Companion Species Manifesto*, in which she uses it to emphasize that the worlds of humans and dogs are not contraries but, if a different topology is adopted, can be understood as interconnected configurations of life. Rather than thinking in terms of oppositional elements (nature vs. culture), Haraway proposes that these configurations be viewed relationally. This idea also underpins the approach taken in this article.

Although Haraway refers to interspecies encounters, her manifesto offers a program for future action, including those undertaken within academic spaces and concerning encounters between theories. Regardless of the kinds of species that enter into relations, “Respect is the name of the game” (Haraway 2003: 49).

Following Haraway’s provocations, this article offers a diffractive reading weaving together two approaches that, at first glance, appear distant and seemingly incompatible: the postmodern anthropology proposed by Stephen Tyler and the agential realism developed by Karen Barad. The idea of applying a diffractive reading to the works of Tyler and Barad may seem risky. After all, postmodernism, as many argue, is closely aligned with social constructivism, recognizing discourse and power as fundamental in understanding, shaping and deconstructing culture and social relations. Agential realism, by contrast, encompasses post-constructivist philosophies and feminist new materialisms (see Alaimo, Hekman 2008; Coole, Frost 2010a; Dolphijn, van der Tuin 2012; van der Tuin 2011). It arises, as Francesca Ferrando (2013: 30) argues, “as a reaction to the representationalist and constructivist radicalizations of late postmodernity, which somehow lost track of the material realm”. Problematizing — and even rejecting — postmodernism (Barad 2003: 802), agential realism shifts the focus to what has long been marginalized in the humanities and social sciences: the issue of matter and the nonhuman agency.

The decision to stage the relationship between postmodern anthropology and agential realism is motivated by the fact that they can serve as synecdoches for two paradigm shifts that have sparked some of the most significant theoretical and methodological debates of the past fifty years. Both trends were, in their time, regarded as new sensibilities in philosophy as well as in the social sciences, including anthropology. The uproar surrounding postmodernism intensified in the 1980s and 1990s, marked by a critical interrogation of the modernist tradition and its faith in the possibility of objectively representing reality. Posthumanities — including agential realism — emerged, by contrast, at the end of the 20th century as a subsequent development, positioning themselves in opposition to both modernism and postmodernism and challenging their foundational assumptions. By unsettling binary oppositions (nature/culture, real/ideal,

material/discursive), posthumanities open up possibilities for refiguring scientific objectivity as a situated, embodied and relational practice.

However, the claim that theoretical framings of Tyler and Barad are entirely contradictory can be viewed as wishful thinking — driven by the need to construct identity boundaries through opposition — rather than the outcome of an in-depth examination of what Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012: 116), drawing on Jean-François Lyotard, have termed the theoretical practice of “rewriting modernity”. According to this way of thinking, the study turns a deaf ear to the Cartesian call parodied by Tyler: “Don’t follow forking paths! Don’t fork! Get thee behind me Borges!” (Tyler 1987a: 6). In solidarity with Borges’s straightforward (forthright) atypicality, and refusing to keep pace with Descartes (1998: 1–2) along “the right path”, this article takes the form of a transversal action that entangles postmodern anthropology and agential realism. When framed canonically — that is, linearly — these approaches appear light-years apart, both temporally and theoretically: fully formed, always-already-complete galaxies of meaning. However, nourished by the belief that “the text-as-object is less interesting than the text-as-process” (Tyler 1991: 83), this article treats these approaches as intersecting flashes of matter-meaning, brought into being in moments that Barad refers to as intra-action. Something akin to a prosopopoeia of the universe. As Haraway puts it more readably: “The recognition that one cannot *know* the other or the self, but must ask in respect for all of time who and what are emerging in relationship, is the key” (Haraway 2003: 50). The consequence of “rewriting modernity” is the claim that postmodern anthropology and agential realism are not opposing forces, but rather mutually implicated and mutually enhancing forms of significant otherness. Their onto-epistemological sensibilities are not as far apart as they might initially appear.

