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ARTICLE

NODE: “NEW FEMINIST MATERIALISM: ENGENDERING AN ETHIC-ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY”**On difference that makes a difference
and how some things come to matter and
others don't****Political agency and subjectivity
in Karen Barad's feminist new materialism****Franziska Aigner**

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Abstract

The following essay is a critical investigation into the political within feminist new materialisms. Agency, identity and subjectivity are complexified in new materialist theories, although not entirely done away with. They are understood as the complex product of a material-discursive, nature-cultural web of relations from which a feminist political subjectivity might emerge in its always situated and situational instantiations. However, while feminist new materialisms offer complex insights into the transient nature of boundary drawing practices, destabilizing binary conceptualizations of subject and object, matter and discourse and the like, our focus in this article is on how such complexifications can ground a feminist politics proper, in particular concerning the work of feminist quantum physicist and philosopher Karen Barad. Using the conceptual tools developed by Peta Hinton (2014) and Catherine Malabou (2011), our argumentation works through Barad's notions of objectivity, accountability, agency and subjectivity. At the core of the article lies the question of whether Barad's realist notion of

objectivity and accountability could allow for the recognition of commonalities and common histories in cuts and marks left on bodies in order to bring forth a certain kind of feminist (potentially collective) identity that could think and work towards political change. By working through the complementarity principle developed by Niels Bohr and its further elaboration by Karen Barad, the argument points at the conceptual problems arising from the complementarity of “truth and meaning” for envisaging political subjectivity. Rather than working towards resolving or collapsing the conceptual and material problematic of complementarity, a conclusion is drawn by thinking through Barad’s grounding of agency and processes of materialization, bearing in mind Malabou’s notion of plasticity and her call for a minimal concept of female essence, with the idea being to craft material-discursive apparatuses that could enable the tracing of a politics based on embodied historicities of matter.

Keywords

situated subjectivity, agency, accountability, violence, historicity, plasticity

Sobre la diferencia que marca la diferencia, y sobre cómo algunas cosas llegan a importar y materializarse, y otras no. Agencia política y subjetividad en el nuevo materialismo feminista de Karen Barad

Resumen

El siguiente artículo es una investigación crítica sobre lo político en los nuevos materialismos feministas. La agencia, la identidad y la subjetividad se vuelven más complejas en las teorías del nuevo materialismo, aunque no se eliminan del todo. Se entienden como el producto complejo de una red de relaciones material y discursiva, natural y cultural, de la que podría surgir una subjetividad política feminista representada por ejemplos siempre situados y situacionales. No obstante, mientras los nuevos materialismos feministas ofrecen perspectivas complejas respecto a la naturaleza efímera de las prácticas que establecen límites, desestabilizando conceptualizaciones binarias del sujeto y el objeto, la materia y el discurso y aspectos similares, nuestro artículo se centra en cómo tales complejidades pueden fundamentar una política feminista propiamente dicha, particularmente vinculada a la obra de la física cuántica y filósofa Karen Barad.

Empleando las herramientas conceptuales desarrolladas por Peta Hinton (2014) y Catherine Malabou (2011), nuestra argumentación recorre las nociones de Barad de objetividad, responsabilidad, agencia y subjetividad. En este artículo radica la cuestión de si las nociones realistas de objetividad y responsabilidad que presenta Barad permitirían el reconocimiento de cosas en común y relatos comunes en los cortes y marcas dejados en los cuerpos. Así, podría generarse un cierto tipo de identidad feminista (potencialmente colectiva), planteada y orientada hacia el cambio político. Al repasar el principio de complementariedad desarrollado por Niels Bohr y su elaboración posterior a manos de Karen Barad, la argumentación señala los problemas conceptuales que surgen de la complementariedad entre la «verdad» y el «significado» para concebir la subjetividad política. En vez de resolver o erradicar la problemática conceptual y material de la complementariedad, se extraen conclusiones mediante la fundamentación de Barad de agencia y de procesos de materialización. Asimismo se tiene en cuenta la noción de plasticidad de Malabou y su exigencia de un concepto mínimo de la esencia femenina, con el objetivo de elaborar aparatos materiales y discursivos que permitirían basar la política en historicidades encarnadas de la materia.

