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Ethos of Diffraction: New Paradigms for a (Post)humanist Ethics

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...the very house of difference rather [than]
the security of any one particular difference.
Audre Lorde *Zami*.¹

How *to live* a world of difference(s), a world in/as ongoing differentiation, in such ways that the outcome is not ever more separation and antagonism, exclusion and the fear of others, but so that new senses of commonality are envisioned? This article takes up this broad ethico-political (and to certain extents also insistingly human(ist)) quest for alternative worldly enactments, which I feel with contemporary urge on a planetary scale. Two issues seem at stake today when we approach this question of difference(s) and differentiability from such an ethico-political perspective: on the one hand, there seems to be an ever increasing sense of what can be called a post-secular awareness that 'world' is nothing but (dis)continuous differentiation, and that, thus, 'we' – and this article will be specifically concerned with the engagement of such 'we' – will not find any unambiguously 'good' alternative or 'secure' universal ground that is not always/already implicated in the unequal power relations constituting everything; and, on the other hand – and maybe as a consequence of such awareness – 'we' cannot not notice in our daily experiences the ubiquity of difference(s) played out globally as increasing inequalities and processes of exclusion, instigating frightening renewals of xeno- and other phobic anxieties. At first sight these issues might not appear to be adequately addressed by a philosophical argument, but seem to call for direct political action. Yet, as I want to argue in what follows, it matters deeply to all (practical) political agendas how we *theorize* – and this is how we *imagine* in the deepest sense – 'differences', 'otherness' or 'the commons'. Thinking *is* an active force with-in-of this world, and in view of the above quest my argument wants to stress that I see the urge to also *think-practice* this world differently, if – to speak with Donna Haraway – 'we' again want 'to make a difference', and if – to speak with Jacques Derrida – 'we' are still after 'the best, the most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self'.²

This text will be necessarily programmatic, since the project itself is too ramified to be treated exhaustively in the spacetime given to me in this article. What I aim at here is to unravel some dimensions of what I call the *ethos of diffraction* and develop it further into the articulation of a possible '(post)humanist ethics'. My focus on the ethical should in no way be misunderstood as turning away from politics. To the contrary, I aim at strengthening politics as an *affirmative politics of difference(s)* by specifying its constitutive ethico-onto-epistemological conditions and possibilities of 'agency' therein.³ Envisioning difference differently – i.e. theorizing a different difference – leads to a thought-practice in which concepts are not abstraction *from* the world, but an active force *of* this world – and thus always/already implicated in and concerned with world(ing): practicing *and* envisioning specific practices for this world.

Evidently, this article is inspired by the concept of diffraction such as it figures in the works of Karen Barad, Bracha Ettinger, Donna Haraway and Vicki Kirby. In a first part, I attend to the ethical specificities of diffraction as I see them addressed in specifically Barad's and Haraway's work, and I draw on some of Kirby's essential insights on how the ethico-political dimension might catch up with us in such diffracted worlds. Diffraction is used by Donna Haraway as a 'metaphor for another kind of *critical consciousness* at the end of a rather painful Christian millennium, one committed to making a difference'.⁴ And diffraction becomes quantized in the work of Karen Barad where it breaks open *ontologically* 'the binary of stale choices between determinism and free will, past and future'.⁵ I will bring to the fore the foundational nature of the move towards a different difference via diffraction in my discussion of these works. Ethics then is no longer relegated to a second order that comes after the facts, but is entangled with the onto-epistemological conditions as ethico-onto-epistemology.⁶ From this different 'ethical beginning', in a second step I move towards a diffractive reading of the posthuman(ist) quantum tradition of diffraction with the (in)human aesthetic worlds of the artist-philosopher Bracha Ettinger. Ettinger's theorization of psychic matrixial borderspaces permits continuing the ethico-onto-epistemological reformulations into *trans-subjective* agential figurations, for which also she uses explicitly the terminology of diffraction.⁷ Although Ettinger's psychic registers surely will introduce a difference that is not all too easily brought into harmony with the posthuman(ist) theorizations of diffraction – speaking from an aesthetical and psychoanalytical point of view, Ettinger's project addresses what is commonly seen as very human(ist) dimensions – I hope to produce significant resonances amongst these two thought-universes of diffraction that open the horizon for further discussion.⁸ I also hope that these new interferences allow to keep open currently stifling boundaries between what supposedly is or counts as posthuman(ism) and human(ism) respectively. Taking diffraction as a possibility to move beyond the persisting binary logic of difference inherited from the history of Western philosophy, I inquire into the ethos of diffraction as primary relating-in-difference and discuss the potential of such diffracting difference or difference diffracted for a (post)humanist ethics.

The *Ethos* of Diffraction or What Is *Ethico-Onto-Epistemology*?

