The 'WHAT OF' and the 'WHAT IF' of Agential Realism

– In Search of the Gendered Subject

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Putting agential realism to work: Can the conceptual toolset of agential realism help us make sense of real/ virtual transgressions and gendered presence in gaming settings? And does the concept of spacetimemattering carry potentials for the analysis of subjectification processes?

Our purpose is to explore Karen Barad's abstract and complex theoretical framework, agential realism, to seek out theoretical perspectives that can be used as analytical approaches to empirical data – and thereby also used to expand, tune and sharpen our empirical analyses of gendered subjectivity and subjectification. Barad's diffractive reading of quantum physics and poststructuralist theory results in conceptualisations that radicalise our understanding of not only what constitutes the social, matter, discourse, subjectivity, etc., but also how constitutive processes work.[1]

We will not present Barad's theoretical framework in detail but emphasize a few conceptualisations from her work that form the basis for our reflections. The quantum inspirations of agential realism are captured in Karen Barad's theoretical framework, agential realism, and processed through key concepts such as onto-epistemological intra-action, apparatus, agential cuts and

spacetimemattering. We will put these concepts to work below, but here, briefly indicate the quintessence of the framework: 'agential' denotes that everything 'does' something, in other words, that everything is performative and has agency. Nothing is delimited as a separate entity. Everything is always engaging something else, in specific ways designated by the concepts: intra-activity, i.e., matter and meaning, object and subject, nature and culture are all mutually articulated and mutually entangled. They are never articulated separately. 'Realism' stands for the conception that the agentiality has real effects. Realism is not about the representation of something substantialised or something that already is present, as for instance, a difference between subject and object or between materiality and discourse. Realism is about real effects of intra-activity, and these effects become ingredients in further ongoing intra-activities (Højgaard & Søndergaard 2011). Agentiality in this thinking is thus distributed widely and specifically undercuts notions of passivity, fixation, linearity and the one-dimensionality of matter and materiality while emphasising the constitutive intra-active processes across distinctions, such as human/non human, subject/object, matter/discourse, etc., by which we normally operate. Matter and discourse intra-act and become inseparable in the concept of material-discursive practices, which is a conceptualisation that carries the very idea of agential realism within it. This approach offers a shift in agentiality from what in poststructuralist thinking is known as 'discursive practices' to intra-active material-discursive practices, thus allowing for a perspective that not only embraces the entanglements of bodies and language but also includes the dynamics and effects of materialities in a broader sense, including space and time, and the workings of these in the constitution of gendered subjectivity (Juelskjær 2009). It is the focus on the intra-activity of this wider range of phenomena

that renders this approach promising. The intention of our discussion is to explore, pragmatically as it were, additional analytical venues to supplement and expand our poststructuralist perspective, not to offer a critical assessment of this approach as such.

For the purposes of our discussion, we have selected two pieces of data to illustrate the analytical possibilities offered by this approach. The focus here is not the empirical analyses in themselves. The data are selected for their capacity to convey examples of the workings of this analytic and to invite specific and different analytical questions intrinsic to their specific subject matter. The first piece of data stipulates an opening of '*WHAT OF*' of the activities in a world of computer games: *WHAT OF* the myriad of real and virtual voices, sentiments and actions and their interconnections and meaning for gendered subjectification? Can the perspective of intra-action render the transgressions of real/virtual and of gendered presence that are played out in the gaming room meaningful? The second piece is guided by '*WHAT IF*' thinking: *WHAT* would we be able to see *IF* we brought insights from quantum physics, i.e., spacetimemattering, to the conception of thinking subjects? The two pieces mobilise and accentuate different analytical potentials of agential realism, and therefore, the conceptual toolset used will be presented as the specific analysis unfolds.

