



Intrastructural Necropolitics: Entanglement, Transparency, and the Conditions of Domination

JACOB VANGEEST

University of Western Ontario

Introduction

What if the source of liberation constitutes the very affront to that liberation? This article interrogates the relation or ‘intra-action’ of ontological, epistemological, and ethical entanglement. Intra-action is a concept developed by Karen Barad (2007) to both identify the entanglement of being, knowing, and normativity, and the co-determination of ‘entangled agencies’ (2007: 33). Here, not only are ontology, epistemology, and ethics inherently co-determined and intra-relating, but so too are all ‘individual’ actors inherently connected through their relations. Given that entanglement is promoted by philosophical scholars as an ontological condition, it is worth examining its role in the structuring of exclusion. Looking specifically at the material dynamics of racialization, the production of race can be understood as an ‘intrastructural necropolitics.’ This formulation brings together ‘intrastructure,’ Denise Ferreira da Silva’s (2002) oblique rendering of Barad’s ‘intra-action’ to think through the constitution of the Slave’s body, and ‘necropolitics,’ Achille Mbembe’s consideration of how human populations are divided by socio-political forces into “who may live and who must die” (2003: 11). Through the use of intrastructure, da Silva focuses the operative, relational apparatus of modern thought: how a colonial, racial, juridical, and capitalist architecture informs the construction of contemporary concepts. This relational apparatus becomes the determinate calculus of necropoliticization. This article illuminates how ‘entanglement,’ which Barad promotes as primordial and determinate of being, constitutes the structure of exclusion through dynamic, material productions. “Staying with the trouble” of this deployment (Haraway 2016), I stress the dynamics of this ontological exclusion or ‘death’ in epistemological and ethical dimensions, as arising from entanglement or intra-action. Drawing from works of Afro-pessimism, I argue that the socio-political structural production of exclusion precludes the possibilities of Barad’s ‘intra-active ethics’ due to the developments of entanglement. Rather than escape from the tendencies of representation (or ‘transparency’), as it aims to do, entanglement succumbs to its tentacles. I close with some speculations on possible ways ‘forward,’ when any attempt at moving forward re-integrates the very conditions from which one seeks emancipation.



Methodologically, this article adopts a form of critical interrogation that works to first reconstruct the major elements of Barad's concept of entanglement before subsequently using the principles of this reconstruction to interrogate its commitments. As an attempt to "stay with the trouble," this may be read through the method of 'diffraction.' Conceived by Haraway (1997) and Barad (2007), diffraction as method draws upon optical diffraction and diffraction in wave particles to promote "nonrepresentational methodological approaches" (2007: 88). It is, foremost, an attempt to mark and be attentive to becoming and difference. In light of the close of this article, my approach might be best named an oblique diffraction of intra-action, as it marks the becoming or difference of a sideways diffraction from Barad's commitments. I hope to move through critical post-humanism, pushing it in oblique directions. As such, my argument is distinct from extrinsic critiques of Barad made in physics (Faye and Jakslund 2021; Everth and Gurney 2022). Furthermore, while there are clear resonances with their work, my method is distinct from that of Cristin Ellis (2018), who offers an extrinsic critique of critical post-humanism's appeal to normativity by way of an extrinsic critique from Black studies. Finally, while I agree with Ellis (2018: 146) and Alexander G. Weheliye (2014: 9-10) that post-humanism should be critiqued for a failure to look beyond the Western canon, my argument does not take this exclusion as the basis of an extrinsic failing. Instead, I draw upon this exclusion to show the tensions inherent to a post-human ethics in the project of entanglement and tease out its intrinsic failings.

Intra-active Domination

Scholarship in the critical post-humanities poses theories of 'connection' as a source of emancipation from human exceptionalism. Promoting 'entanglement' and 'intra-relation,' the philosopher, feminist, and physicist Karen Barad argues in favor of the "intertwining of ethics, knowing and being," which they refer to as an "ethico-onto-epistemology" (2007: 185).¹ Barad understands being as 'intra-active:' entanglement is a primordial condition of any individual and any individual is constituted through a differential intra-action of heterogeneous phenomena. Relation is therefore inherent to beings. Entanglement is an indeterminate but inclusive, dynamic, and relational field that is prior to any and every individual. Entanglement is the ontological condition of being and beings. For Barad and other critical post-humanists, entanglement produces a normative vision: the injunction to "intra-act responsibly" by considering the various (inclusive though indeterminate) relations that are constitutive of our being (2007:

¹ It is worth noting that, while Barad aligns agential realism with post-humanism in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, their latter work sometimes shies away from the term in favor of Haraway's alternative of "composting" the human (see 2018: 242). This may be, in part, an attempt to separate their project from those attempting to think 'beyond' the human (see Barad and Gandorfer 2019: 19). This framing—a posthumanism less invested with overcoming the human than with challenging the tenants of humanism—is consistent with work under the moniker 'critical posthumanism,' as described by figures like Jill Didur and Cary Wolfe, despite Barad never—as far as I am aware—endorsing that term.