Diffracting difference(s) is Haraway's longstanding concern as a transdisciplinary feminist scientist and thinker, be it differences in their sexual, racial, or (multi)species figurations. Her work can be read as a continuous critical engagement with misleading dualisms and binaries, i.e. the human exceptionalist bifurcation of nature all too characteristic to the still determining 'modern times'. Throughout her work she aims at multiplying and widening our imaginations of what difference actually 'is'. This shows already exemplarily in her entry on 'Gender' written for the *Marxistisches Wörterbuch* in the early 1980s, when she emphasizes 'a need for a theory of "difference" whose geometries, paradigms, and logics break out of binaries, dialectics, and nature/culture models of any kind'.⁹ That this does not merely address the need to *think* outside the box, beyond dialectics and binaries, but inherently connects to *practicing* and *acting* with-in this world, is exemplified in the continuation of her claim towards such 'different difference'. For, she continues, '[o]therwise threes will always reduce to twos, which quickly become lonely ones in the vanguard. And no one learns to count to four. These things matter politically.'¹⁰ The *ethos* of Haraway's engagement with differentialities is, thus, present from the start. 'Things matter' and theory never is a purely epistemological undertaking. Which cuts are made, to speak with Barad, will make a difference – and necessarily so because these cuts constitute ('are') the very plane from-with

which everything emerges.

Haraway does not explore new ways of imagining difference(s) in order to move *beyond* differentiability, but in order to undo the naturalized understanding of it (inherited from the dialectical Western thought tradition) as always only happening between two and as a movement of separation and categorization. Her more recent discussion of multispecies becoming shows this anew when she emphasizes that it is ‘the *patterns* of relationality...that need rethinking, [and] not getting beyond one troubled category for a worse one’.¹¹ Working (on) these patterns, Haraway introduces the optical metaphor of diffraction ‘as the *production* of difference patterns’.¹² Difference as inherently linked to the oppositional scenario (in its purest the Aristotelian contradiction) is transformed into a different – a diffractive – methodological engagement. The resulting ‘new’ criticality – for it is still criticality that is needed in any engagement with difference(s) and differentiability – does no longer base itself on reflexivity and reflection, i.e. on the mirroring attitude that ‘only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up the worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real’,¹³ but aims at the multiplication and dissemination of differential powers in order to produce other, unexpected, and (hopefully) less violent interference patterns. It habit(u)ates difference(s) differently.

Introducing diffraction in this way is precisely not about finding, or even about already having, the merely ‘better’ difference(s). Although a more conventional, i.e. moralistic understanding of the ‘ethical’ might strive for such a ‘better’, it is not what the specific *ethos* of diffraction that I want to draw out here is after. With diffraction – both as concept and as apparatus via which we envision difference differently – we witness a change in attitude: an opening up of the whole engagement with difference(s) and differentiability as ‘a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction’. For, as Haraway continues in this well-known quote, ‘[a] diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear’.¹⁴ The specific *ethos* linked to such an understanding of difference affirms the differential relationality instead of categorical separation, both *of* the phenomenal ‘what’ and *with* the methodological ‘how’ in every engagement with difference(s). Melanie Sehgal phrases this to me very adequately when she writes that diffraction in this sense is ‘process and the result of a process at the same time’.¹⁵ The relational image of difference(s) as the production of interference patterns, which this first usage of diffraction claims, transforms the engagement with differentiability or what could also be called ‘the problem of difference’: from the wish to resolve and overcome differentiability into homogeneity and sameness to the practice of affirming ‘differing differences’, yet without neglecting the ‘matters’ that are always at stake.¹⁶

If we now attend to Barad’s quantum ethico-onto-epistemology of diffraction, the differential relationality that an *ethos* of diffraction affirms becomes constitutive implicatedness and entangledness of ethical, ontological and epistemological dimensions. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* diffraction is introduced as the quantum physical phenomenon, which is able to illuminate the complexity of the always/already entangled processes of dis/continuous becomings that make up what we are used to calling ‘world’. However, as also Barad emphasizes: ‘[D]iffraction not only brings the reality of entanglement to light, it is itself an entangled phenomenon’.¹⁷ What the quantum physical two-slit experiment made explicit (both as the *Gedankenexperiment* at the beginning of the 20th century, and in its experimental realization in more recent years) is that the phenomenon of diffraction embodies a rich (even if for our usual reasoning paradoxical) constitution that changes the whole object of investigation (in our case the question of difference(s)). It both *is* this very object (difference