WHAT OF

We start out in a gaming room at a recreation centre in Denmark where a group of children play computer games after school. These data are part of a larger body of data that were collected between 2008 and 2011 as part of a study on bullying and real/virtual interaction among children aged 8-14. The data contained interviews with approximately 130 school children, observations in schools and recreation centres, as well as interviews with teachers, parents,

and school managers (Søndergaard 2012). Here, we are in a gaming room:

The girls have now joined the boys playing Counter Strike. The room is engulfed in a cacophony of shouts: "Damn, you dirty slapper!"; "You're such a faggot". Jacob to John: "I'm gonna fuck you up. Don't you play this shit at home? Man, you play the shit out of CS at home!" Ian: "Hell yeah, you got owned!" Emma: "Stop it. Look, now there's blood on the wall". Ian: "Bollocks, man. I almost got you then!" Jacob again: "John, you play every fucking day, man!" Jacob kicks the chair away from beneath John and hits him hard, causing him to fall to the floor. "You play every day, man!" he repeats accusingly, and sits back down. Several older boys (12-14 years old) have now taken over the room; the volume on the game's sound effects is turned up – close-up on Ian's screen: the shooter walks over and straddles his victim. Waits a moment before emptying his machine gun into the body. Blood everywhere. Cheers ring out in front of the screen. "Booyah – I got him!" Emma: "It was a her". Emma shouts again: "It was a her you shot!" They carry on playing. The avatars run across the virtual landscape. Danny: "Fuck yeah, you faggot, I just whacked hi…uhm…her!" His voice falls away. Emma: "Yeah, it weren't exactly hard, was it!" She sneers at Danny. The girls begin to withdraw, and the boys respond: "Ah, come on. You can be the terrorists this time". Two of the girls join in. Anna kills a couple of the boys. Then they get up and leave.

What of the apparent turbulence in this room? How can the involvement, excitements, the actions and emotions, bodies and game, and the relations among all these elements be understood? Who is doing what and why, or what is doing what to what and to whom? From a baradian perspective, the movements in this room vividly show the continuous intra-activity among human and virtual bodies, games, screens, discourses on gender, sexuality,

age, youth and all the normativities demarcating (in)appropriate realisations of these categories and subject positionings (Davies 2000; Søndergaard 2002). However, what does it entail to deploy the concept of intra-action? Barad explains the neologism "intra-action" as an alternative to the usual "interaction", which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction. Intra-action signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies and emphasises that distinct agencies do not precede but rather emerge through their intra-action (2007: 33).

The concept opens our analytical attention to processes of emergence and emerging agencies through intra-action. Distinctions such as real/virtual, game actions/real life actions, him/her, etc. are the effects of intra-activity in particular apparatuses of material-discursive production. The intra-active processes are set in motion, determined and differentiated by apparatuses, which is a concept Barad elaborates by diffractive readings of, among others, Foucault, Haraway and Bohr. Apparatuses are "specific material reconfigurings of the world" (Barad 2007: 142) and designate a form of boundary-making, or of temporary definition that establishes specific demarcations of these complex processes and their effects.

Apparatuses are material-discursive practices that create differences, delimitations, and thereby the multitude of phenomena of the world. They are iteratively produced or reconfigured in intra-action with other apparatuses. Apparatuses constitute differentiation and perform boundary-setting practices by way of agential cuts (ibid.: 155). As specific material-discursive practices, apparatuses enact agential cuts within phenomena and thereby produce different phenomena. It is through agential cuts that the boundaries, categories and 'properties' of phenomena are established, and it is also through these cuts that specific concepts and specific material-discursive reconfigura-

tions of the world become meaningful. Phenomena are thus the effect of boundary drawing practices that make some attributes intelligible and exclude others. It is the work of agential cuts that produces different phenomena effectuated by the apparatuses enacting these agential cuts within the phenomena.

One of the analytical potentials embedded in agential realism has to do with this enactment of phenomena, of focusing and understanding the intra-actions that enact particular phenomena. Thus, let us focus on the phenomena in the data above and suggest some of the ways an understanding may emerge.

