

Volume 7, Issue 1

April 2023

Pages: 168-189

## Doing Concepts Differently

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### ABSTRACT

This article proposes an alternative way of using concepts in the scholarship of teaching and learning in the South. Normative understandings and uses of concepts in educational scholarship are challenged through a postphilosophical and postqualitative approach. In such an approach, concepts, instead of methods, become the generating force of research and pedagogy, as a counter to approaches which use formulaic methodologies to dictate the structure and content of pedagogy and research. Postphilosophies are predicated on a relational ontology which assumes that relationships precede entities and come into being in complex entanglements. Concepts are not seen as abstract ideas in the human mind but come into being through material arrangements as part of the world. In the paper, we develop six propositions as provocations for activating and doing concepts differently: Consent not to be singular, Render each other capable, Diffract concepts to enlarge your scholarly perspective, Make pedagogy an event, Make scholarship through research-creation, and Use writing to aerate your scholarly practice. The article extends an invitation to readers to consider doing concepts differently in their own scholarly practice.

Submitted: October 23, 2022

Accepted: January 30, 2023

## Introduction

Concept (n):

- 1: something conceived in the mind: THOUGHT, NOTION
- 2: an abstract or generic idea generalized from particular instances  
(Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Concepts are not ideational but are specific material arrangements.  
(Barad & Gandorfer, 2021: 24)

A concept is a brick. It can be thrown through a window or used to re/build a nation or a scholarly practice.

(Adapted from Massumi, B. 1987. Transl Foreword, Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus. xii)

The basic, common definition and understanding of concepts in the domain of higher education is that concepts inform how we work, teach and conduct research. Concepts are seen to be intellectual ideas that provide a frame for our thinking, shape our methodology and illuminate the object of scrutiny whether in pedagogy or research. They are considered to be abstract and generalisable, able to be applied to objects and phenomena, and to facilitate discussion in a common language. They can be used and deployed to direct our scholarly practice. Regarding research, scholars and students frequently search for a concept or a theory to inform their data, in order for their research studies to fulfil the requirements and conventions of western scholarship. The related notion of a conceptual framework is a support structure of related concepts, a systematic set of distinctive ideas, which provide a “basic outline for analysing the data and drawing conclusions” (Badenhorst, 2007: 21).

Concepts and their frameworks can also be used in more flexible ways – stretched to accommodate the specificities of research projects, debated, challenged and modified by the objects or phenomena of the inquiry or particularities of the context. Although concepts within particular disciplines are often given meanings relevant to the aims and foci of the discipline, Mieke Bal (2002: 4) demonstrates the travelling nature of concepts and their potential for the new: “hazardous, exciting, and tiring, travel is needed if you are to achieve the gain of new experience”. Concepts travel, she says, not merely across disciplines, places, and times, but also within themselves as a result of intimate interaction with the exigencies of particular contexts. Bal advocates concepts as an alternative methodological base for analysis, through bringing together concepts and the objects and phenomena of study into a complex, living field, likely to be replete with obstacles, questions and problems which need to be traversed if not answered or solved. She is adamant that concepts are not labels and that if merely used to name or identify, they lose their working force. On the

other hand, if their historical, disciplinary and theoretical location and potential are understood, they can become partners in a dynamic, symbiotic interaction between scholar and object or phenomenon under investigation.

In this article, we challenge the notion of concept as an abstract idea in the human mind, even in its more flexible application such as that of Bal's as introduced above. Rather, we consider how a postphilosophical reorientation towards thinking-with<sup>1</sup> concepts differently opens pedagogy and scholarship to new possibilities. Postphilosophical approaches<sup>2</sup> include those of posthumanism, feminist new materialism and postcolonialism and encompass the work of Karen Barad, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, Édouard Glissant, Donna Haraway and Isabelle Stengers, amongst others. Their work is undergirded by the philosophies of Niels Bohr, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Baruch Spinoza and Alfred North Whitehead.

Postqualitative inquiry is a way of putting postphilosophical approaches to work. Postqualitative scholarly approaches challenge the hegemony of formulaic methodologies which are ubiquitous in qualitative research. Bettie St. Pierre, founder of 'postqualitative inquiry', advocates using concepts as methods, or instead of methods, in pedagogical scholarship (St. Pierre, 2017; Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017). Conventional educational research methods, frequently used in the scholarship of teaching and learning, are based on quantitative or qualitative methodologies. Postqualitative inquiry shifts from the management of knowledge to the task of creation and invention through beginning with philosophical concepts rather than methods. This process is intended to activate a more experimental, thoughtful and open-ended approach.

This article is structured in the following way: we begin with a discussion of concepts and practices of Karen Barad as a key postphilosophical scholar, in order to challenge traditional Eurocentric views founded upon rationality, separability, fixities in knowledge and human exceptionalism. This is followed by an introduction to propositions as a way of prompting new directions in pedagogy and research, after which six propositions – based on key concepts – are provided as prods to action.