Given the above-mentioned insights, it is reasonable to treat this study as a series of interventions carried out within the space of social theory, while also recognizing that these interventions are affirmative in nature. This article does not seek to critique either approach. This stance is grounded in Tyler’s recognition that “the discourse of critique is already and inextricably involved in what it criticizes” (Tyler 1991: 91) and that “the game of critique is played out” (Tyler 1991: 93). Consequently,

this study moves away from conceptualizing scientific discussion through the metaphor “argumentation is war” (see Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 3–6). Instead, it frames debate in terms of the commons (the common good), adopting the metaphor “argumentation is mutual aid”. The metaphor proposed here, departing from the notion of gamification, draws, on the one hand, on the thought of Peter Kropotkin (2021), who argued that it is mutual aid — not competition, as Charles Darwin claimed — that drives development; and, on the other hand, it invokes Anna Tsing’s (2015) work on the coevolution and cooperation of plants and fungi. In doing so, it offers inspiration for forms of living that — through their difference — privilege the commons (and community) over individualization, as Kropotkin had already emphasized. Furthermore, “mutual aid” also evokes the mutual implication (and enhancement) of Tyler’s and Barad’s theories, as articulated in the epigraphs of this study.

This affirmative approach aligns with a diffractive reading, which is not a reading against someone; it is not a critique, as Evelien Geerts and Iris van der Tuin (2021: 177) explain:

Reading diffractively therefore not only appears to transcend the level of critique, ultimately based in a Self/Other identity politics, but in Barad’s regard also can be regarded as a boundary-crossing, trans/disciplinary methodology, as it brings about “respectful engagements with different disciplinary practices” [...]. Blurring the boundaries between different disciplines and theories to provoke new thoughts and theories, this methodology examines how and why boundaries between disciplines and strands of thought have been made and how they can be (re)made to matter more toward inclusion than apartheid.

The belief in the possibility of developing new theoretical sensibilities through the creation of unforeseen blends and the careful tracing of differences also informs this study, which should be seen as a performance: one that invites both postmodern anthropology and agential realism to turn upon themselves in relation to the Other. A diffractive reading allows these two approaches to intra-actively engage and enrich each other. Like heliotropes turning toward the sun to ripen in summer (see Muckelbauer 2016: 39), they rely on one another; their development depends on this ongoing relational intra-action.

To address this challenge, the article is organized into two parts. The first part seeks to uncover points of convergence between

postmodern anthropology and agential realism by engaging with the non-representationalist tradition within the (post)humanities and social sciences. Problematizing the relationships between these paradigms, the second part explores how intra-action, relationality, and nonhuman agency might be articulated without succumbing to the aporias of Indo-European grammatical structures, which constrain the expression of onto-epistemological assumptions. Tyler's reflections on the middle voice provide a conceptual backdrop for Barad's approach. At the same time, Barad complements and extends Tyler's insights, offering a rigorous framework for understanding how relationality, intra-action, and nonhuman agency operate at both ontological and methodological levels. In this interplay, the two approaches enhance each other: Tyler highlights relationality in discourse-matter, while Barad provides the conceptual apparatus to explore its broader implications. Together, they demonstrate the generative potential of diffractive readings for navigating theoretical tensions, showing how bridging postmodern anthropology and agential realism can illuminate complex relationalities and intra-actions, while also opening pathways for further engagement with rhetorical new materialisms and their significance for contemporary posthumanist thought.

BREAKING THE MIRRORS AS A COMMONS

First and foremost, a key issue must be clarified, as doing so will help dispel certain misconceptions about the postmodern anthropology proposed by Tyler. When asked by Scott Lucas in an interview why *Writing Culture* (Clifford, Marcus 1986), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus, Fischer 1986) and *The Predicament of Culture* (Clifford 1988) became emblematic of postmodernism in anthropology, Tyler responded: "That's a very interesting question because I don't think any of those texts really count as postmodern in any interesting sense. Most of what is in *Writing Culture*, for example, or in either of the other two texts, is really modernist themes that are taken up and trotted out as experimental works" (Lucas, Tyler 1996: 5). This statement does not reveal anything new or surprising to a reader familiar with *Writing Culture*. In the introduction to this collection of essays, James Clifford explicitly noted that "most of us at the

seminar [which formed the basis for *Writing Culture*], excluding Stephen Tyler, were not yet thoroughly ‘postmodern’!” (Clifford 1986: 21). In *Still Rayting*, Tyler notes something that might also be of interest to Barad:

Writing Culture is not post-modern; its authors neither invert the relationship between aesthetics and epistemology nor revolutionize the three-fold hierarchy of epistemology, politics, and aesthetics (in descending order of hierarchic precedence). Like Bob [Scholte — added by author], they are willing only to promote politics, to contextualize science to power, to relativize epistemology to politics, but this politicization of discourse does not change or threaten the ancient Western idea of hierarchized discourses. Instead, it preserves the myth of a privileged discourse that founds or grounds all the others. In contrast, post-modernism grants no priority to any discourse. It aims to deconstruct the divisions that give the illusion of separate, hierarchically ordered discourses (Tyler 1987b: 50).