ENACTING REAL/VIRTUAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE GAMING ROOM

The events in the gaming room might, with different types of theoretical approaches, be understood as a consequence of John's personality encountering Jacob's aggressive personality and reaction to defeat. Alternatively, it might be understood as a consequence of a transfer of aggression from the game to the boys and their interrelations (Gentile & Gentile 2008). However, in an agential realist analysis, an understanding of what happens would demand attention to multiple forces and phenomena, multiple processes across matter, discourse, time, space, the 'real' and the virtual. The differentiations between John's human and virtual body, John's chair disappearing underneath him, his human body falling and the beating that follows are in agential realist terms enacted somewhere in the multidimensional net of intra-acting processes. Additionally, to obtain some type of idea of what this conceptual framework opens, we have to follow the processes.

When John, Jacob and the other boys enter the gaming room, they find their machines, open Counter Strike multiplayer, and agree who are going to play as terrorists and counter terrorists. From that point,

the avatars in the scenarios are no longer addressed as soldiers that the boys 'play'. Now they reappear as 'I', 'me', 'you', and the weapons and actions as 'my' shotgun, 'your' sniper rifle and 'my' kill. Real and virtual reconfigure. It is not 'my terrorist' that dies, it is 'me'. The separation between a human and a virtual 'I'/'you' evaporates.

Differentiations shift and new differentiations are articulated. Terrorist and counterterrorist is one of the new differentiations; allies and enemies are articulated and lived as a fundamental and explicit differentiation linked closely to 'my' and 'your' destinies as either alive or dead. Life and death are enacted as a basic differentiation re-enacted in every movement in the game, as are questions of how many more lives 'I'/'you' have, which weapons 'I'/'you' have, and how many 'I'/'you' kill in what speed. New agential cuts and differentiations are enacted.

John killing Jacob in a virtual scenario is therefore not insignificant; it is John killing Jacob. 'You' killed 'me'! is lived and viewed from a demarcated gaming perspective, if for a moment we allow ourselves to imagine that as possible, viewed from within an apparatus demarcated from all other apparatuses, such as those enacting the human bodies/boys earlier in school same day, that virtual killing is quite realistic, possible and acceptable because the acts were conducted according to the gaming premises. The game can be started over and over again on the basis of the same premises: kill or get killed, ally, run, act strategically, hurry, shoot, fly.

However, analysed from an agential realist perception, lived from the positioning of multiple enacting and intra-acting apparatuses, the situation is different. The common school experience, to take but one of those apparatuses, will intra-act, too, and that intra-action shifts the effects once again. When the relational practices shared by John, Jacob and the other boys in school enter the gaming room and float in-

to intra-activities across time and space, matter and discourse, real and virtual, articulated by Jacob's frustration, Jacob's defeat is reconfigured. The 'killing' lingers in this process of intra-acting apparatuses in a type of ambivalence caught in processes between the school and the gaming scenarios. Things mix and mingle in yet new ways. In this remixing, it is Jacob who most obviously, to the observer, articulates the challenge that emerged through the intra-acting of two apparatuses: school and gaming. In that articulation, Jacob comes to resist his own killing by John: he cannot be killed by John in this room while exposed to all the other boys and living the same school apparatus as these boys. The boys are enacted of both apparatuses and thereby positioned in the tension between the articulation of 'John' and 'Jacob' of the school apparatus and of the gaming room.

In that other space, in school, John is marginalised and often a victim of bullying; he is 'killed' socially every day, and Jacob is an active part of that (Søndergaard, 2012). Such is the distribution of positionings enacted in that other apparatus as part of the relational practices there. Thus, the demarcated differentiations articulated by the gaming scenario, namely the merger of real and virtual 'I's, are cancelled for a moment by Jacob's articulation of anger, and differentiations from outside the gaming scenarios between human and virtual bodies and subjectivities are re-enacted in the intra-action between the apparatuses of school and gaming room. Thereby, a particular hierarchical order is reconfigured between John and the other boys: Jacob is the 'killer', not the 'killed'. The processes will continue; the accentuation of the intra-activity between the two apparatuses will effect further events when the gaming is restarted and differentiations shift again into human-virtual 'I's and 'you's actualised in Counter scenarios.