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<sup>1</sup> The hyphenated form of *thinking-with* signals a collaborative, relational process of thinking.

<sup>2</sup> The term postphilosophy was used in a webinar series gathering together prominent academics from different disciplines in the fields of feminist new materialism, posthumanism and postcolonialism. For more information about the webinar series, visit <https://education.missouri.edu/learning-teaching-curriculum/webinars/>. These webinars were published in a double special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* in 2022 (see Kuby & Bozalek [2022] for the editorial which introduces the special issues).

## Postphilosophical approaches to concepts for doing academia differently

Postphilosophies such as feminist new materialism and posthumanism are predicated on a relational ontology which assumes that relationships precede entities. Entities (including concepts) only come into being in the world through relationships. An important change in the postphilosophical view of concepts is that they are not necessarily dependent on the consciousness of the human subject. This means that they are liberated from the realm of the human mind and from human intentionality. Subjects and objects also come into being through relationships rather than preceding them. Space constraints preclude a discussion of all the postphilosophers mentioned above. Barad is emphasised in this section because they<sup>3</sup> provide a particularly clear explanation of relational ontology, the problems with representational thinking and the inextricable connection between the material and the discursive. Barad doesn't assume a pre-defined givenness of concepts as capturing meaning; rather, for Barad, concepts come into being through the material arrangements of the world.

### Concepts as material-discursive

Feminist new materialism provides an alternative to the linguistic or cultural turn that focused solely on language, texts and discourses, excluding the importance of the material world (Braidotti, 2013). Instead, matter is seen as central. The commonplace understanding of matter as a discrete substance out of which things are made is challenged by posthumanist and feminist new materialist scholars who do not see things as having fixed essences or properties but rather as a vital process of coming into being through ongoing entanglements. This is a significant difference in conception here as matter is an intra-active becoming and configuring of the world. Similarly, the discursive is seen in a different way. It is not a speech act or a synonym for language and hence a capacity of humans. Rather, discursive practices are the material conditions for meaning making through ongoing performances of the world articulating itself. Hence matter and meaning are mutually implicated; the material and the discursive are inextricably entangled.

The American feminist queer quantum physics scholar, Karen Barad, is a postphilosopher for whom entanglement is the pre-existing state of the world. Barad's notion of 'intra-action' is an important one in a relational ontology, which is described in the following way:

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<sup>3</sup> The pronoun *they* indicates Barad's gender identity preference.

The neologism ‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies ... the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-actions. It is important to note that the ‘distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements.* (Barad, 2007: 33 [emphasis in original])

Concepts in Bohr’s quantum physics are diffracted through concepts from the critical and poststructural theory of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Gloria Anzaldúa, Donna Haraway, Vicky Kirby, Kyoko Hayashi and Jacques Derrida to develop Barad’s framework of agential realism, which can be thought of as a transdisciplinary theory or framework, in that it is diffracting concepts from the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. Together with other postphilosophers such as Haraway, Braidotti, Manning and Massumi, Barad rejects the complementary notions of representationalism, humanism and individualism, all of which have had a major influence on contemporary thinking. Barad’s non-representationalist way of thinking calls into question the separate existence of words and things and the notion of truth based on their correspondence. Representationalism positions humans at a distance from the world upon which they reflect. Barad proposes instead a performative understanding of discursive practices which challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things. Unlike representationalism, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorising as practices of engagement with the world of which we are a part. For Barad, it is important also to investigate the conditions or practices that give rise to concepts in their sedimented historicities, so that these become apparent. This is necessary because, as Barad (2007: 360) puts it, “[l]ike a good magician, representationalism would have us focus on what seems to be evidently given, hiding the very practices that produce the illusion of givenness”.

Reflection or reflexivity are tools of representationalist perspectives which assume that the world can be mirrored, held at a distance and critically reflected upon. Nonrepresentationalist or performative understandings of the world are better served by diffraction, where differences emerge within phenomena<sup>4</sup> rather than from the separation of subject/object, inner/outer – there is an entanglement. From a nonrepresentationalist perspective “*practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world*” (Barad, 2007: 91 [emphasis in original]). Matter, including the materialisation of concepts, participates in the world’s becoming. “Which practices we enact matter - in both senses of the word”, thus showing how ethics in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> In a Baradian agential realist framework, there are no independently existing determinate bounded entities, only phenomena, which are entanglements of spacetime-mattering – that is, they are material-discursive intra-actions which extend across space and time.

making a difference in the world is also entangled with the materiality of concepts (Barad, 2007: 91).