Based on the above statement, one might venture that Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway* is closer to the sensibilities of postmodern anthropology — as understood in Tyler’s sense — than *Writing Culture*. After all, agential realism aligns with non-hierarchical thought, asserting that “an empirically accurate understanding of scientific practice, one that is consonant with the latest scientific research, strongly suggests a fundamental inseparability of epistemological, ontological, and ethical considerations” (Barad 2007: 25–26).

The thesis regarding the convergence of Tyler’s and Barad’s thought may appear controversial — perhaps even to Tyler and Barad themselves. Therefore, merely pointing out that both question the modernist idea of the separateness of kinds of/and discourses is not sufficient to construct a persuasive narrative. It is necessary to provide key pieces of evidence. This is all the more important given their disciplinary backgrounds — Tyler as an anthropologist and Barad as a quantum physicist — which led them to focus on different objects of inquiry. For instance, when speaking of scientific knowledge, Tyler thinks of conversation, while Barad thinks of the laboratory. This difference alone already makes it easier to accept the idea of divergence. This is why, in delineating the commonalities that intertwine these two approaches, it is worthwhile to engage in “rewriting modernity”. In this endeavour, it is valuable to incorporate the strategy of “*breaking through* dualism” (Dolphijn, van der Tuin 2012: 97) with

particular emphasis on dismantling the dualism between representation and the represented, as embodied in the metaphor of the mirror.

As Barad (2007: 86) writes: “Mirrors reflect. To mirror something is to provide an accurate image or representation that faithfully copies that which is being mirrored. Hence mirrors are an often-used metaphor for representationalism and related questions of reflexivity”. The practice of breaking the mirror is meant to be a distinctive feature of feminist new materialisms (including agential realism), setting them apart from postmodernism and social constructivism (Coole, Frost 2010b: 26; Barad 2003: 802). As Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012: 107) note: “a modernist scientific materialism allows for one, True representation of matter, and a postmodern cultural constructivism allows for a plethora of equally true representations, it is the *shared representationalism* that is questioned and shifted by new materialism”. A detailed “rewriting modernity” may problematize this belief. As Susan Hekman observes:

Although postmodernism as a whole is certainly guilty of the privileging of the discursive, it is nevertheless the case that some postmodern thinkers do precisely what postmodernism claims to accomplish: the deconstruction of the dichotomy. They offer a theory, in other words, that deconstructs the dichotomy between the real and the discursive, a theory that constitutes a third version of the new settlement (Hekman 2008: 99).

It is therefore worth recalling that it is difficult to characterize Tyler’s postmodern anthropology as representationalist, since its purpose is not to seek answers to the question of “how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation” (Tyler 1987a: 205). This is not even a matter of allowing for multiple equally true representations, as Dolphijn and van der Tuin suggest in their account of postmodernism. Tyler resists any attempt to ground anthropology in representationalism. The scientific discourse he rejects harbours “the Mephistophelian urge to power through knowledge, for that, too is a consequence of representation. To represent means to have a kind of magical power over appearances, to be able to bring into presence what is absent. [...]. The whole ideology of representational signification is an ideology of power” (Tyler 1987a: 208). This ideology is rooted in the oppositions of subject/object and language/world, that is, in the relationships between those who or what represent and those who or what are represented. Tyler’s

postmodern anthropology emerges precisely from its commitment to thinking about knowledge production beyond the metaphor of the mirror. “Writing mirrors the world; writing mirrors the author’s voice; writing mirrors itself. Three alternatives of Western discourse — the reflected object, the spectral subject, and the mirrored mirror — how long played out in so many books?” — Tyler (1987a: 5) asks at the beginning of *The Unspeakable* in a tone that resonates with Barad’s aforementioned provocations concerning reflexivity.