ENACTING GENDERED ENCOUNTERS IN THE GAMING ROOM

There are other enactments of phenomena performed in the gaming room: gender and sexed bodies. When Emma and her two friends enter Counter Strike, the boy/girl demarcation is brought into the game in particular ways. Entering the gaming room, their bodies are read as signs denoting their unambiguous 'belonging' to the female category. The intra-activities of the school apparatus work along the same differentiations: boys and girls, constructions reiterated and performed through discourses and materialisations, which will, whenever efficient, point to the human bodies as a discursively recognisable key element in the production of performative legitimisation. However, what happens when the differentiations shift and rearticulate from a real and virtual body differentiation to a real-and-virtual 'I' and 'me' and when the avatar offered in the gaming scenario to merge one's real life 'I' with is so obviously male and signed by means of clothes and weapons heavily loaded with masculine connotations? What happens when the real and virtual differentiation evaporates as part of the enactment of the gaming apparatus, but the sex/gender differentiations performed in real life apparatuses send these strong intra-acting demands of articulation into the intra-activity with the virtual, into the real-virtual mer-ger simultaneously demanding the disappearance of differentiation between real girl signed 'I' and virtual male signed 'I's? For the boys, such shifts do not seem to cause any immediate problems in Counter Strike. The shift from 'boy' to a particular type of 'man' is apparently enacted fairly smooth. However, when girls' bodies enter, this performative smoothness is somehow challenged. The enactment of particular players in particular bodies from 'girl signed' to 'male signed' appears challenging.

In the John and Jacob encounter, the differentiations clashed and shifted when

the school apparatus was articulated intra-actively with the gaming apparatus. In Emma's and the boys' real/virtual encounter, differentiations clash among almost every apparatus imaginable in their intra-actions with the gaming apparatus because Emma is enacted as 'female', with what follows of compulsory reiterations through the linked pronoun 'she', in all those 'real life' apparatuses, though as 'male' in the virtual apparatus because of the common reading of her avatar's virtual material-discursive body. Because the 'I' enacted in the game by an evaporation of the real and virtual differentiation is represented in the game as a 'male', in most players' reading, Emma apparently feels obliged to find a strategy for her gendered merging into that 'I'. She does not seem to see any possibility of entering in any non-differentiated way or to simply accept a change from 'she' to 'he'. Consequently, she is enacted to be compelled to place the differentiation of a real life 'she' and a virtual 'he' 'somewhere', and her solution is to claim that her avatar is a 'she': *"It was a her". She insists: "It was a her you shot!"*

What strategies could Emma's positioning have been enacted to follow? She could, as mentioned, have followed the differentiation of real and virtual; she is a real life 'she', but a virtual 'he'. That was the strategy offered by the boys' agency: *"Booy-ah – I got him!"* when she is shot. And it was a strategy taken for granted, as exposed in the difficulties they had in joining her clarification: *Danny: "Fuck yeah, you faggot, I just whacked hi…uhm…her!"* as his voice fell away. The boys followed that shifting strategy when they merged with their avatars and shifted from 'boys' to 'men'. However, perhaps that placement would have left her at a distance from the gaming agency, which was a situation that may have hampered her efficiency as a gamer or at least tapped her energy. Regardless, she did not choose that strategy. Her choice was to insist that the differentiation, which evapo-

rated between real and virtual, effected a subsequent shift in the avatar, now a 'she' – no matter how everybody else's gendered reading of the avatars' bodies would work. However, this last solution effected less legitimacy on her part as a co-player in relation to the other players. It caused delays because of her ongoing clarifications about the proper words to use and because of asynchronous imagery: Emma imagined the avatar as a 'she', but the others imagined the avatar as a man and placed less relevance in the difficulties Emma encountered concerning a (gendered) merger of a real-virtual 'I'. No one explicitly negotiated the possibility of a differentiation between 'inner she' but 'outer he', perhaps a trans-avatar or even a trans-real life Emma.