as diffraction) and it *acts* as its apparatus of investigation (diffracting difference).¹⁸ While it is significant not to forget to stress that diffraction ‘cannot serve both purposes simultaneously’, since the two dimensions are in scientifically experimental terms ‘mutually exclusive’,¹⁹ the real *Verschränkung* of ontology and epistemology (Bohr’s claim for real ‘indeterminacy’ rather than Heisenberg’s ‘uncertainty’) is essential for Barad. Following through the philosophical consequences of this condition of diffraction, the latter becomes in this step more than a metaphor for a different critical consciousness and reaches the level ‘in which we can understand diffraction patterns – as patterns of diffraction that make a difference – *to be* the fundamental constituents that make up the world’.²⁰ With diffraction, and this to me is one of Barad’s strongest theoretico-political claims, we have a tool and/as quantum spacetime-mattering to rethink ‘much of Western epistemology and ontology’ itself – with major consequences for its ethics.²¹ In the relational ontology of her agential realism, which follows from the theorization of diffraction as ontological condition, ‘knowing is a material practice of engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming’ – ‘onto-epistem-ology’.²² And if diffraction remains committed to making a difference, ethico-onto-epistemologically it will matter at every moment *which* knowledges get produced, *which* thinking populates the world and *which* cuts are made – because cuts necessarily will (need to) be made in dis/continuous becoming or ‘worlding’. That next to Haraway also Kirby’s *Quantum Anthropologies* is such an important conversation partner for Barad is more than understandable at this point. For in a gesture comparable to Barad, Kirby’s foundational work on Derridian deconstruction brings to the fore the entangledness and implicatedness of ethico-onto-epistemology. Reading Derrida’s grammatology as ‘a positive science’, as which he also announced it early on in his deconstructive engagements, and producing an understanding of *différance* as *physical* phenomenon of diffraction, Kirby is able to convert the so often misunderstood deconstructive statement that ‘there is no outside (of) text’ into a provocative ‘there is no outside (of) nature’. She asks: ‘Although Jacques Derrida’s science of grammatology is rarely read as a meditation on the nature of *physis* as originary diffraction (*différance*), what prevents us from reading it this way?’²³ While at first one might fear a jump too great, with Kirby’s claim that nature is (a) language, ‘life at large’ becomes the creative diffractive capacity to ever further differentiation that exemplifies the very same open (quantum) systematicity as Barad’s onto-epistemology: a world that both can never escape (from) itself and yet is ‘a plenitude of possibilities, a cacophony of convers(at)ions’.²⁴

With quantum entanglements, the *ethos* of diffraction, which I am after here, gets thus further fleshed out. Adding to Haraway’s emphasis on the practice of diffraction as the *production* of interference patterns that unhinges difference(s) from the oppositional-reflexive scenario, in Barad world itself *becomes* diffraction pattern(s), and with it ‘knowing, thinking, measuring, theorizing, and observing are material practices of intra-acting within and as part of the world’.²⁵ Such operations will always ‘matter’ in a more than merely logical sense, and thus onto-epistemology in its diffractive understanding cannot but always end up with the ethical question (and in quantum terms this can at the same time be its beginning). Diffraction is an ethico-onto-epistemological matter, because ‘[d]iffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter...Diffraction is a material practice for making a difference, for topologically reconfiguring connections’.²⁶ Both the nature of difference as differential entanglement (primary relationality) and the specificity (via diffraction) that everything has are essential to notice, or even better the specification that nothing can rid itself of a dimension of ‘mattering’, so that no matter is ever merely a ‘matter of fact’ but always/already a material-discursive meaning/mattering loaded with specific histories *and* futures. And, as I want to stress again with Kirby, it is essential to fully take account of the

Baradian image of entanglement of different becoming-forces, such as e.g. the scientist, the apparatus and the object of investigation itself in the diffraction experiment. It is essential to realize that ‘this does not mean that there are three different “entities” interacting with each other. Entanglement suggests that the very ontology of entities emerges *through* relationality: the entities do not pre-exist their involvement’.²⁷ Seeing entities as emerging through intra-active relationality prioritizes relations so foundationally that this not only implies that each and everything is logically effectuated by relations that ontologically come first – that literally these relations *are all there is* – but that each and everything is necessarily the temporary and historical product of a most specific – always concrete and mattering – constellation. *Ethos*, i.e. the differentiability of *how* relations are undertaken, lived and produced, becomes visible as inhering in the ontological endeavour. And therefore, as Barad argues, the following suggestion respectively an ethics derived from this ethico-onto-epistemological condition needs to be made:

[E]thics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world, as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities – even the smallest cuts matter.²⁸

The here theorized intimacy between ontology and ethics, which traditionally are seen as separate realms of being and acting, I see very much resonating with the Deleuzian inspired formula ‘ontology = ethics’ that I have engaged with elsewhere. As I argue there, in the process of relating these two domains, making them touch up/on each other (in Deleuze’s case via the Spinozian (monist) parallelism that a body *is* what it is capable of, that is what it *does*), both sides become-different from what either ‘ontology’ or ‘ethics’ in a classical sense were meant to be.²⁹

What Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* calls the ‘ethics of mattering’, and what more recently she has further specified as ‘an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference’,³⁰ now brings the *ethos* of diffraction as attitude of primary differential relationality and entanglement (dis/continuous becoming and cutting together-apart in exact Baradian terms) to the proper ethical question of accountability. And having changed the onto-epistemological map into an intra-active plane of dis/continuous becoming in which ‘we’ (ultimately) practice nothing but ‘what we are’, this ethical question of accountability must necessarily transform too. The quantum accountability shifts the ethical terrain from the supposedly known responsibilities that ‘we’ have to take up in ‘our’ lives – an ethics of the right conduct and fully based on the (human) subject – to on-going precariously located practices, in which ‘we’ are never categorically separate entities, but differentially implicated in the matters ‘we’ engage with (*we are*). Given the diffractive dis/continuous process of worlding, this also includes that there never will be a final outcome of ‘our’ doings. Rather, these will only ever become new – mattering – threads in the ‘entangled webs we weave’.³¹ The quantum thought-practice therefore engenders a foundational *queering* of everything and on all levels of ethico-onto-epistemology:

The quantum dis/continuity queers the very notion of differentiating. It offers a much-needed rethinking of ac/counting, taking account, and accountability that isn’t derivative of some fixed notion of identity or even a fixed interval or origin. Ac/counting [...] cannot be a straightforward calculation, since it cannot be based on the assumed existence of individual entities. [...] Rather, accountability is an ethico-

onto-epistemological commitment to understand how different cuts matter in the reiterative intra-activity of worlding, that is, of the entanglement of spacetime-matterings. Taking account entails being accountable, for all ac/countings are from within, not without.³²

This passage shows that the complexities of articulating ethical accountability grow immensely within the entangled spacetime-matterings of diffractive realities. Yet, this seems to be the task here: to envision the practice of ac/counting as only coming ‘from within’, and that is to conceive of ethico-political agency as the very entangled nature of becoming (in) the world. For, the need for agency does in no way shrink by linking ethics so closely to the ontological level. As Barad importantly adds in her discussion of the ethics of mattering: ‘Responsibility is not ours alone. And yet, our responsibility is greater than it would be if it were ours alone.’³³

In view of what has been argued up to here, the reference to ‘our’ responsibility necessitates a further engagement with the question of *how to sort out specificities of agential forces within the entangled nature of worlding*. My second part will devote itself now to this question of the ‘our’ that I read as a specific – yet not privileging – highlighting of concrete human agency. We have to continue the diffractive ethico-onto-epistemological thought-practice on the subjective level, or, to be precise, ask again: Who comes *after* the subject?³⁴

Towards a (Post)Humanist Ethics: Diffracting (New) Feminist Materialisms with Matrixiality

If one of the major consequences of the diffractive thought-practices of Barad, Haraway and Kirby is that accountability can no longer be based on any originary identitarian and ‘given’ starting point, or if, to speak again with Kirby, ‘there is a shared need to disarticulate the subject as an agential origin’,³⁵ the result must not be to understand this foundational problematization of agency as a withdrawal from the ethico-political question and as propagation of (human) relativism. To the very contrary, all of the works cited here show an immense care and concern for the ethico-political dimensions *at the very heart* of their theoretical engagements, as Barad exemplary shows when she argues that if not all responsibility is ‘ours’, the very specific one that ‘we’ nonetheless continue to have is thereby in no way diminished, but rather grows. *How* to meet the universe halfway is what matters to Barad, and it is the same *how to* that I see Haraway stressing with ‘when species meet’, in as much as the question of Kirby’s ‘originary humanity’ is no other than *how* to ‘keep[...] it all inside’, i.e. how to not again fall into the inside/outside trap that only ever displaces but never undoes the nature/culture bifurcation.³⁶ An ethico-political charging happens here at the level of thought-practices, for it matters how agencies are envisioned – subjective and non-subjective ones – for the diffracted/-ive naturecultures and the ethico-onto-epistemological one-ness as multi-*pli*-city that now has emerged as world(ing).

Certainly, one very seductive solution to this problem of agency is to confront straightforwardly – ‘attacking frontally’ as Derrida once called it³⁷ – anthropocentrism’s privilege of the Subject (with the capital S that cannot be anything but ‘human’) by simply inviting into the arena of subjectivity those who are usually excluded from it, i.e. including what is called ‘animals’, ‘things’ and ‘objects’, and thus opening up subjective agency beyond its merely human (consciousness-driven) conceptualization. However, while taking account of more than human agency in worlding entanglements is certainly essential (and as

was just shown at the heart of the reformulations of the authors addressed here), mere inclusiveness into the conception of subjective agency does not suffice.³⁸ All too often this practice of inclusion only re-affirms ‘The Great Divides’ that it aims to undo by merely adding, without transforming the ‘ground’ itself. Current trends in philosophy that I want to refer to as *thingification* and/or *object-fetishization*, as much as certain animal rights discussions in which – again Derrida – the *asinanity* ‘to assign, interpret or project’ wins over the careful *limitrophy* that is needed in this demanding situation, precisely exemplify this problem.³⁹ If a true opening beyond so-called ‘subjective’ agency is going to take place – and again, subjective here still echoes the history of a transcendently secured and phallogocentric human exceptionalism – then this must happen *before* the safe grounds of distinctions are in place (and ‘before’ is to be understood in the quantum sense in which the spatially and temporally separated before and after of linear causality are utterly queered). It must happen within the, as Barad said, ‘entangled webs we weave’.