Contrary to the claims of Barad and other proponents of feminist new materialisms, postmodernism (as understood by Tyler) entails neither an endorsement of representationalism (which has already been refuted) nor of correlationism. Tyler’s entire theoretical project is aimed at moving beyond the notion of scientific activity as something mediated through language. His response to the foundational statement of agential realism — namely that “knowledge making is not a mediated activity, despite the common refrain to the contrary” (Barad 2007: 379) — could only be one: enthusiastic agreement. The postmodernist stance toward those “common” assumptions Barad refers to (and perhaps Barad even has Tyler in mind) is parodically expressed in a passage from Tyler’s manifesto: “Language and the world? You can’t get there from here, buddy” (Tyler 1991: 90). That *buddy* is someone who, according to Tyler, wrongly assumes that “both subject (self) and object (thing), knower and known, are mediated by LANGUAGE, which transcends, encompasses, and constitutes them” (Tyler 1987a: 172). The following sentences dispel any doubts about the position Tyler designates as postmodernist:

Thus the amaurosis of LANGUAGE, the means of that mediation, must be the final act in the decomposition of the commonsense world of words and things. It will also be the recreation of a commonsense world, for postmodern anthropology refuses the transit to absolute knowledge that establishes an identity between the subject and the object by means of LANGUAGE (Tyler 1987a: 172).

Additionally, in the conclusion of *The Unspeakable*, Tyler advances the idea of evocation, freed from representationalism:

Evocation is neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and immune to the judgment of performance. It overcomes the separation of the sensible and

the conceivable, of form and content, of self and other, of language and the world (Tyler 1987a: 199–200).

Overcoming the dualism of language and world is also a leitmotif in Tyler's later work, including his contributions to rhetoric culture theory (Tyler 1995, 2011, 2014). If the claim that "semiotic constructivism" transformed "the mirror of nature" into "the mirror of culture" (Dolphijn, van der Tuin 2012: 107) holds true, it seems unconvincing to apply it to Tyler, especially since his interventions also engage with matter, as will be demonstrated in the second part of this article. Tyler's attempts to break the mirror of language (Tyler 1987a: 3), his development of a non-representationalist ethnography and linguistics, and his efforts to write and speak "other-wise" (Tyler 1991: 83) — nonlinearly, affectively, bodily and rhizomatically (Tyler 1987a: 6) — align not only with the "strategies for writing the subject 'other'-wise" (Smith, Watson 1998: 20) found in the French feminism (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva), but also with new materialist conceptualizations of language and writing as life forces (Colebrook 2008). There are, without doubt, generous *lines of flight* in Tyler's performances.

And yes, Tyler (virtually) agrees with Barad that "language has been granted too much power" (Barad 2003: 801). This is precisely why he devotes so much effort to making us hear that "world and word are mutually implicated, neither having priority of origin nor ontic dominance" (Tyler 1987: 171). And yes, Barad — knowingly or not — agrees with Tyler in contending that "the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity" (Barad 2007: 184). It is telling that Tyler's insights remain largely unheard or misunderstood. Perhaps it is now time to listen more closely to the past-present, as new sensibilities such as the posthumanities emerge. After all, this is a diffractive attitude, one encouraged by Barad, Haraway, Dolphijn and van der Tuin.

TOWARDS INTRA-ACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Echoing Tyler's interventions, agential realism firmly rejects the notion that there are representations and ontologically distinct entities awaiting representation (Barad 2003: 804). Breaking with this way of

thinking, Barad draws on quantum physics, specifically the Copenhagen interpretation as represented by Niels Bohr, which asserts that:

things are indeterminate; there are no things before the measurement, and that the very act of measurement produces determinate boundaries and properties of things. So, his is an ontological principle rather than an epistemological one. In other words, for Bohr particles do not have a position independently of my measuring something called position (Barad 2007: 139).

Transferring Bohr's findings to feminist new materialisms, Barad argues:

the primary epistemological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather *phenomena*. On my agential realist elaboration, phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of "observer" and "observed"; rather, *phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting "components."* That is, phenomena are ontologically primitive relations—relations without preexisting relata. The notion of *intra-action* (in contrast to the usual "interaction," which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the "components" of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful (Barad 2003: 815).

From the standpoint of postmodern anthropology, this is a highly compelling thought. Barad's concept of intra-action offers the possibility of thinking not only beyond the object/subject dualism but also beyond the dualism of language and world: "Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other" (Barad 2003: 822). As noted above, this sensibility is quite familiar to Tyler (1987a: 171). Considered from an ontological perspective, the proposition of agential realism shares much in common with the insights of other feminist new materialisms projects, including Donna Haraway's (2003) emergent ontologies, Rosi Braidotti's (2006) processual ontology and Jane Bennett's (2010) vibrant materialism, among others. These approaches no longer ask how to know the world (epistemology) but rather what the world is (ontology) and how it becomes (ontogenesis). Such a view provokes a more nuanced

perspective on life itself and can open up new and intriguing research fields for postmodern anthropology.