Barad proposes diffractive methodology as an alternative to representationalism:

Diffraction is an ethico-onto-epistemological matter. We are not merely differently situated in the world; ‘each of us’ is part of the intra-active ongoing articulation of the world in its differential mattering. Diffraction is a material-discursive phenomenon that challenges the presumed inherent separability of subject and object, nature and culture, fact and value, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, epistemology and ontology, materiality and discursivity (Barad, 2007: 381).

From Barad's perspective, intellection and the making of concepts are not merely a human affair, involving ideation which happens inside the human brain. Knowing is part of the world's ongoing performativity in which different parts of the world make themselves intelligible to other parts. Barad is thus not merely challenging the conceptual framework of concepts, but proposing that concepts in their dynamism, are part of the material enactments or doings of the world. As Barad explains in an interview with Daniela Gandorfer, “for me, thinking concepts is not a way of engaging with a framework in which representations of things either match or do not match some cultural notion or natural thing in the world” (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021: 27). Rather, concepts are enactments which are part of the world – they do not describe the world.

Barad (2007) uses the work of quantum physicist Niels Bohr to show how concepts are not ideas which “capture aspects of the world” (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021: 24). Examples from physics have relevance to thinking concepts differently in higher education: the concepts “particle” and “wave” do not pre-exist their measurement in an apparatus but come into being through particular material arrangements and apparatuses. Similarly, the complementary theoretical concepts “momentum” and “position” only become determinate when measured by particular apparatuses – a fixed platform for position and a moveable platform for momentum. “Particle and wave”, and “momentum and position” are known as complementary concepts as they cannot exist at the same time – the one precludes the other. Bohr understands the reciprocal relationship between particle and wave, momentum and position in ontic and semantic ways, not just epistemic ways, since you “cannot know something definite about something which there is nothing definite to know” (Barad, 2007: 118). We can only know the particleness or waveness through particular physical arrangements – they don't exist as qualities in and of themselves.

As is the case in these scientific examples, concepts in higher education too are not products of the human mind but arise out of and are determined by particular material arrangements and conditions. For example, the recent protest movements by South African students materialised

differently in different concepts. The thrust of the concept #Rhodesmustfall in the student movement materialised in a historically white university (HWU) founded by notorious colonialist, Cecil John Rhodes, where students foregrounded the decolonisation of a hegemonic colonial curriculum, whereas the impetus for the concept of #Feesmustfall in the student movement at historically black universities (HBUs) was determined by economic imperatives, where students did not have the basic resources to be able to study.

According to Barad, it is possible to work with the material conditions of concepts by tracing the entanglements of their sedimented historicities. Concepts are described “not as things in conceptual space” but rather as “a field of spacetime-mattering” (an inseparable entanglement of space, time and matter in its iterative intra-action) (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021: 29). One way of working with concepts is to use a diffractive methodology which allows concepts to breathe, by aerating them and opening them up, to enable a response, much like an earthworm does by aerating the soil by turning it over and over again (Barad, 2014). Barad talks about walking around in concepts and of tracing entanglements that constitute a material object as an ethical practice, both for scholars and students, with the understanding that no past is ever finished finally:

I walk around in a sentence, I walk around in a word. A word, or even a letter, entails stories, different stories. *It is a phenomenon, an entire entangled spacetime-mattering of particular kinds of configurations — and not others.* These are matters of ethics, of justice (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021: 32).

### Affectivity of concepts

Barad walks around in words and concepts, tracing their entanglements; however, in this process, affect is largely bypassed. It is important to acknowledge that what concepts can do is connected with their affectivity. Baruch Spinoza defines affect as a body’s “capacity to affect and to be affected”, and this does not only refer to a human body. Affect in this sense refers to a life force and a capacity for responsiveness, which capacitate a body’s state, either increasing or decreasing its ability to act. Different from emotion and feeling as experienced by an individual as an internal state, the concept of affect enables teachers and researchers to consider non-cognitive aspects – the generative or stultifying force of affect within a classroom, for example, or the affectivity of concepts used in research. Affect is a relational force, a circulating energy, which can awaken us to qualities of motion, change, sensoriness and futurity in our becomings-with concepts through encounters. Affective tonality refers to the specificity of the affective forces at play within these encounters and how these forces shape experience:

Affective tonality is something we find ourselves in, rather than finding in ourselves. It's an embracing atmosphere that is also at the very heart of what happens because it qualifies the overall feel. Affective tonality is what we normally call a "mood" (Massumi, 2008: 21).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used concepts as their method of socio-political analysis (Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017). They dated the different plateaus (or chapters) in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to indicate that concepts arise in particular circumstances, in response to particular problems, become sedimented, and take on different meanings in different historical periods and in different disciplines. Of utmost importance, though, is not what concepts *mean*, but what they can *do* for scholarship, be tools for analysis or bricks thrown through windows to break down outdated systems of thought. For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy is about *creating* concepts, just as pedagogy is about experimentation. Experimental encounters potentiate "*thinking* in thought" (Deleuze, 1994: 139, our italics), which conventional thinking, based upon rationality and the known, does not. Thinking and pedagogy are both processes rather than methodological applications; these are processes of conceptual invention, complication or modification in the face of problems the contemporary world throws up.