Palabras clave

subjetividad situada, agencia, responsabilidad, violencia, historicidad, plasticidad

Introduction

The promise of new materialisms for feminist theory seems to be nothing less than providing ontological and scientific grounds for deconstructing old binaries. The relational ontologies in question complexify our understanding of agency and history, time and change, identity and difference; furthermore, by accounting for their historical and material-discursive emergence, they displace received notions of matter and discourse, nature and culture, sex and gender. If, on the one hand, such a shift clearly facilitates a feminist onto-epistemology, on the other hand, it is less obvious how this complexification can ground a feminist politics proper. When the boundaries of subject and object, matter and discourse and the like are destabilized, what is left of political agency? How can we think a feminist political subjectivity? With these and similar questions in mind we wish to tackle the work of Karen Barad. We want to enquire how her specific new materialist onto-epistemology, which she terms *agential realism*, enables us to conceptualize (political) change. How does it influence our thinking of difference and what becomes of feminist political subjectivity after her relational re-reading of objectivity and subjectivity? In other words, can her re-reading of agency, objectivity and subjectivity at the quantum level be relevant for rethinking a feminist politics, concerned with power relations?

In order to address these questions, we will look at how Barad's work responds to Haraway's quest for "situated knowledges" and how it enable us to tackle its deadlocks as drawn out by Peta Hinton. Furthermore, we wish to read Barad's relational reading of agency, difference, accountability and history in relation to Catherine Malabou's work on plasticity and her quest for a minimal concept of female essence. We would argue that Malabou's work, engaged as it is with neuroscience and psychoanalysis, on one hand, and continental philosophy (particularly Hegel), on the other hand (although in no way programmatically associated with feminist new materialisms), reworks received notions in an akin manner, while explicitly thinking the stakes of such a reworking in relation to classical notions of violence, power, political agency and subjectivity. By bringing together such disparate feminist philosophers, we wish to draw out the conditions for a contemporary conceptualization of a situated feminist subjectivity and the meaningful differences this can bring about..

Feminist subjectivity, female essence and plasticity

In the article *Situated Knowledges and New Materialism(s): Rethinking a Politics of Location*, Peta Hinton (2014, pp. 99-113) conceptualizes an annunciative politics— rather than enunciative— through a critical re-reading of the notion of subjectivity put forth in *Situated Knowledges* by Haraway (1991, pp. 575-599). Hinton's annunciative

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politics is a response to the paradox she ascribes to a feminist "politics of location": "Feminists are faced with the difficult task of addressing the essentialist manoeuvres that supposedly accompany demands for a politics of inclusion or visibility, 'yet this demand can [...] only ever be brought about by emphasizing precisely the specificity of (sexual) difference(s)', with the risk of both undermining its (more) democratic agendas and reintroducing the essentialism being addressed. Reading this 'problem of difference' into a politics of location, the key issue that emerges here is that its reconfiguring of subjectivity disrupts the capacity to secure the identity of woman in any straightforward manner, while at the same time it requires something of this identity in order to ground its political aspirations."

Tracing an analogous paradox in the tension in situated knowledges between objectivity and locatability, universality and situatedness, knowledge and embodiment, Hinton does not opt for resolving it, but rather proposes an annunciative politics as a two-way movement: the subject's attempt to situate herself, as well as the process of being situated (Hinton, 2014, p. 108). Hinton proposes this as the founding movement of a feminist politics, that "[...] can be seen to perform a violence of sorts, but this violence [...] appears necessary if feminism is to have any purchase" (Hinton, 2014, p. 111).

Hinton's insistence on the necessity of conceptualizing a female identity for a feminist politics resonates with Malabou's points made in her book *Changing Difference* (Malabou, 2011). She argues for a plastic and minimal notion of female essence as the grounds for a feminist politics: "I propose a minimal concept for woman, an 'ineffaceable' remains in which 'woman' refers to a subject overexposed to a specific kind of violence. This violence can be defined as a dual constraint or schizoid pressure: the pressure of work in society and at home. This minimal concept – woman's overexposure to dual exploitation – is the remainder, burning and plastic, with which we must work" (Malabou, 2011, pp. 3-4). Malabou's minimal concept of woman is implicitly one that is both situated by and situating itself. On the one hand, woman is situated by a specific kind of violence, which she has to endure as the dual exploitation of work in and outside the home. At the same time, she is situating herself in a specific way — reclaiming this minimal concept of woman based on a history of violence— by refusing to give into a total deconstruction of the feminine, which would result in the dissolution of (sexual or any other) differences towards an undifferentiated stream of meaningless differentiations. Differences and different locations have meaning precisely because there are different kinds of violence they have to endure. Malabou, in *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (2008), Malabou articulates the problem of meaningful difference against a meaningless flux of endless differentiations as the contrast between a plastic notion of brain and/as subjectivity versus a flexible one: "To ask 'What should we do with our brain?' is above all to visualize the possibility of saying no to an afflicting economic, political and mediatic culture that celebrates only the triumph of flexibility, blessing obedient

individuals who have no greater merit than that of knowing how to bow their heads with a smile. [...] To exist is to be able to change difference while respecting the difference of change: the difference between continuous change without limits, without adventure, without negativity and a formative change that tells an effective story and proceeds by ruptures, conflicts, dilemmas” (Malabou, 2008, p. 79).