It is at this point that the art-theory work of Bracha Ettinger must come to mind.⁴⁰ For our context, Ettinger might be described as a *par excellence* diffractive thought-practitioner in the arts, psychoanalysis and philosophy, whose focus on (in)human aesthetics provides a rich supplement to the posthuman(ist) (new) materialist tradition that I engage in this article. She is the theorist of *matrixiality*, which refers to ‘the psychic sphere that is trans-subjective on a sub-subjective level’.⁴¹ In her theory-practice, in which Ettinger links artistic, philosophical and therapeutic praxes, a highly conceptual universe (whose major concepts are ‘[m]atrix, metramorphosis, trans-subjectivity, co-poiesis, and co-emergence’⁴²) is interlaced with a most intimate embodied ‘feminine’ metaphoricity (*matrix* is the Latin for ‘womb’). As Griselda Pollock, however, has argued, as much as the Lacanian psychoanalytical basis of sexual difference that provides the background for Ettinger would be misunderstood when taken in any essentialist sense, i.e. as the ‘difference between men and women (gender), or the psycho-linguistic (+/-)’, also her matrixial reference would be misunderstood if we saw it as aiming at any simplifying biological prioritization (pregnancy/motherhood). Instead, it is to be understood as ‘a thinking apparatus for conductible affectivity, which gives voice to the affected body-psyche *co-emerging with* the other and the world’.⁴³

The matrixial borderspace developed in Ettinger attends to earlier (starting with the pre-natal) proto-subjective experiences than what Lacanian psychoanalysis usually allows for: ‘The matrixial exposure of the becoming-m/Other is an openness to the uncognized world and to unknown but intimate others’.⁴⁴ Ettinger thereby opens the horizon for *further agential* qualities and capacities, which the traditional conceptualizations of subjectivity, based on self-location and separation from the o/Other, have excluded from the start. Within the matrixial borderspace, the encounter of I’s and non-I’s is not based on splits but on co-emergences. And the central theoretico-aesthetical imagery of ‘weaving’ – ‘metramorphosis knits the matrixial field itself, with the rotation of its involuntary trails’, ‘[matrixial subjectivity] is weaving and woven’⁴⁵ – resonates so well with imageries of agency that are looked for as coming from within the entangled webs ‘we’ weave.

And yet, it must also be acknowledged here that it is not a simple task to read the intra-active becoming-ethical of quantum ontology together with the aesthetico-psychic sphere that Ettinger calls diffractive matrixial borderspace. The manifold resonances between the two thought-universes notwithstanding, their general frames of reference remain different. While the coordinates of the diffraction tradition that I have presented up to here (with Barad, Haraway, Kirby) moved in-between philosophy and the sciences (diffracted by each other) and in view of a post-human(ist) road-map, in Ettinger we touch up/on the intra-action of art

and philosophy, with a focus on psychoanalysis, one of the most dominant discourses on human subjectivity. In no way do I neglect these differentiations that are in need of more detailed attention than this article is able to provide. However, in the spirit of the diffractive attitude (*ethos*) in which other stories might become audible, I do ask my readers at this point to suspend any immediate urge to straight away separate in order to clarify, and rather follow the interference patterns that I find myself implicated in for a possible (post)humanist ethics. A diffractive reading at its best furthers the ‘splashes in the water’. And it is the central appearance of diffraction as the vision of a different difference also in Ettinger’s work – a ‘feminine different difference’ *supplementing* phallogocentrism – together with its leading into a (proto-)ethical force in which originary *severality* in entangled webs of co-emergence and borderlinks is the starting point and not atomistic entities of subject *versus* object or self *versus* other, that makes bringing things together here also a most fitting gesture.⁴⁶

Let me continue with a few more theoretical sound bites of *The Matrixial Borderspace*. These two passages from Ettinger centrally touch upon the issues that have been discussed so far:

Difference from a feminine angle diffracts; it is a difference based on webbing of links and not on essence... Differentiation and difference in co-emergence are attuned in metamorphoses that create – and that are created with-in – relation-without-relating in permutations of distance-in-proximity along borderlinks, transiting between presence and loss, subject and object, the foreigner and myself.

The feminine participates in the in-formation of the subject via transformation-by-transgression toward others differentiated-in-jointness. The matrix is a dynamic borderspace of active/passive co-emergence, with-in and with-out the uncognized other, that inscribes joint existential ontogenesis, a becoming-memory in relation to the feminine-Other desire. We may describe the matrixial borderspace after Francisco Varela’s autopoiesis, as a space of *co-poiesis*.⁴⁷

Again, Ettinger’s registers – the re-emergence of ‘the feminine’ and finding apparently separable entities of ‘subject and object’, ‘the foreigner and myself’ as the ground(s) on which relating takes place – might at first sound estranging to the attuned ears of the queering effects of diffraction that we have encountered before. Yet, this estrangement does not need to hold. For, as was already mentioned, Ettinger’s entry into ‘theorizing’ is not at the level of the Subject (and Object) proper, where categorizations receive essential character. The quite difficult yet most precise definition of the matrixial borderspace as the psychic sphere that is trans-subjective on a sub-subjective level expresses that ‘[t]he matrixial surfs beneath/beside the phallic... The Matrix emerges as a supplementary, shifting, retuning, con-current paradigm, where a web of meaning is woven by a process the artist-theorist names *metamorphosis*.’⁴⁸ To stress ‘besidedness’ and ‘supplementariness’ as Ettinger’s entry is highly significant here, because in order to account for the problem before us, ac/counting for the specificities of ‘our’ responsibilities in the entanglements that ‘we’ as world(ing) have, a straightforward attack on phallogocentrism suffices as little as the ‘head-on’ attack on anthropocentrism discussed earlier. Rather, what is needed in the diffractive attitude instead of opposition and substituting is to enlarge and complexify the whole realm of investigating subjectivity in a manner adequate to the complexification that the quantum reformulation of ontology as ethico-onto-epistemology has brought about. Only that way will diffraction as a different difference also in the aesthetico-existential dimension make the difference that I have been pursuing here.⁴⁹