However, inquisitive minds may rightly ask whether intra-actions have their own language or whether they can be expressed in academic language at all. The following interventions explore what posthumanities, and Barad in particular, might gain from engaging with Tyler's postmodern anthropology. It is important to note that agential realism does not resolve the challenge of writing or speaking about phenomena that emerge through intra-actions. The language Barad employs, like that of most academics, to describe emergent processes and phenomena — understood as the inseparability and entanglement of subjective and objective elements, the discursive and the material, the processual and the static — ultimately cannot fully convey this inseparability and entanglement. This is not a flaw of agential realism itself, but a limitation of Indo-European grammar (Tyler 1987a: 26).

Consider two sentences: “The cat drinks water” (active voice) and “The water is drunk by the cat” (passive voice). In both cases, the components are clearly separated: the water, the cat, and the act of drinking. Moreover, the cat is the agent of the action, as if the water had no agency at all. Alternatively, one might say, “Water drinks the cat” — but then, what happens to the cat and the process of drinking? Now consider these examples: “The cat grows”, “The water evaporates” and “The snow melts”. Here, too, there is a separation: the cat is distinguished from the process of growing, the water from the process of becoming steam, and the snow from the process of turning into water. The grammar of Indo-European languages — especially English, which dominates academic discourse — is itself part of the problem. These languages tend to rely on separable subject–verb–object constructions that presuppose discrete entities and linear causality. As a result, even the language of posthumanities tends to reproduce such separable forms — and so does Barad, even when describing what is, by definition, inseparable: phenomena, intra-action, emergent ontologies. Is there a way out of this grammatical impasse?

The concept of the middle voice, developed by Tyler since the 1990s and integrated into rhetoric culture theory (Tyler, Strecker 2009; Tyler 2011), can be particularly helpful. In a text with a title emblematic of the

identifications explored in this article, *Them Others: Voices Without Mirrors*, Tyler notes a common practice in linguistic analysis:

[It] starts from language-as-sentenced, privileges the nominal functions of subject/object, agent/patient, source/goal, and defines the operation of the verb relative to them [...]. In effect, linguistic analysis assumes that the *being present of things* is prior to any process or activity, that processes and activities are always separable from things as if they were mere attributes of some kind, that the things themselves are always divided into something corresponding to subject and object, and that between these two, the subject takes precedence over the object — except in the deviant grammatical structures of the passive, the reflexive, and the middle voices, which are all deformations or secondary derivatives of the paragonic active form of the sentence in which the subject acts on the object. The active voice is normative. Nothing so clearly confirms this prejudice as the fact that the middle voice is often understood as a peculiar kind of reflexive, as if in a sentence like “the corn ripens”, the “corn” is simultaneously subject and object and acts reflexively on itself, as if, in other words, this sentence was short-hand for something like “the corn ripens itself” (Tyler 1998: 49).

In opposition to this approach, Tyler proposes an unorthodox perspective on the middle voice — one that does not assume the necessity of a subject. He explores the concept of the middle voice in relation to Jacques Derrida’s idea of *différance*. Tyler’s postmodernist reading should certainly be of interest to agential realism. He states that “this conception of the middle voice differs from most purely grammatical accounts in that it does not posit subject/object, agent/patient, source/goal as existing prior to the action or operation in which subject and object are mutually involved” (Tyler 1998: 49). What Tyler refers to as *action* or *operation* can be interpreted, on an onto-epistemological level, as intra-action, emergent ontology, or simply an ontogenetic process. Referring to the previously mentioned sentence, “the corn ripens itself”, Tyler concludes:

We might, perhaps more interestingly, say “corn^{ing} ripens”, implying that ripening is only a subprocess of the more general process of “corn^{ing}” or *vice versa*, and that the entity “corn” is but a momentary interruption in an on-going process of “corn^{ing}” that includes the whole cyclic movement from seed-to-plant-to-seed in which the same “corn” may reappear, but the *identical* “corn” never does (Tyler 1998: 49).