While in this essay flexibility is understood primarily as the paradigm of neoliberal flexible subjectivity — celebrating endless meaningless differentiation and self-differentiation as the self-styling and self-fashioning of endlessly young and available precarious subjects — we can see how the conceptual problem behind flexibility and plasticity is akin to that of a radical deconstruction of female essence or a radical anti-essentialism, often resulting in a very naïve appropriation of Butler’s idea of the performativity of gender as an “anything goes” of self-gendering at will. To put it in Hinton’s terms: if we refuse to reclaim any kind of female identity and subjectivity, even though a highly complexified and relational one, if we merely affirm the singular epistemic legitimacy of any kind of location, then any location is equal to another. They are all different and precisely because of that, there is no (politically meaningful) difference between them. Being situated in a certain way becomes merely an empirical fact; and the act of situating oneself becomes equivalent to a choice based on personal tastes, modifiable at will, which leaves no room for a normative grounding of objectivity or political agency — for differentiating among differences and accounting for their meaning.

Malabou’s elaboration of a minimal concept of woman is a response to what she understands to be the basic misunderstanding behind such radically anti-essentialist feminist agendas, which promote the flexibility of endless differentiation: they conceive of essence as being determined as a fixed substance and a given biology (sex), as well as being normatively imposed on a social level (gender). Malabou (2011) warns us, on the contrary, that essence, already in Hegel, was conceived as essentially plastic: as a form enduring (and giving itself) ever new formations. In the same vein, her notion of gender in terms of essence is conceptualized as a complex interplay between biology, ontology, culture and history, an interplay which is *essentially* plastic: “We must rethink the relation of philosophy and science today [...] always according to the hypothesis of the originary transformability of presence and nature [...]. To construct one’s identity is a process that can only be a development of an original biological malleability, a first transformability. If sex were not plastic, there would be no gender. If something would not be offered for transformation in the natural and anatomical determination of sex, then identity construction would not be possible [...]. Transformability is at work from the start, it trumps all determination. Everything starts with metamorphosis” (Malabou, 2011, p. 98).

The minimal concept of female essence based on a history of violent plasticity is thus, for Malabou, not merely a political necessity, but a notion that gives a feminist politics empirical grounding. Recognition

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of the “specific kind of violence” female subjects endure is implied in Malabou’s conceptualization of the plastic nature of the female or any other essence: plasticity itself as an ontological process is a violent operation. It de-forms what has been formed and creates new forms, always on the layers of previous plastic operations. This gives us a complex understanding of the intricacy of freedom and determinism: the given is the product of a history of transformations, while at the same time limits and enables further transformative processes.

We can see how such a rendering of the complex intricacy of ontology and history in Malabou complicates received notions of agency, subjectivity and identity, in a way analogous to that which Peta Hinton ascribes directly to Haraway and indirectly to Karen Barad. Hinton suggests that the double-gesture of situating oneself and being situated is an anticipation of the politics behind new materialist thinkers, particularly Karen Barad. Agency, identity and subjectivity are not done away with but are complexified in new materialist theories: they are understood as the complex product of a material-discursive, nature-cultural web of relations from which a feminist political subjectivity might emerge in its always situated and situational instantiations. Wishing to reclaim a feminist politics and, hence, a feminist political subjectivity that could bring about meaningful difference, we would like to investigate Barad’s notions of objectivity, accountability, agency and subjectivity. Do these notions allow an account of histories of practices of marking, which could produce particular kinds of subjects that could situate themselves as a “we”? Do her notions allow such a recognition of the regularity and commonality of these processes of marking — of the sort Malabou has in mind when she writes about a specific kind of violence endured by women — as the basis for a minimal concept of female essence?