Thus, in this gaming room, on this day, among these children, the players' synchronised shifts in differentiations were troubled and lost their synchrony by the entering of female signed bodies and the challenge to contain yet other differentiations and shifts in their mutual movements between and mergers of real and virtual I's. The girls eventually left. The boys complained and suggested alternatives (*"Ah, come on. You can be the terrorists this time"*) that were of no relevance to the girls.

To understand the girls' departure is thus not simply a question of 'gender', as in 'girls are not interested in technology or in computers' or 'girls and boys are different'; these are widespread explanations among educators in schools and recreation centres. The understanding of the girls leaving the gaming rooms invites analyses of the intra-activity among a much wider range of phenomena, forces and intra-activities involving technology, the fantasies of the game producers, enactments of material-discursive gender, rules of playing, school and family apparatuses, etc.

WHAT IF

The second empirical example focuses on

the quantum mechanicalness of Barad's thinking and her reworking of space and time as a consequence, which is a part of her work that has not received much attention, although it is integral to how Barad theorises materiality and change/movement.

This tiny disjuncture [the quantum leap, authors], existing in neither space nor time, torques the very nature of the relation between continuity and discontinuity to such a degree that the nature of change changes from a rolling unravelling stasis into a dynamism that operates at an entirely different level of "existence," where "existence" is not simply a manifold of being that evolves in space and time, but an iterative becoming of spacetimemattering (Barad 2007: 234).

According to quantum physics, time and space cease to be external units of measurement (as in classical physics). In a baradian re-work, time and space are produced through iterative intra-actions that materialise specific phenomena. We now need to take intra-actions and material-discursive practices and *add* that processes of mattering or materialising are simultaneously dynamics through which temporality and spatiality are produced as something specific (*of* the apparatus and the agential cuts of material-discursive boundaries), hence the concept spacetimemattering.

It is interesting to consider Barad's queering of quantum physics in relation to everyday conceptions that are very much based upon classical physics. A way to do that, from the perspective of the humanities or social sciences, would involve a diffractive reading of these insights from the natural sciences, and then perhaps invite the reader into a cascade of *"what if"* thinking. For instance, what if (insights from) quantum physics co-constituted everyday conceptions of time and space? What socio-psychological analytics could be developed and how could we conceive thinking subjects?[2]

In order to open for exploration, we exemplify with an empirical study of school change performed by (13 year old) pupils who wanted to "get a new beginning", that is, to change to another school where they could start fresh as pupil and classmate (Juelskjær 2009). Some of the children were bullied or had conflicts with teachers in the school life they left, and some were bored and curious about another school life.[3] The research apparatus set time and space in motion by following the pupils across time and space and by having the pupils reflect upon their movements and processes of becoming a school-pupil girl/boy in interviews with the researcher before and after changing school. The research was set up with the poststructuralist notion of subjectivities as contextual achievements made possible through the interaction and negotiation of social categories within discursive practices (Davies 2000, Søndergaard 1996, Staunæs 2004 among others). However, empirical studies of subjectification within this poststructuralist field often do not include space and time as explicit dimensions; these concepts are merely implied in associated concepts such as 'context' and 'position'. This poststructuralist analytic offers a study of the renegotiation and positioning of, for example, "disobedient boy/pupil" and the negotiation and positioning of 'escaping' a position as "the quiet girl in class"; the analysis is sensitive to the complexities of these relational positionings and the discursive dynamics. However, when diffractively reading ideas of social categorisation with the concept of spacetimemattering/agential realism, it becomes clear how positioning theory produces a social coordinate system. This system is a stable grid; it is something with respect to which movement and positioning can be denoted. It presupposes time and space as naturalised givens: a Newtonian universe. By diffractive methodology, we want to de-naturalise space, time, and matter, and turn them into possible constitutive dynamics within analysis.