This section has discussed postphilosophical approaches to concepts, in particular those of Barad concerning the material-discursive (the inseparability of concept and matter), intra-action, and relational ontology. The double implication of this relational ontology is, firstly, that the world does not consist of discrete independent entities with predetermined fixed properties, and, secondly, given that there is no external position, we are always part of an entangled world and there are no pre-existing subjects and objects. In order to create possibilities for doing academia differently, the next section provides a set of propositions to open understandings of how SOTL in the South might be performed differently from common understandings of pedagogy and scholarship.

### Introduction to propositions

In this part of the paper, we develop a number of propositions which pertain to doing academia differently using concepts within a postphilosophical frame of reference. First, we briefly explain what propositions are and how they can be put to use. We then move to six propositions: Consent not to be singular; Render each other capable; Diffract concepts to enlarge your scholarly perspective; Make pedagogy an event; Use writing to aerate your scholarly practice; Practise research-creation.

Propositions are useful tools for doing academia differently in SOTL, in that they provide possibilities for a leap in the imagination and a concomitant shift in practice. Rather than focusing on the givenness of what is (what Alfred North Whitehead (1978) refers to as actualities that are already given and which already exist in the world), propositions create what Whitehead calls “a lure for feeling” (Stengers, 2011: 383). This is not an enticement towards emotion in an individual but rather a relational pull, tonality or mood in the event which activates a new becoming.

Propositions are not fixed sets of instructions, research goals, guidelines or judgements of any sort. Rather, propositions attend to an affective force of thought-in-the-making, propelling a potential event. Another way of conceptualising propositions is as experiments for provoking thinking, activating what might be, by enabling a response, which may be collective. Propositions can also be thought of as enabling constraints – simultaneously productive and limiting. They are both actualising and speculative and can be theories in the making. “Propositions move the concept into action, this movement is always emergent, its creative potential never pre-established” (Manning, 2009: 226).

In responding to the heterogeneous and complex social and cultural conditions of urban school life through a project on gardening, Nikki Rotas (2016) shows how propositions create an embodied process of knowledge creation, creating event potential through process-oriented modes of learning. She allows students to develop their own propositions, using diaries to activate unforeseen modes of knowing and thought with the more-than human<sup>5</sup>, rather than as reflection tools. In this way, the students become experimenters and interventionists in social and environmental justice issues in their schools. In what follows, we put forward six propositions. Space prevents us from doing more, but each proposition will briefly provide at least one example of how a proposition has been or might be engaged with in a fruitful way.

#### *Consent not to be singular*

Édouard Glissant was a writer, poet, philosopher and literary and cultural critic from Martinique, and an influential figure in Caribbean thought. This proposition is a translation of his words, “Consent à

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<sup>5</sup> See Manning (2016, fn2:233-234) for an explanation of the difference between more-than-human and more-than human: “the more-than-human is a way of making operative ways of thinking the nonhuman without excising the force of human complicity from these worldings. When I speak of the more-than human, I am focusing on the realm of the human, emphasizing that the category of the human is always modulated and affected by the more-than”.

n'être plus un seul" in his *Poetics of Relation* (2010). Translated as, "Consent not to be singular" or "alone" or "a single being", the words form part of his postcolonial analysis of the phenomenon and aftermath of slavery. They are an attack on the metaphysics of individualism, intra- and inter-species separation, discreteness and hierarchisation, which has enabled one group to enslave another. They are also the only sensible response to a diverse and multi-faceted world. Paradoxically, however, the harsh, abyssal<sup>6</sup> realities of slavery have shown the potency of relation in acknowledging the complexities and multiplicities of a world founded upon difference.

Philosophically, the injunction of this proposition may be extended to all forms of living, thinking and doing; it is an injunction to accept relationality rather than individualism as the condition of life on this planet, and to practise it in ethical ways. This view is held also by Deleuze and Guattari in their ontology of immanence and by Karen Barad in their ethico-politico-onto-epistemological philosophy of entanglement, where entities are constituted intra-actively. As Barad writes in their book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, which captures the spirit of this provocation:

This book is about entanglements. To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating (2007: ix).

Authorial intentionality and individual subjectivity are thus refuted or reconceptualised: "To reach not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says "I"" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:3).

The imperative verb "consent" in "consent not to be alone" defies and unravels normative views of agency, implying not so much an act as a "non-performative condition or ecological disposition" which is at the basis of a "poetics of relation" (Moten, 2017: xv). A poetics of relation is far more than a group of people acting together; it is rather the complexity, multiplicity and ongoing dynamism of the earth. The proposition provokes a disposition in which living on this planet is a complex entanglement of multiplicities (human, animal, material, technological, historical and epistemological) rather than an encounter between individuals, and a form of scholarship which acknowledges and practises a condition of worldly, responsible and response-able relationality in both pedagogy and research.