Agential realism and the political: intelligibility and accountability

Let us now turn to how these political concerns could be conceptualized through Karen Barad’s agential realism. The political in Barad can be understood as a set of practices and apparatuses that materially and discursively individuate political subjects vis-à-vis their others. While the political subject is thus de-naturalized in the absence of inherent boundaries, this does not mean that, for Barad, anything can be understood as a political agent. Political agents emerge out of a complex set of practices, which, even though not determining, are still reinforcing. In order to understand who and what gets endowed with political agency, we need to inquire into how components partially individuate within intra-actions and how agency is conceptualized.

Thinking with Barad, we are always already involved in modes and ways of being and, therefore, implicitly committed to a surrounding world from which we come to act and which constrains our actions. This is what Hinton would call our situatedness, the specific locations

we find ourselves in and intra-act with, how we become what we are through intra-actions and our entanglement within the environment, with the world as an apparatus. Apparatuses are conceptualized by Barad as open-ended material-discursive practices that nonetheless produce differences that matter. But how can we think these differences that matter and who/what defines what a relevant difference is?

To think in that way, we need to account for how agency might result and give rise to meaningful differentiation. Joseph Rouse, drawing on Brandom, uses the notion of selective environments, which actively “shape my surrounding as a field of possible actions in which something is at stake in what I do and help determine whether those stakes can be fulfilled” (Rouse, 2012, p. 260). Only if my actions intra-act relevantly with the actions of others, and also in combination with the affordances of our common environment, can these intra-actions come to matter — as opposed to fail to exhibit significant intelligibility and to materialize. Agency can neither be understood as something that any one subject, apparatus or relata has, and neither can it be imposed from outside the particular phenomenon in question. This account of agency corresponds to how Barad delineates it as being located in the “[...] space of possibilities opened up by indeterminacies entailed in exclusions” (Barad, 2007, p. 182). It is in this respect that intra-actions have to be understood as open-ended patterns of existing and possible intra-actions and not as particular and contained. “The space of possibilities does not represent a fixed event horizon within which the social location of knowers can be mapped, nor does it represent a homogeneous, fixed, uniform container of choices” (Barad, 2007, p. 246). Rather, Barad describes agency as an inexhaustible liveliness which resonates with Malabou’s metamorphosing qualities of plasticity. Neither agency nor plasticity can ever arrive once and for all at one single repeating behaviour, as the historicity of matter in the form of previous intra-actions is infolded in present materializations that reinforce but never foreclose agency once and for all. “The past matters and so does the future, but the past is never left behind, never finished once and for all, and the future is not what will come to be in an unfolding of the present moment; rather the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter’s iterative becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 181).

While plasticity undoes what has been, moulds old forms and creates new ones, Barad’s agential cut cuts both together and apart and enables the marking of the measuring agencies by the measured object. Both Malabou’s plasticity and Barad’s agency are violent operations to a certain degree. In passing let us note that there might be a kind of ontologization of violence in both thinkers that might endanger the political project of opposing certain kinds of systemic and inter-personal violence. On what grounds can we differentiate between, on the one hand, the violence endured by women that makes for their situatedness and, on the other hand, the violence at work when situating oneself in order to enable political action? How can we normatively ground our decision to engage politically one kind

of violence against the other? We could offer an ontological criteria for their distinction, i.e. in terms of Spinoza’s distinction between affects: joyful affects that increase a body’s power to act, its agency and plasticity versus sad affects that decrease a body’s power to act, even against what Malabou calls a complete disaffection, the loss of the possibility to affect and be affected as the contemporary mode of operation of power. But the problem is perhaps ill-posed, if we interpret it in terms of “choosing” between one kind of violence against another. After the dispersion of agency in Malabou and Barad, choice ends up being a useful concept for accounting for how a certain kind of violence makes us situated so that we can only resist — if we do resist — through a second act of violence which constitutes a feminist subject.

Returning to Barad, we have to think how violent plastic operations and cuts give rise to the intelligibility and objectivity of the marks left on bodies to account for different kinds of violence. This could lead us towards accounting for the iterability of processes of materialization and, therefore, towards thinking whether it is possible to conceptualize a recurrence of practices of marking which would allow us to ground political agency in shared experience. To see, for instance, whether Barad’s framework enables an informed account of how subjects are gendered through material-discursive apparatuses — that is, what specific kind of (de)formative violence they are situated by in their being gendered — we need to turn to how Barad conceptualizes the intelligibility of marks left on bodies.