With Ettinger's matrixial borderspace we enter into a zone that opens our imaginaries towards a primary relatedness on the aesthetico-existential level, without at the same time returning all too quickly to a taken for granted embodied subjectivity as a fixed entity prior to the relating itself. With-in the matrixial, this is what Ettinger's art-theory develops, subjectivity is an 'encounter-event' that 'refutes opposition and fusion because it is woven – a textile and a texture'. Yet, what is spoken of here is also not merely 'an endless multiplicity of singular individuals', Ettinger continues. A *severality* 'that *traverses* subjectivity' is the much more precise conceptualization:

The severality is a necessary result of the affective shareability that underlines it. Sharing knowledge via concepts is by definition limitless. Opening a difference via affect and mental waves is by definition limited. Someones [*sic*] must pass through the event and work through it; an encounter must have taken place.⁵⁰

What I want to suggest here is that Ettinger's aesthetico-(proto-)ethical art-theory works on the subject in the same way as Barad's ethico-onto-epistemological physics-philosophy works on ontology. And in diffractively reading them with and through each other, seeing both as gesturing toward each other's side, – Ettinger moving from the subjective to the cosmological and Barad moving from the ontological to the agential – we produce a rich picturing of the onto-epistemological/cosmic entangledness as-in the singular local knots that are woven in each and every cut that 'cuts together-apart'. If the question of ethical agency 'for us' emerges anew with Barad's ethico-onto-epistemology, Haraway's multispecies becoming-with or Kirby's originary humanicity, the specificity of 'our' responsibilities might be articulated and assessed further if they are brought to interfere with the originary severality of Ettinger's 'transjective psychic field' that is 'aesthetical and proto-ethical'.⁵¹ It further attunes the vision of entangled agency in the webs 'we' weave for the (post)humanist framework at stake here.

'Co/in-habit(u)ation' and 'Response-Ability' as New Paradigms for a (Post)humanist Ethics

In concluding this article, I would like to summarize what I tried to achieve here so that at last I can open up towards what I named in the title 'new paradigms' for a (post)humanist ethics. My argument began by pointing out that when diffraction is introduced into the arena of thinking – which by now has become spelled-out as worlding-practice itself, and thus as much constitutive of this world as any other (maybe more visible and objectifiable) practice – the image of thought (to say it with Deleuze) itself changes into one that always/already exemplifies 'attitude' as (critical) *ethos*. It, thus, transforms the question of difference and differentiability into affirmative practicing of differing difference in an ethico-onto-epistemological manner. What once was the problem of difference requiring ethical reflection from *above* a world troubled by asymmetries, has become a differentially entangled intra-active plane 'on' which worlding *matters* at every moment. Differentiation then, to say it again with Barad, is not 'about radical exteriority, but rather agential separability...not about othering or separating but on the contrary about making connections and commitments'.⁵² And Haraway's stories of becoming-with as 'turtles all the way down' stress exactly the same when she claims that '[t]he ordinary is a multipartner mud dance issuing from and in entangled species. It is turtles all the way down; the partners do not preexist their constitutive intra-action at every folded layer of time and space.'⁵³ It is, as was also argued with Kirby,

life at large that dis/continuously negotiates to ‘keep it all inside’.

From there the question emerged how precisely accountability and ac/counting ‘for us’ can be envisioned – an urgent question ‘for us’ in the face of the planetary state of things – given that accountability is possible now only from with-in the webs we weave. Diffractively reading Ettinger’s (matrixial) ‘other humanism’ – if I may call it thus – into the posthuman(ist) line made legible a diffractive borderspace of (trans)subjectivity *beyond* the limited humanist ‘Subject’, knitting together the ethico-onto-epistemological with the aesthetical-existential foldings that *we* become with-in the worlding-*Verschränkungen*. In order to fully succeed in these new entanglements or foldings – from the aesthetical to the ontological and back again (without – in the quantum sense – being anywhere in-between) – a more extensive diffractive reading of the two thought universes would be necessary.⁵⁴ But already at this point, two dimensions within a (proto-)ethical imagery come to the fore that significantly impacts the traditional framework of ethics. Instead of striving for co-existence with others via processes of recognition, as is common ethico-political theory-practice, the affirmation of primary relationality-in-difference, of ‘having-the-other-in-one’s-skin’,⁵⁵ changes profoundly the picturing of the ethical scene (I am tempted to even call it the ethical *Urszene*). Rather than ‘learning to share’ in the sense of the need to create sharing grounds, we need to learn that the shared terrain in all its ambivalence, because made up of asymmetrical power relations, is always/already (at) the beginning. And *habituating* ‘ourselves’ to this prior *cohabitation* is already a first step in this different ethicality.⁵⁶ Ettinger introduces the terminology of ‘co/in-habit(u)ation’ here,⁵⁷ which to me suggests to knot the ‘co’ together with ‘in’ (*/*) in order to avoid prioritization of either in- or outside, and linking this entangledness (-) to the dynamism of ‘habit(u)ation’ (superimposing habitat and habituation). This to me again resonates inherently with the intra-active plane of the manifold entangled relations of Barad’s quantum ontology in which ‘we are *of* the universe – there is no inside, no outside’.⁵⁸