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<sup>6</sup> Technically referring to the depths of the ocean, this term is used by Glissant (2010b), Harney and Moten (2013) and de Sousa Santos (2007) to encapsulate the abyss of the unknown, the abyss of the ocean floor during the transatlantic slave journey.

In the scholarship of teaching and learning, the proposition, “Consent not to be singular”, should be considered in relation to modes of thinking, researching, writing and pedagogic practice. It may thus inform practices of collaboration (as in collaborative reading groups, writing groups and research projects)<sup>7</sup>; transdisciplinarity (as in Barad’s diffraction of quantum field theory concepts through feminism, postcolonialism, critical race theory and poststructuralism, and Manning’s of art and philosophy); multilingualism and multimodality rather than an imposition of the dominant language; as well as other rhizomatic approaches. Glissant acknowledges Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome as an enmeshed, spreading root system which “challenges that of a totalitarian root [...] Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (Glissant, 2010: 11). Deleuze and Guattari compose the opening sentence of *A Thousand Plateaus* in a strikingly terse formulation which acknowledges “the poetics of relation”: “The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away” (1987: 3).

The motive behind this proposition is a voyaging across space and time. It is also a voyaging toward the other, the unfamiliar, the not-yet-encountered, rather than the search for fixed, universal answers and a colonial-type expansion of territory. And a serendipitous encounter is not so much of subject-to-subject but rather one which reveals the scintillating possibilities of relation, a build-up of energies, the potential of the coming into relation: “The truth of multiplicity ... is the step toward the other. ... What’s different in the world constitutes our strength” (Glissant, 2011: 9-12).

### *Render each other capable*

Rendering each other capable, being mutually imbricated, a concept developed by Vinciane Despret (2004; 2016), in her careful observation of the reciprocal relationships between human and non-human animals, is similar to Barad’s notion of response-ability and Haraway’s (2016) notion of becoming-with. As Haraway observes:

Despret’s kind of thinking enlarges, even invents, the competencies of all the players, including herself, such that the domain of ways of being and knowing dilates, expands, adds both ontological and epistemological possibilities, proposes and enacts what was not there before. That is her worlding practice (2016: 126-127).

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<sup>7</sup> See Bozalek, Newfield, Romano, Carette, Naidu, Mitchell & Noble (2021) as a detailed example of the value of collaborative reading-writing-research groups.

Response-ability is the ability to respond in attunement with the other, with the idea of making a difference in the world, of bringing one another to life. According to Barad, the indeterminacy of the world calls for a response, which includes sharing compassion for suffering, recognising the responsibility to the other. Becoming-with or being rendered capable is not limited to human and non-human animals but includes matter – atoms become-with each other in the void, stepped leaders of lightning yearn to connect with the ground (Barad, 2015).

Participating in reading difficult philosophical texts aloud together is a way of making new connections with texts and ideas through collective and collaborative responsive engagement, dislocating habitual ways of knowing, being and doing. Each reading session, even with the same piece of text is a unique experimentation and invention and produces new connections depending on the context and participants. In this way, what happens in each reading session cannot be preconfigured or foreseen. In addition to reading, peer-to-peer reviewing of essays is another way of rendering one another capable in the classroom.

Rendering each other capable focuses on the incipiency of learning as thinking-doing rather than learning about the givenness of pre-existing facts and objects. From a relational ontology, we cannot consider knowing in advance. In its relationality, knowing happens imperceptibly. Marks left on bodies, the contagions of pasts, presents and futures, spacetime mattering changes possibilities in each encounter. Pedagogy is emergent and in the making, as it can never pre-exist the encounter of being rendered capable and of rendering each other capable (Barad, 2007; Truman, 2016). A form of education which is dependent on exit level outcomes is rejected from a processual perspective of being rendered capable, as inventiveness happens through relation.

#### *Diffract concepts to enlarge your scholarly perspective*

Diffraction is an important methodological concept in postphilosophy – for thinking, reading, writing and researching. Both Haraway and Barad see diffraction as a way of making a difference in the world, proposing it as an alternative to endless self-reflection. According to Haraway, "diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings" (Haraway, 2000: 102). Haraway (2000) uses diffraction as a way of looking at the history of how something came to be. This is similar to Barad's notion of 'tracing' the historical sedimented entanglements of how an object is materially-discursively produced in the world. Haraway shows how through diffraction it is possible to make visible many different meanings which have been lost

in an object or a concept. Tracing the historicity is a spatial and temporal diffraction of how it came to be used in world, revealing an object's complicity in the history of capital formation, in state regulatory apparatuses, and major industries.