Intelligibility is configured via normative differential responsiveness (Barad, 2007, p. 380). Intra-actions become intelligible if they are iterative and reproducible under particular circumstances even though they do not arrive at a final regularity. Sticking to the objective referent which is the phenomenon, the practices of registering positions, refining and differentiating marks left on the measuring agency need to take place within the phenomenon. The possibility to refine and reconfigure measurements and apparatuses of bodily production is constitutive of the ability for pattern recognition within any one phenomenon, onto-epistemologically entangling intelligibility and the possibility for change. To put it in Hinton’s words, the inquiry into the given as that which one is situated by is enabled by the possibility of changing it, of situating oneself.

Let us now turn to the very motion of self-situating and investigate it in relation to Barad’s agential realism, by thinking Barad’s apparatus as a possible prosthetically extended (potentially human) political subject, staying truthful to Barad’s post-humanist commitment. According to Barad, measurement instruments are not classical apparatuses, they do not have inherent boundaries and neither do they ontologically pre-exist their particular intra-actions (Barad, 2007, p. 146). However, agential cuts enable exteriority-within-phenomena, through which apparatuses — including a possible political subject — become describable as mixtures or separate components in so-called “classical” terms. Even though spatially separable, the relata of the phenomenon remain ontologically entangled, in fact it is their very

intra-action which allows marks to be left on bodies and subsequently allows for their accountability and objectivity.

In order to approach accountability, we need to look carefully at how the material and the discursive mutually implicate one another in agential intra-actions. In a scientific experiment, concepts only become meaningful with reference to a particular physical apparatus (Barad, 2007, p. 474). For instance, the concept of “position” only has determinate meaning with reference to an apparatus with fixed parts that can actually measure position, as explained by both Bohr and Barad. However, such materially embodied concepts must be understood as being normative, since neither the term nor the concept of position are (universal) self-explanatory notions for Barad, but acquire their meaning only by being involved in particular practices: “[...] an apparatus with internally fixed components does not measure momentum, but only because it fails to indicate momentum by distinct marks” (Rouse, 2012, p. 287). At the same time, the material is folded back into the discursive, because measurements require descriptions in order to be significant. A material mark needs to be involved in a chain of performances (uses of the term “position”, for instance), which are “appropriate” expressions of the concept position (Rouse, 2012, p. 287). The system holding certain uses of concepts normatively accountable to materializations is the same system that produces their definiteness as concepts. Accountability for Barad, therefore, emerges through iterative material-discursive intra-actions; and both the recognizability of patterns of mattering, as well as their accountability, are located within the phenomena in question. Accountability turns out to be based on the ontologically embedded possibility of objective knowledge of the world; it is not dependent on human subjects or political collectives alone, following from Barad’s post-humanist commitment. This notion of objectivity exhibits the extent of Barad’s realist commitment as she writes: “Objectivity [...] is about being accountable and responsible to what is real” (Barad, 2007, p. 340).

Let us now question how and if Barad’s realist notion of objectivity and accountability could allow for the recognition of commonalities and common histories in cuts and marks in order to bring forth a certain kind of feminist (potentially collective) identity that could think and work towards political change. In order to approach this question, we need to further our understanding of the ontological possibility for intelligibility within intra-actions, since change and intelligibility are mutually entangled. Intelligibility can occur in two ways, due to the complementarity principle developed by Niels Bohr in an attempt to make sense of the wave-particle paradox. Bohr’s principle states that the wave and particle behaviours of photons and electrons are ontologically not simultaneously determinate — not only simultaneously un-knowable as proposed by Werner Heisenberg (Barad, 2007, p. 106). Furthermore, the measuring agencies are complementary to the measured object. The measuring system cannot take account of its full entanglement with the object under investigation

and neither can it take itself into account. In order to enquire about the measuring system itself, we would need to entangle it with a further apparatus, which would produce a different phenomenon. Both of these measurements, however, are not determinate at the same time, since they require two materially exclusive experimental set-ups (Barad, 2007, p. 347).

Thinking the complementarity principle in relation to a political subject describable in classical terms, we can say that it can measure the marks of the location imprinting itself on the apparatus. This measurement constitutes the “truth” (Rouse, 2012, p. 148) of the mark in relation to the environment, but only in reference to the particular phenomenon. The “meaning” of this mark, however, cannot be measured by the same experimental set-up, since the only determinate concepts available are those that are well-defined by the phenomenon in question. We cannot help ourselves to concepts not embodied within the particular set-up, since their meaning would be non-determinate, ideational and abstract within the phenomenon in question. We could take other notions and concepts into account if we were to exit the quantum framework for a different methodology in order to allow for the determination of the meaning of marks left on bodies. This would be the moment to re-introduce a classical subject, for instance, or to take recurrence to a language antecedently understood. If we want to remain within the quantum framework, however, and would like to undo this locality — with the intention of accounting for the political, ethical, epistemic and ontological meaning of the particular measurement as well as accounting for how it differs from others — we have to entangle the first apparatus with a subsequent one. In this motion, the first apparatus will now be treated quantum-mechanically as the object under investigation, which will again be complementary to the subsequent apparatus. This means that the truth of any one mark related to its surrounding and the meaning of that mark in relation to other marks are not simultaneously determinate but are complementary. This has both epistemological and ontological ramifications, since truth and meaning require two materially exclusive apparatuses that ontologically materialize different subjects and objects, each bound up with issues of accountability and responsibility only within and as part of the particular phenomenon.