The different ethicality envisioned here then no longer aspires an (always failing) *responsibility for* the other, with the subsequent question *which* responsibility to choose in order not to either appropriate otherness into sameness or patronize others via protectionism. It instead suggests *response-ability with* others that transforms the ethical problem itself: From the anthropocentric anxiety to wrongly ‘disturb the universe’ we move to the (post)humanist realization that ‘[t]here is only intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming’ and thus ‘disturbance is not the issue’; and from the phallogocentric phantasies of irreversible separations and splits we glimpse at the ‘impossibility of not-sharing’ and a ‘wit(h)nessing...that is not a sacrifice of myself in a disappearing for the sake of the Other, but rather a partial disappearing to allow jointness’.⁵⁹ All in all, this means practicing an ethical imperative of a different kind, one that with Haraway’s most recent terranpolitical project I find well expressed as learning ‘to stay with the trouble’.⁶⁰ What I hear here is affirmation (worthy its name) practiced: Affirming that there will never be an innocent starting point for any ethico-political quest, because ‘we’ are always/already entangled with-in everything; and yet that this primary implicatedness is not bound to melancholy or resignation, which for too long has been preventing us to think-practice difference(s) that really might make a difference.

Notes

I am very grateful for conversations with Karen Barad and Vicki Kirby during the writing of

this article. It was an incredible experience to be in exchange while writing on diffraction. I would also like to thank Birgit M. Kaiser, Iris van der Tuin and the two reviewers for very insightful and helpful comments in the completion of this manuscript.

¹ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (London: Pandora, 2003), p.197.

² See Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 273 and Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject”, in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, eds Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), p.114.

³ In this sense I take up the questions that Vicki Kirby in her recent essay on ‘Initial Conditions’ brings to the table: ‘How to justify why the coordinates of one particular frame of reference should take precedence over another? How to avoid political quietism? How to work toward a more generous understanding of the politics of difference if to differ, to discriminate, to decide and judge, seem to involve an inevitable act of negation or erasure: “This and not that!”’ See Vicki Kirby, ‘Initial Conditions’, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Studies*, 23/3 (2012), p.198.

⁴ Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p.273 [my emphasis].

⁵ Karen Barad, ‘Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come’, *Derrida Today*, 3/2 (2010), p.254.

⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷ Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁸ The essay uses deliberately different spellings for the entangledness of posthumanism and humanism: (post)humanist, posthuman(ist), (in)human. With this I wish to render specific the alternating emphases that I see at work in the different situations.

⁹ Donna Haraway, “‘Gender’ for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), p.129.

¹⁰ Donna Haraway, “‘Gender’”, p.129.

¹¹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.17 [my emphasis].

¹² Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p.34 [my emphasis].

¹³ See Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, p.16.

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’, in *The Haraway Reader* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), p.70. For *ethos* as ‘attitude’, see Michel Foucault’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’, in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp.303-319, especially p.309.

¹⁵ Melanie Sehgal, ‘Diffractive Proposition: Reading Alfred North Whitehead with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad’, in this issue.

¹⁶ The expression ‘differing differences’ comes from Gilles Deleuze’s ‘Difference must be shown *differing*’, in *Difference & Repetition* [1968], trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.56. I wish it to be read as always/already diffracted with the paper’s epigraph by Audre Lorde.

¹⁷ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.73.

¹⁸ See Karen Barad, ‘Quantum Entanglements’, p.253.

¹⁹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.73.