Diffraction in quantum physics is a physical phenomenon which can involve water, sound or light waves means “to break apart in different directions” (Barad, 2014: 168). Diffraction happens where waves combine when they overlap and bend and spread out when they encounter an obstruction. This process creates an interference pattern (Barad, 2007: 76) showing the *effects* of difference. Diffraction can be both spatial and temporal. In spatial diffraction, one wave can be in multiple places at once and multiple waves can be in the same place at one time. Temporal diffraction is derived from the time-energy indeterminacy principle, where a given particle can co-exist in entangled state of superposition in multiple times – threaded through the past, future and present – an indeterminate time. Temporal diffraction starts from the assumption that time is out of joint and can be diffracted through itself (Barad, 2010: 244).

Philosophical diffraction is a methodology where one or more theories, oeuvres, texts, concepts are read *through* rather than *against* one another (Barad, 2007). It entails a care-full, attentive, detailed and responsive reading of one through others without dismissing any of them; a diffractive reading means that one is not judging from without – as in a prefixed frame of external judgement. New or creative insights are enabled through the interferences and entanglements across different texts, ideas, theories, oeuvres and their concepts. Barad enacts diffraction in the writing of her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007)<sup>8</sup>.

For both Haraway and Barad, Trinh Minh-Ha’s (1986) notion of “inappropriate/d others” is important for diffraction as it denotes difference as exteriority-within, which undermines opposition or separatism, where givenness and the essences of categories are challenged. For example, there is a Third World in every First World and vice versa. Diffraction allows objects or phenomena to be traced from transdisciplinary perspectives, to understand how disciplines and concepts always already live inside one other.

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<sup>8</sup> As a recent South African example, see Motala & Bozalek (2022) where traditional land surveying methodologies are diffracted through posthuman cartographies.

### Make pedagogy an event

One always affects and is affected in encounters; which is to say, through events. To begin affectively in change is to begin in relation, and to begin in relation is to begin in the event (Massumi, 2015: ix).

How might we understand a pedagogy of the event in order to make pedagogy an event? To begin, we unpack what an event is and what it does. According to Brian Massumi, an event is an energising affective encounter that he calls “a something doing” that “snaps us to attention together” whilst “correlating our diversity to the affective charge this brings” (2015: 115). An event “takes off from its elements’ contribution to it” (2011: 20) and opens new ground for exploration and invention in ways that are both risky and indeterminate (2015: 57). Risky because we cannot know in advance what the event will do and how it will do us, and indeterminate because there is no knowing whether events will happen and if they do, we cannot predict how they will play out (2015: 57). The emphasis on the “something doing” troubles human’s centrality in the event and foregrounds how the effects of the doing activated in the field of relations are the heart of the matter. Linked to this is how events are transindividual in that they carry affective potential for becoming other “because the ability to affect and the ability to be affected are two facets of the same event” (Massumi, 2015: 48).

Unlike traditional approaches to pedagogy that tend to reduce pedagogical encounters to a mechanistic transmission of content to learners, a pedagogy of the event is concerned with its affective tonality. In this instance, affective tonality refers to the specificity of the affective forces at play within the encounter and how these forces shape the pedagogical experience itself.

Pedagogical events are therefore shaped not by the content “taught” as much as by the “performative tendencies” of immanent affective flows that open the event towards its ongoing generative potential (Manning, 2020: 12). By attending to how these tendencies materialise and impact on the relational field within the classroom, affective tonality moves us towards differential new knowledges. Pedagogy is thus conceptualised as a process that unfolds through the event’s happening that, rather than being reduced to a set of prescriptions, guidelines and prerequisite outcomes that have been planned in advance, takes us with it in expected ways that give rise to new thoughts<sup>9</sup> (Manning & Massumi, 2014: 91). Importantly, pedagogical events are not free-for-all anything-goes encounters; it is imperative that they are carefully curated with the support of

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<sup>9</sup> For a recent example, see Newfield (in press), Literature and Culture Studies in classrooms: From petrification to spark, in Desz-Tribuczak, J. & Garcia-Gonzales, M. (Eds) *Children's Culture Studies after Childhood*. John Benjamins Publishing.

enabling constraints and techniques of relation that shape the particular coming together of the event (Massumi, 2015: 77).

Rather than trying to get everyone on the same page in pedagogical settings, a pedagogy of the event attunes to the affective difference within the event (Massumi, 2015: 56). Moreover, given that each event has a life of its own that can never be repeated, the differential quality of a pedagogy of the event becomes an iterative generator of different potentials for the future and, by the same token, each one always takes up the past differently (Massumi, 2015: 50). Unlike linear time, event time is a capacious in-between time that cuts transversally between past and future in ways that reactivate the past differently, carry new potentials for the future and energise the present (Massumi, 2015: 50). So while all events begin anew, they always start in a field of relation and carry with them traces of past events.