Furthermore, we need to re-address the status of the narratives produced in interview situations about (for example) the past school life when we want to conduct a 'what if' thinking and read for new patterns of engagement. As noted by Lisa Rosen Rasmussen (2010) as she works on transgressing this theoretical problematic, a poststructuralist position implicates that "one cannot say anything about 'the past', experiences are meaning-making processes in the here and now" (2010: 47 translated, authors). Let us follow and afterwards trouble this take on interviews and what the 'here and now' might 'be' through a snippet of an interview. Mary reflects on her school change: *"…I don't think I would ever be able to think like that again, although I was fine about it then* […]. *Thinking back, I can see that it was wrong, but I liked it – I didn't feel bad about it or anything."*

A wellknown ordering would be that the pupil 'sits' in a *time-space 1* (the interview context, a here and now), talks about a *time-space 2* (producing a past school life through a narrative of the ways she behaved, the friends she had, etc.), and thereby produces a present school life, a *time-space 3* (manifesting the new beginning, the other place). The process furthermore involves a *time-space 4*, in which the researcher conducts the analysis while gathering the narratives of 'past school life' and 'present school life' from different parts of the interview with particular attention to how Mary makes multiple splits between different practices at school in and between now and the past. This approach neatly separates the data into four disconnected spatio-temporal orders loosely linked by a narrative. However, *what if* we tried to think differently about what is unfolded in interviews (and in other verbal intra-actions)? What if we untidy the tidy order somewhat through the notion of multiple apparatuses producing specific (but intra-acting) spacetimemattering? The pupils are all mobilised by an apparatus of a new be-

ginning and the idea of The Willful Subject (who is *of* that apparatus): the pupil must choose to become someone else, someone 'improved'. This improvement involves, for instance, moving from being recognised/positioned as a disobedient pupil who hates school to becoming a different sort of pupil. The children all work on mastering versions of their pasts to position themselves in a desired present/future (i.e., *"I don't think I would ever be able to think like that again"*). Mary, e.g., is recognised as a girl who although she is ethnic-racialised Danish, at her old school had become 'one of the Muslim girls', and then after changing school had transformed from being 'one of the Muslim girls' to becoming a 'white young girl': *"I viewed myself as one of them* [Muslim girls]. *I acted exactly like them and I really liked it back then."*[4]

However, this particular apparatus of change is not the only apparatus through which subjectivities emerge. Beginnings can be viewed as complex and as "already haunted" (Barad 2010) by multiple apparatuses. We do not get to re-set time and self: this notion is a specific fantasy about The Subject as Master of time-space-subjectivity. Although Mary produces a narrative of a past that is linear, a past that she has left behind, and social categories that have been swapped, we may theoretically and analytically choose not to 'buy into' this specific topology of space and time when analysing the (gendered) subjectivities (of school change). *If* we remember the analytical take with the multiple apparatuses from the first part of this article and add that spacetimemattering is what is *also* produced in specific ways in the agential cuts of the apparatus, *then* we will be able to conceive multiple space-times as what becomes co-present and co-produces 'Mary-the-white-girl' as apparatuses open to different space-times. Thus, we get to know something else about constitutive processes of gendered subjectivities. How so? The apparatuses (re-)shape what is, what can be and

possibly what will be, both in what we call the present in the new school life and in terms of how Mary is enacted, for example, through the landscape where her old school is situated. She says, "*When I am with the girls from my class, we take a detour* [to get to Marys home] *I know it is stupid, but I don't like meeting people* [from her 'old life']". Mary of the old/new home-landscape is in danger of reconfiguring as a traitor that has abandoned her old friends and ways of living, and reconfiguring as 'Mary-the-white-slut'. All the while, when confronted with the active sex lives of her new friends (that she herself does not want to take part in), she says, *"this is too much [..] this could never have happened at 'Nør-rebro'* [her multicultural neighbourhood]". The boundaries of her gendered subjectivity/ies and the affective tonalities (Massumi, 2002) of these subjectivities are continuously reconfigured by multiple and non-linear spacetimematterings.