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- ²⁰ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, pp.72 and 84 [my emphasis].
- ²¹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.83.
- ²² Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.89 [my emphasis].
- ²³ Vicki Kirby, 'Initial Condition', p.204.
- ²⁴ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2011), p.88.
- ²⁵ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.90.
- ²⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.381.
- ²⁷ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, p.76. A specification needs to be made respectively the three authors cited here in quite entangled manners. It might be argued that Haraway's use of diffraction (and also her corresponding thought of 'naturecultures') by focusing on the production of interference patterns suggests pre-existing entities entering into relations. Thus, the quantum dimension in the Baradian and Kirbian sense of diffraction that touches precisely 'initial conditions' is not directly implied (see also Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 381). However, in my reading I entangle Haraway's *When Species Meet* into this (at least) triangular web, in which multispecies becomings are elaborated via Barad's intra-activity. Nonetheless, a differentiation might always be necessary given that Barad and Kirby explicitly engage with ontology/systematicity, while Haraway uses biology/evolution as her continuing main reference frame. Of significance in such careful differentiating (in a diffractive sense) see also Kirby's earlier discussion of Haraway's 'cyborg' in *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997), p.146ff.
- ²⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.384.
- ²⁹ See Kathrin Thiele, *The Thought of Becoming: Gilles Deleuze's Poetics of Life* (Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2008). The equation is inspired by the Deleuzian formula 'Monism = Pluralism' that emphasizes an understanding of Deleuze's philosophy as inheriting Spinozian immanence – 'radical immanence' even, as it is called by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University, 1994).
- ³⁰ Karen Barad, 'On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Studies*, 23/3 (2012), p.216.
- ³¹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.384.
- ³² Karen Barad, 'Nature's Queer Performativity', *Women, Gender & Research*, No. 1-2 (2012), pp.46-47.
- ³³ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.394.
- ³⁴ Referring again to the book entitled *Who Comes After the Subject?*, see note 2.
- ³⁵ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, p.89. See also Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's 'Introducing New Materialisms', in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham/London: Duke University, 2010), pp.1-43.
- ³⁶ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, p.89.
- ³⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am', in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.29.
- ³⁸ This is for sure a lesson to be learned already from the manifold critical engagements with the Subject in its phallographic and eurocentric profile by black feminist, queer, and postcolonial voices.
- ³⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal', p.18. I therefore join both Kirby's and Barad's ultimate dissatisfaction with the Latourian actor-network theory tradition of STS. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, pp.58-59, and Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropology*, pp.79-88. With 'object-fetishization' I refer to 'object oriented' philosophies/theologies. For a

representative collection, see *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds Levy Bryant, Graham Harman and Nick Srnicek (Melbourne: re-press, 2011).

⁴⁰ I will only be able to address the conceptual thought-practice of Ettinger here while her thinking is intimately linked to ‘metramorphosing with the artwork’. See Bracha Ettinger, ‘Traumatic Wit(h)ness-Thing and Matrixial Co/in-habit(u)ating’, *Parallax*, 5/1 (1999), p.92.

⁴¹ Bracha Ettinger, ‘Copoiesis’, *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 5(X) (2005), p.703

⁴² Griselda Pollock, ‘Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?’ in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p.2.

⁴³ For both these quotations, see again Griselda Pollock, ‘Trauma, Time and Painting: Bracha Ettinger and the Matrixial Aesthetic’, in *Carnal Aesthetics. Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, eds Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p.23; and ‘Femininity’, p.3.

⁴⁴ Bracha Ettinger, ‘Copoiesis’, p.709.

⁴⁵ Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, pp.110 and 196.

⁴⁶ For a close reading of Ettinger’s work as one of diffraction, see Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Scriptures: Diffracted Traces’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21/1 (2004), pp.101-105.

⁴⁷ See *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p.110.

⁴⁸ Griselda Pollock, ‘Femininity’, p.6.

⁴⁹ The expression ‘aesthetico-existential’ I borrow from Félix Guattari who e.g. in *The Three Ecologies* molecularizes subjective agencies thus. For a factual conversation between Ettinger and Guattari, see ‘From Transference to the Aesthetic Paradigm’, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 24/3 (1997), pp.611-624.

⁵⁰ Citations in this passage come all from *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p.196 [my emphasis].

⁵¹ See Bracha Ettinger, ‘Fragilization and Resistance’, *Studies in The Maternal* 1 (2) (2009), <<http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk>>[01/03/2014].

⁵² Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.392.

⁵³ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, p.32.

⁵⁴ This seems especially fruitful given that both Barad and Ettinger turn to Levinas’ ‘ethics as first philosophy’ in order to flesh out their ethical projects. For Barad, see ‘Towards an Ethics of Mattering’, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.391-396; for Ettinger, see her conversation with Levinas ‘What Would Eurydice Say?’, *ATHENA*, 2 (2006), pp.137-145, and ‘From Proto-Ethical Compassion to Responsibility: Besideness and the Three Primal Mother-Phantasies of Not-Enoughness, Devouring and Abandonment’, pp.100-135.

⁵⁵ See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.392ff.

⁵⁶ Considering that we are here striving for a (post)humanist ethics, we might want to call it *ethology* rather than *ethicality*. For ethics as *ethology* see also Gilles Deleuze in *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988).

⁵⁷ See Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p.157ff; and also ‘Traumatic Wit(h)ness-Thing’ and ‘Fragilization’.

⁵⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.396.

⁵⁹ See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, pp.395 and 396, and Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, pp.144 and 145 [my emphasis].

⁶⁰ See e.g. Donna Haraway, ‘Cosmopolitical Critters: Companion Species, SF, and Staying with the Trouble’, <<http://www.sas.ac.uk/videos-and-podcasts/culture-language-literature/cosmopolitical-critters-companion-species-sf-and-sta>>[01/03/2014].