#### *Make scholarship through research-creation*

This proposition focuses on research-creation as an experimental and experiential practice that embraces modes of expression such as creative writing and art-making, that are often undervalued in the academy. Research-creation can contribute to SOTL because it ushers in “emergent modes of life” and prefigures “new forms of value” (Manning, 2020: 194). For Manning, research-creation is an ecology of practices that operates in the between of making and thinking, that makes a difference to how knowledge is created, the way that enquiry is done and how it might be disseminated (2020: 228). The hyphen in research-creation is theoretically significant for Manning in that “making is a thinking in its own right, and conceptualization a practice in its own right” (Manning, 2016: 41). Embodied and experimental research-creation processes enact a thinking through making that allows students to think/make with complex concepts in ways that foreground their knowledges and lived experience in relation to the material about which they are learning, and in so doing signal to students that their knowledges and modes of expression matter.

Research-creation in a project of decolonising the curriculum would be undertaken through making rather than defining the concept of decolonisation. Research-creation processes offer a way forward to this challenge by moving away from traditional representational modes of knowledge production and foregrounding how thinking happens through embodied practices, as a thinking-through-making that both disrupts the theory/practice divide and shows how concepts materialise as an entangled process of learning-through-making. When decolonising a history of art curriculum that grapples

with the discipline's implicatedness in the colonial project, students draw, paint, collage, knit, write as problematising responses to their affective encounters with the effects of colonial practices<sup>10</sup>. Students' generative thinking-through-making shows how thinking is not limited to the individual human brain but is part of what happens in the material world. Moreover, as pedagogical tools, their artworks generate thinking anew rather than repeating and entrenching that which is already known.

#### *Use writing to aerate your scholarly practice*

The aeration of scholarship by doing concepts differently necessitates writing differently, as is instantly sensed by readers coming to postphilosophers and their forebears for the first time. Feelings of disorientation, confusion, shock or being lost often accompany initial readings of Deleuze and Guattari, Karen Barad, Erin Manning, Édouard Glissant, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. Discourse, genre, style and vocabulary are deliberately defamiliarised, either through the reconceptualization and revaluing of commonly used terms or the invention of new ones, or through syntactical and structural experimentation. Standard orthographic conventions are similarly applied in new ways, for example, the dash and slash. It is important to understand that writing differently in postphilosophy and postqualitative research is more than a gimmick or a Baudelairian shock to the bourgeoisie. It stands against the long history of the print medium as a colonising tool imposed upon the colonised and attempts to convey a relational reconceptualisation of planetary life – a geological/ human/ non-human/ material/ technological entanglement, with ethical responsibilities. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), writing is not about signifying but about mapping worlds, even worlds to come (p.1). This is an anti-representationalist stance which refuses the separation of writer and world. The writer is not a separate entity in the world, commenting on it from a distance, or on high, but part of the world, contributing to its making. Manning and Massumi consider writing to be more than a description: rather, it is a kind of 'kindling' which ignites a new way of seeing and thinking (2014: 27-28)

Writing is reconceptualised as an assemblage of agential relata rather than as a standard literate form or product. It is a modality of practice, amongst others, expressing a process of conceptual thinking constituted by human/more-than-human intra-action in the event of writing: "The writer is exceeded as a singular, isolated, cognitive human, and instead becomes a more-than-human figure ... The writing event is an intra-active assemblage comprising an ongoingly intra-acting array of

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<sup>10</sup> For a recent example of students creative and affective responses, see Romano (2023).

materials, technologies, texts, affects and bodies, including that of the writer/s" (Rozynski, 2012: 2-5). Writing is thus an assemblage of possibilities. The desire in postphilosophical writing is to unsettle Cartesian conventions of reason and logic in research writing – the polish, sense of finality and completeness, the linear trajectory towards a conclusion based on clear evidence; rather the stutter and stammer in thinking, and the 'bounce of ideas' (Osgood, Taylor, Anderson, Benozzo, Carey, Elmenhorst, ..., & Tobias-Green, 2020: 606) is perfectly acceptable and welcomed in the writing's push towards the unknown<sup>11</sup>.

To move to the pedagogical side of writing, writing is considered to be a space for thinking and a method of enquiry by St Pierre (2017). It takes her somewhere she cannot go without it, and becomes magic, experimentation and adventure. It focuses not on things already known and made but on things in the making. 'How to aerate one's scholarship by writing differently' is the challenging question that underlies this proposition. 'What must language do to become visionary, become-other?' as Manning and Massumi ask (2014: 49). One of these ways is to write in heuristic, fluid, non-linear, perhaps multimodal and multilingual ways, experimenting with genre, style and discourse, using images, doodles, fonts and creative maps as integral vehicles of meaning-making (see Kuby, Spector & Thiel, 2019; De Freitas & Sinclair, 2014; Romano, 2023). Another strategy is to renovate existing concepts or invent new concepts that arise within and speak to the phenomenon under investigation (see Newfield, 2014). Poetics is an anti-colonial strategy recommended by Glissant (1969). For him, poetics is a transformative mode of analysis consistent with the refusal to accept the logic of western epistemological principles as the only productive logic. Poetics, for Deleuze, is a dynamism that breaks the inertia of language habits, challenges interpretosis, the obsession with knowing and understanding the world, to enable transgressive cultural narratives (Bayliss, 2009). For Lykke (2019), poetics underlies a 'wonder-based' approach to scientific research and writing, enabling deep affectivity and environmental care.