The pupils live through the existence of multiple apparatuses of spacetimemattering while manoeuvring (the hopes and practices of) their version 2.0 of the new beginning. And all the while as there is a great amount of work put into (configuring and being configured by) the linearity of the new beginning, somehow, their realities become hyper-complex: There is a hyper-storying of oneself present in the narratives that is brought about by change, living the change, talking about the change, the past, the future, the now, talking about the social categories, living them, reflexively manoeuvring them *and* radically becoming through them. In these ongoing and multiple processes, there is also a work on 'keeping' 'the past' a past. It is in no simple way a past by itself; Mary tries to control it, all the while she is radically *of* these space-timematterings: they do and undo her in ways out of her control. Past and present are troubled, and her sense of subjectivity (sometimes in gendered specificity, sometimes not) is troubled as it is threaded

through these multiple spacetimematter-ings.

This 'beginning', like all beginnings, is always already threaded through with anticipation of where it is going but will never simply reach and of a past that has yet to come. It is not merely that the future and the past are not 'there' and never sit still, but that the present is not simply here-now (Barad 2010: 244).[5]

Quantum dis/continuity troubles the very notion of dicho-tomy – the cutting into two – itself (including the notion of 'itself'!). All this 'quantum weirdness' (the display of an increasing array of uncanny phenomena) is actually 'quantum queerness' [..] the un/doing of identity. Quantum dis/continuity is at the crux of this im/possible, im/passible, trans/formation. [..] here-now, there-then have become unmoored – there's no given place or time for them to be [..] dynamic relationality between continuity and discontinuity is crucial to the open ended becoming of the world (ibid.).

The past is reappearing in ever specific and different cuts (for instance, from lived presence to reflexive positioning of experience and non/desired activities, and as shifting cuts of neighbourhood landscapes-bodies-belonging). Inspired by the queering of quantum physics, we are confronted with dis/continuity instead of 'movement' and 'change' when considering the new beginning of Mary. If spatio-temporal locations have become "unmoored" (ibid.), the complexities of the constitution of gendered subjectivities (and the analysis hereof) are multiplied and refocused.

When we pay close attention to these multiple apparatuses, time, space and subjectivities appear altered analytically (and onto-epistemologically). With the suggested optics, these banal, everyday activities are considered as more radical forms of creation. Subjectivities are *of and part of* the spacetimemattering, not contained as a position within them. When the point of view

is no longer the social category, Mary ceases to be a special position *in* time and space, but specifically emergent *of* specific material-discursive apparatuses, which themselves are created along with her. There are changing constitutive effects of and for past, present and future as these temporalities continuously thread through each/other, with these effects acting not only upon the spaces and landscapes through which Mary moves and which move her but also upon who or what she can be. The past and present – or the before and after – that guard the pupils, and that the pupils guard through the apparatus of 'new beginning' (which carve up that specific spatio-temporality), is haunted for example by affective tonalities of other intra-acting apparatuses that may or may not be named, but which never the less run like currents in the relational here/now. As the present is a dis/continuous dis/continuity of multiple spacetimematterings, the case of Mary is *not* about identity, but about the continuous re-configuring of that of which we are made of/through/with, *not* as a spatio-temporal binary of past and present, but as the *thickness* of (the tricky and misleading term that we know by) 'the present', in which here-and-now interaction and conversational turn taking goes on.

Working with spacetimemattering involves setting time and space in analytical motion. When you think the subject analytically into that universe, it always appears as a spatio-temporary localisation of specific subjectivities (as when 'Mary' is actualised in specific cuts). Subjectivity is therefore *of* spacetimemattering where the agential cut takes place, not something occurring *in* space and time. This cut is an ambiguous cut – not an identity, as Barad (2010) would talk of this as a "cutting together and apart".