Concluding our thoughts for now, we can say that what would be needed for agential realism to provide a theoretical ground for a feminist politics is to investigate the relation between “truth” and “meaning” within the quantum framework. In the absence of a methodology of thinking the two together, any apparatus and, with it, the prosthetically extended (potentially human) political subject can only know herself through the marks left on the body by the entangled environment, yet it cannot account for itself nor its entanglement with this environment, nor for the meaning of the marks left on its body. Rather uncannily, this observation corresponds with Malabou’s remark on female essence: “[woman] cannot define herself except through the violence done to her. Violence alone confers her being” (Malabou,

2011, p. 98) In the absence of an apparatus accounting for the relation between truth and meaning, this violence cannot be understood as a systemic violence particular to woman, but is exploded out into infinite locations with infinite differences without the ability to investigate overlaps, entanglements and mutual implications.

An apparatus that could account for the relation between two complementary intra-actions has become thinkable since the quantum eraser experiment initially performed by Scully *et al.* (1982), who crafted an apparatus that was said to be able to “erase” the which-path information of particles going through a slit-detector in retrospect, and, consequently recover the original interference pattern. In this sense, the complementarity between wave and particle behaviour was said to have been resolved. In Barad’s reading however: “[...] the original pattern is not recovered; rather a new interference pattern, one that takes a very different form is revealed [...]. In this regard it seems clear that the memory of events has not been erased, at least not in the usual sense of the terms “memory” and “erase”; on the contrary, in an important sense it seems evident that the observed phenomenon holds the memory of the fact that the which-path information was first determined and then made to be indeterminate once more through an appropriate modification of the apparatus” (Barad, 2007, p. 316). The outcome of the experiment does neither indicate the collapse nor resolution of the phenomena, and neither does it enable the simultaneous account of two initially complementary measurement intra-actions. Barad’s reading emphasizes the work of crafting apparatuses and knowledge inquiries that engage the difficult task of accounting for the historicity of matter. The experiment, in fact, exhibits the plastic quality of matter, in which past materializations extend, and are enfolded into, present materializations, which, themselves plastic, restrain and shape the possibility for future intra-actions. Thinking Malabou’s call for a minimal concept of essence with recourse to her notion of plasticity together with Barad, therefore, casts a perspective on crafting apparatuses which could enable a politics of possibilities and intra-actions deduced from embodied historicities of matter, potentially allowing for the changing of the possibility for change to become visible in measurement results.

Conclusion

Barad’s agential realism does not only give us a feminist reconceptualization of agency, accountability, subjectivity and objectivity, but could also be thought to theoretically provide the

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grounds for a feminist politics; this is because it would go beyond singular instances of marking to enable recognition of the recurrence of certain agential cuts as specific kinds of systemic violence as well as of the differences between locations. By way of such an apparatus — which remains hypothetical at the current moment with regard to the project of the humanities as well as politics — the location of a certain kind of feminist collective identity (thinking with Hinton) based on a minimal notion of female essence (as proposed by Malabou), together with the historicity of matter, becomes thinkable. Such an apparatus could, as always, be said to perform and participate in violence itself, as Peta Hinton warns us, calling the first movement of annunciative politics — the one of situating oneself — a “violent” one. Yet, whether or not we can differentiate normatively and/or ontologically between different kinds of violence, what, if not violent, can be the process of de- and trans-formation against what comes to be given and stabilized? Could we really think change of change and meaningful difference without what Malabou calls “disruption, negativity, adventure” (Malabou, 2008, p. 79) against and out of the given? Could we really think so, if we wish to refuse the contemporary prevalent “culture of amenity and docility” which leads us to remain endlessly flexible in the face of violent demands and impositions, “bowing our heads with a smile” (Malabou, 2008, p. 79).

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