Metaphor is rejected by some in the postphilosophy camp. Barad and Gandorfer (2021) reject metaphor as a form of analogical representation. In their discussion about 'letting concepts to breathe' (2021: 31), they categorically state, 'And this is not a metaphor!'. They term theirs a 'matterphorical' rather than metaphorical perspective, a lived experience rather than a contemplation; they are referring to the life-giving materiality of breath whose absence results in

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<sup>11</sup> Recent example of writing as multimodal assemblage is found in: Spector, K. & Guyotte, K. 2019. *Abductions in Kuby, C., Spektor, K. & Thiel, J. (Eds) Posthumanism and Literacy Education: Knowing/Becoming/Doing Literacies*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge. For a recent example of the stutter and stammer of thinking, see, in this issue, Crinall.

death, in concepts as it does in animals. On the other hand, others in the postphilosophy camp such as Haraway (2000), recommend metaphorical play with language as a means of expressing the non-literal complexity of the world, its ability to function both as fact and fiction, nature and culture, materiality and semioticity, object and trope. Haraway enjoys the ‘fleshy ... juiciness’ of metaphor (2000: 86), which brings a sensuous, bodily quality to conceptual writing.

Figurations – condensed images of both imagination and material reality (Haraway, 2016: 7) – have proved to be generative strategies in postphilosophical writing-thinking. They have been described as ‘conceptual personae’ which combine critique with alternative visions for living and thinking (Braidotti, 2013: 163–4). Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome depicts an indeterminate, unpredictable form of transversal conceptual movement, which is set against the hierarchical, classificatory arborescent form of fixed conceptual systems. Haraway’s cyborg is a figure evoking the complexities of 20th century human-technological ontologies; Tsing’s (2015) matsutake mushroom is a figure of survival in a context of environmental degradation; Neimanis’s (2017) body of water figures the precarious politics of water; Bozalek and Hölscher (2023)’s becoming-octopus is recommended for social work practice. Finally, collaborative writing is a strategy consistent with the notion of intra-active relationality underpinning the attempt to do academia differently. As Barad and Gandorfer put it, in a way that sums up a central theme of this article: “Sense-making is never an individual affair, nor does it happen once and for all through proclamation as it were. It is always iterative and collaborative” (2021: 28). Collaborative writing from different perspectives or disciplines may enable the aeration of concepts, diffracting their different historicities and materialisations.

## Conclusion

This article was written to challenge the normative notion of concepts in Eurocentric forms of higher education and their use and application in pedagogy and research, in order to start a conversation about doing concepts differently. SOTL in the South need not be stuck in the determinate, fixed givenness of concepts, but can be inventive and creative, enabling response-ability to the climatic mood or affective tonality of the context. Concepts are dynamic not fixed. Humans are not always the central figures in concept creation, but are part of the world, co-implicated in worlding as a relational process of becoming through encounters.

We have thought-with philosophical concepts such as entanglement, intra-action, non-representationalism, affect, becoming-with, material-discursive, and material arrangements. We have argued that the notion of intra-action and relational ontology, in its moving away from a world consisting of independent bodies with discrete, determinate boundaries and properties, shifts the grounds of debate. Rather than seeing concepts as abstract devices of capture, in a postphilosophical approach, they become ontogenetic devices with possibilities for doing academia differently. We have discussed how doing concepts differently might be fruitful for experimental practice in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The hope is to move SOTL in the South towards forms of emergent inquiry, noncanonical knowledges, and artistic interventions which are productive of new knowledge. This way of working undoes many of the assumptions employed in conventional approaches to research and pedagogy in higher education, instead proposing concepts as or instead of method.

We have provided a strategy for activating as-yet-unthought ways of working with concepts, namely, that of the proposition, considered as a provocation and an enabling constraint. The propositions offered in this article, which seek to activate alternative ways of working with concepts in SOTL in the South, are informed by the key postphilosophical concepts and practices which have been introduced in this article. The article extends an invitation to readers to consider doing concepts differently in their own scholarly practice by throwing them like bricks towards pedagogic and research problems in their own work.

## Acknowledgements

This work is based on the research supported by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number: 120845). We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their comments in response to an earlier draft.

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