To put it plainly, the question is not whether Mary and the rest of the pupils in fact gain a new beginning instead it is an undoing of that question of 'the new' and

the Willful Subject of the new. The question is how they are done and undone in complex ways (and how spacetimemattering is simultaneously done and undone) while living 'the thick present' of this new beginning and with what constitutive effects and what moral obligations and responsibilities of success vis-à-vis 'the change'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Agential realism gives us a theoretical framework that allows access to a much wider set of enacting forces to be considered in any analyses of any type of phenomena, including gendered subjectivity and practice. By reading agential realism diffractively with two different empirical examples and two different research ambitions, our attention is drawn to specificities of what the engagements may enact consequently.

Through the first example, we have noted a set of analytical tools that may be employed in relation to empirical analyses in the field of social science and the humanities. These tools have concentrated the focus on differentiations effected through agential cuts of apparatuses, as these apparatuses intra-act with other apparatuses. They have focused shifts in differentiations, synchronically and/or asynchronically actualised, and they have focused potential contradictions and clashes followed by shifts in differentiations and agential cuts, accentuating a wider set of forces and entanglements than is the case in most analyses of gendered subjectivity, allowing for a heightening of attention to complexities.

The second example concentrated on the potentials of spacetimemattering as an analytical resource when read diffractively with feminist poststructuralist thinking and a specific empirical material and research engagement. Subjectivity is thereby *of* spacetimemattering where the agential cut takes place, not something occurring *in* space

and time. The analytical task then becomes a matter of producing apparatuses that allow for possible multiple spatio-temporalities to intra-act in the analysis and thereby alters the concept of subjectivity/subject formation.

NOTES

1. Reading diffractively is a methodology of reading texts (theory, data, etc.) intra-actively through one another, "attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter" (Barad 2007: 71), and enacting new patterns of engagement with an attention to how exclusions matter. Diffraction is in that sense used as a way of describing the methodological approach (for an example see Barad 2010: 243).

2. Being aware that such invitation may be viewed as highly problematic, no matter the form it takes (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998).

3. The study was longitudinal and observed and interviewed pupils (at 12 different schools in Copenhagen area) before they changed school and then throughout the new school year as they became each other's new classmates at the one and same school, a school for 8.-10. class pupils. The research focus was on the constitution of ('new') subjectivities. The empirical material was produced to make it possible to reframe questions of gendered subjectivities and subject formation while emphasising time, space and materialities as constitutive forces. For the purpose of this article we only exemplify with one of the pupils as a strategy of bringing forth the issues we want to address. Therefore the reader will only 'meet' the ethnic-racialised Danish girl 'Mary', who has changed school from a multicultural urban school. The research project naturally consist of many cases (Juelskjær, 2009).

4. The analysis is complex and nuanced and performed elsewhere with the use of a much larger body of the interviews (Juelskjær 2009, 2010). Within the context of this article, the ambition is different, as stated in the introduction.

5. Barad produces this argument through re-configuring key discussions within quantum physics (Barad 2007; 2010).

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SUMMARY

The article explores Karen Barad's theoretical framework, agential realism, to seek out theoretical perspectives that can be used as analytical approaches to empirical data. By

selecting two pieces of data we aim to illustrate the analytical possibilities offered by this approach. The first piece of data stipulates an opening of 'WHAT OF' *of the activities in a world of computer games:* WHAT OF *the myriad of real and virtual voices, sentiments and actions and their interconnections and meaning for gendered subjectification? The second piece is guided by* 'WHAT IF' *thinking:* WHAT *would we be able to see* IF *we brought insights from quantum physics, i.e. spacetimemattering, to the conception of thinking subjects. The examples show that agential realism offers a theoretical framework that allows access to a much wider set of enacting forces to be considered in the analy-*sis. *By reading agential realism diffractively with two different empirical examples and two different research ambitions, our attention is drawn to specificities of what the engagements may enact consequently.*

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