Tyler’s concept of speaking *other-wise* (middle voice) emerges directly from his attempts in *The Unspeakable* to develop a non-representational

anthropology. Engaging polemically with the structuralist tradition (Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan) and recognizing that it frames language not as a life force but as a formal system — or, as Fredric Jameson might say, a prison-house — Tyler seeks alternative sources of inspiration in hermeneutics and poststructuralism. Interestingly, he ultimately finds a temporary ally in David Bohm, whom he describes as the creator of a postmodern physics (Tyler 1987a: 26). Of particular interest to Tyler is Bohm’s concept of the *rheomode*, introduced in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (Bohm 1980):

Bohm wishes to change the substance/substantive orientation of language, to end the domination of the noun by giving the verb the basic role. He recommends a new mode of language, called the “rheomode” (from *G rheo*, “to move”), in which movement is primary. This would break the cognitive grip of the subject-verb-object form of language which does not divide things appropriately. Rather than things as such, verbs would merely emphasize different aspects of movement so that each would merge, interpenetrate, and imply others. The new language would also have new truth conditions. Rather than truth of isolated statements, there would be an act of “verr-ation”, of “truhing” in a given context. [...] Bohm concludes that we can no longer think of the universe as being divided into separate, distinct, interacting parts, but must regard it as “an undivided, unbroken whole” (Tyler 1987a: 26–27).

Tyler considers Bohm’s insights a starting point for postmodernism. Beginning with ontogenesis — the process of the material world’s emergence, or what Barad would call intra-action — Tyler (following Bohm) ultimately moves toward the idea of *intra-active* communication:

We think of things as if they were autonomously behaving parts that could be separated out and the put back into interaction. Undivided wholes do not fit this pattern; they call for a new kind of description that does not separate the observed object from the observing instrument, and they require a new kind of observing instrument that would be capable of holography (Tyler 1987a: 27–28).

Although Bohm’s work is close to Tyler’s inquiries, it serves only as a starting point for postmodern anthropology. Bohm does not move beyond the metaphor of the mirror: “His [Bohm’s] argument is, after all, still motivated by the visual episteme of observing and describing” (Tyler 1987a: 28). For this reason, in constructing the foundations of a non-representational approach, Tyler ultimately turns toward the middle

voice. This point is also highlighted because Bohm is known to Barad (see 2007: 122, 287, 409, 453, 456, 458–459). However, Barad is primarily (and exclusively) interested in those aspects of Bohm’s quantum physics that relate to Niels Bohr and the Copenhagen interpretation — an interpretation that, notably, also does not abandon the mirror metaphor.

What conclusions can be drawn from this prolegomenon to an intra-active communication for posthumanities? Based on the examples of the cat and the snow, it can be concluded that fully realizing the imperative of agential realism — to express inseparability and the idea of intra-action — should entail a change in grammar itself. One might experiment with phrases such as “cattening happens” or “cattening proceeds”, in analogy with Tyler’s “corning ripens” (Tyler 1998: 49). But what should be done with the snow that melts before human-animal eyes on the windowsill, falling in droplets onto the cat below, which — under their, the droplets’, or perhaps rather its, the snow’s, influence — leaps into the air, hissing in fright and startling the sparrows gathered on the rowan tree? How can one articulate this phenomenon, this assemblage of components, this inseparability, without dividing it into discrete elements? This question underscores why thinking, speaking and writing about intra-action and emergent processes should be a central concern of rhetorical-ontological sensibilities within feminist new materialisms. The insights offered by Tyler’s postmodern anthropology may provide valuable guidance for developing a new materialist and posthumanist prophylaxis of communication. Ultimately, the crucial issue is not what the snow might think, but rather how it emerges along with other objects (including the animal-observer), exerting influence upon them. Or, to put it differently, through the lens of the middle voice...

CONCLUSION: THEORIES AS MUTUALLY IMPLICATED COMMONS

Unlike agential realism — which should be understood as an “epistemological-ontological-ethical framework that provides an understanding of the role of human and nonhuman” (Barad 2007: 26) — postmodern anthropology remains an anthropocentric approach. One of its foundational texts defines it as “the study of man — ‘talking’ [...] that is, speaking and writing” (Tyler 1987a: 171). At the centre of Tyler’s post-

modern anthropology is the *anthropos*, understood as *homo rhetoricus*, the symbolic animal who not only speaks rhetorically but also, in doing so, acts materially and bodily within the world. Although Tyler democratizes rhetoric by extending it beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries he still confines rhetorical (agential) becoming to the human realm. In this respect, postmodern anthropology diverges from agential realism (and more broadly, from the posthumanities). Barad clearly expresses the idea of nonhuman agency in conversation with Dolphijn and Van der Tuin: „feeling, desiring and experiencing are not singular characteristics or capacities of human consciousness. Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers” (Barad in Dolphijn, van der Tuin 2012: 59). It should be emphasized here that, according to Barad, agency is not something possessed by someone or something; nor does it coincide with subjectivity (Barad 2007: 178). Rather, it is attributed to the intra-active process of matter-meaning. Barad’s concepts have the potential to enrich — and relationally enhance — the assumptions of postmodern anthropology.

However, a diffractive-transversal reading reveals that, despite certain differences, postmodern anthropology and agential realism are not opposed but rather mutually implicated and even complementary. The common ground between the core assumptions of these approaches lies in their shared commitment to moving beyond representation, dualisms, and the hegemonic constructs that constrain cognition and limit what can be thought about a world emerging through intra-action. Moreover, by problematizing the relationships between these significant others, this article proposes how intra-action, relationality, and nonhuman agency might be articulated without falling into the aporias of grammar that — by its very nature — divides and isolates, using Tyler’s concept of the middle voice. This constitutes a strong methodological implication for the entanglement of the two approaches advanced in this article. Assessing the potential ethical–onto–epistemological benefits that arise from this conjunction for concrete analyses should form the next stage in intervening in the practice of cultivating new anthropological sensitivities.

To conclude, the diffractive reading proposed here brings into contact two seemingly distant approaches, not to oppose them, but to allow them to emerge through their very encounter. These theoretical formations

are not treated as finished or self-contained but as generated within this intra-action. This is, of course, not an entirely new idea: hermeneutics has long reminded that things are not simply given, but assigned for interpretation. What this intra-active encounter reveals is a form of mutual implication — not in the sense of linear succession or causality, but in the sense of co-implication, co-involvement and co-emergence. From this perspective, theoretical engagement is not a battleground of ideas, but a commons — a space of mutual aid — where concepts enhance one another not through opposition, but through entanglement. Such a mode of reading and thinking gestures toward a common good — the shared labour of theory-making, in which knowledge is not possessed but cultivated, not isolated but woven together. This is theory as collaboration, not confrontation. In this light, argumentation becomes a form of caring for ideas — attending to what they might become together. Perhaps this affirmative (diffractive) attitude will mark a new sensibility in the social sciences, anthropology included.

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Abstract

The article proposes a diffractive reading that weaves together two approaches that, at first glance, appear distant and seemingly incompatible: Stephen Tyler’s postmodern anthropology and Karen Barad’s agential realism. A consequence of this diffractive methodology is the claim that postmodern anthropology and agential realism do not constitute opposing elements, but rather mutually implicated significant Otherness. To strengthen the argument, the article adopts a two-part structure. The first part aims to reveal points of convergence between the two approaches through reflection on the non-representationalist tradition within the (post)humanities and social sciences. The second part, problematizing the relationships between significant Others, explores the possibility of articulating intra-action, relationality, and nonhuman agency without falling into the aporias of the grammar of Indo-European languages, which impose constraints on the expression of onto-epistemological assumptions.

keywords: Stephen Tyler, Karen Barad, postmodern anthropology, agential realism, diffractive reading

Abstrakt

Autor proponuje dyfrakcyjną lekturę splatającą dwa podejścia, które na pierwszy rzut oka wydają się odległe i pozornie niekompatybilne: postmodernistyczną antropologię Stephena Tylera oraz realizm sprawczy Karen Barad. Konsekwencją przyjęcia metodologii dyfrakcyjnej jest stwierdzenie, że antropologia postmodernistyczna i realizm sprawczy nie stanowią elementów opozycyjnych, lecz wzajemnie implikujące się znaczące Inności. W celu wzmocnienia argumentacji artykuł ma dwuczęściową strukturę. W części pierwszej autor ukazuje punkty styeczne obu podejść poprzez refleksję nad niereprezentacjonistyczną tradycją w obrębie (post)humanistyki i nauk społecznych. W części drugiej, problematyzując relacje między znaczącymi Innymi, bada możliwość artykulacji intra-akcji, relacyjności i nie-ludzkiej sprawczości bez popadania w aporie gramatyki języków indoeuropejskich, która nakłada ograniczenia na wyrażanie założeń onto-epistemologicznych.

słowa kluczowe: Stephen Tyler, Karen Barad, antropologia postmodernistyczna, realizm sprawczy, dyfrakcyjna lektura