384). Given the nature of entanglement, ‘relation’ and ‘responsibility’ extend to all of being: not only to humans but those typically excluded from the category of humanity (the inhuman or subhuman) and those often termed ‘non-human’ (including animals, plants, bacteria, etc.). Where older systems justified the human domination of non-human nature (by treating nature as subordinate to humanity), critical post-humanism argues for an intra-active ethics that refuses these divisions and their justification for domination (see for example Barad 2007: 392).

Works in the critical post-humanities often pose this connection between all things as an onto-epistemic shift that would, if enacted, promote a more process-oriented, ethico-ecological awareness (see Barad 2007; Braidotti 2013, 2019, 2021; Ferrando 2016, 2019; Haraway 2016; Biswas Mellamphy 2021). A recent definition suggests that “at stake in critical posthumanism is a rethinking of the relationship between Human agency, the role of technology, and environmental and cultural factors from a post- or non-anthropocentric perspective” (Herbrechter et al. 2022: 19). In this sense, critical post-humanism is not placed in opposition to the human, understood as the individuated beings of a particular species, but rather resists humanism and anthropocentrism, understood as distinct trends in human thought throughout history (Wolfe 2010: xv). For Francesca Ferrando (2019: 66), this mandates the use of a hyphen, which acknowledges the mediation of the ‘post-’ with the ‘human’ and a multiplicity of other terms; in other words, post-humanism is still being negotiated. “Critical post-humanism”—a term originally coined by Jill Didur (2003)—signals an emancipation from anthropocentrism and speciesism (Kopnina 2018). It invokes a shift away from the onto-epistemic separation of ‘human’ persons from ‘natural’ things to focus on the mutual “embodiment” (MacCormack 2012: 14) or “entanglement” (Barad 2007) of human and non-human in an “ethics of interaction” (Braidotti 2013: 169). While critical post-humanist discourses are diverse (Braidotti 2019: 1), this diversity contains a common denominator in the “shared critique of humanist anthropocentrism and the white, Western, colonial, patriarchal structures that underpin it” (Herbrechter et al. 2022: 6). This ethical promotion invokes normative frameworks through the imperative to adopt post-humanism and dismantle humanist structures of domination.

The work of Karen Barad provides an integral example of how this onto-epistemic shift instructs an ethico-political imperative. Drawing from the work of quantum physicist Niels Bohr, Barad’s “agential realism” advances an “ethico-onto-epistemology” that takes ethics, ontology, and epistemology as intra-active or entangled phenomena (2007: 185). For Barad, ontology is ‘entangled’ rather than separate, epistemology is ‘diffracted’ rather than representational, and ethics is ‘situated’ rather than universal. Bohr’s interpretation of super-positioned particles in Stern-Gerlach devices is integral to



Barad's position: it suggests that a particle's eigenvalue² is indeterminate when it is not being measured (2007: 258-266).³ For Bohr, an eigenvalue only exists under observation, implicating the act of observation in the determination of the value. The value is only individuated as a value through, as Barad puts it, the "individuation-within-and-as-part-of-the-phenomenon enacted in the placement of the cut between 'observer' and 'observed'" (2007: 321). This 'cut' informs both the ontological and epistemological (or onto-epistemic) consideration of intra-action. Where the term 'inter-action' poses the coming together of distinct entities to form a composite whole, 'intra-action' conceives of an indeterminate ontological inseparability (or entanglement) of phenomena prior to the operation or process of individuation (2007: 139). Like a superpositioned particle, individuals do not precede their entanglements but are constituted by and through their entanglements. The 'individual'—which corresponds more closely with Duns Scotus' notion of *haecceity* (a 'this-ness') than Aristotle's *quiddity* (as 'essence' or 'givenness')—is identified with an operation or process that cuts across disparate material phenomena. For Barad, reality is composed of phenomenal intra-actions (or phenomenal cuts) that are entangled and indeterminate but nevertheless maintain their differential *haecceity* through an operational difference as a singular "performance" (2007: 246) of phenomena working through their co-constitution. The process of individuation and materialization intra-connect through various intra-actions or cuts without essence or *quiddity* (2007: 210). Individuation refers to the process of an individual coming into being. It describes an individual's genesis. Materialization stresses this process as determined by matter. Intra-action, as a material individuation,

² 'Eigen' is German for characteristic. Very roughly, an 'eigenvalue' denotes the value corresponding to a vector's transformation (the value describing the vector's change in the transformation).

³ Barad's reading of quantum entanglement and superpositions is integral to agential realism. Twentieth-century physics adopted the notion of superpositions from mathematics to try and explain phenomena occurring in wave and particle experiments. Barad discusses the following example. Using a spin-measuring device (the Stern-Gerlach or SG device), physics sort and measure properties of particles. When using an SG device that measures the 'z' value (SGz), the device produces an even distribution between eigenvalue 'up' for the z-value and eigenvalue 'down' for the z-value. If 200 particles are measured, 100 would be distributed 'up,' 100 'down.' If those 100 'up' particles were again sorted by an SGz device, all 100 particles would travel up. Such findings align with classical physics, where present value predicts future value. However, this is complicated when another sorting device is added. If the physicist took those same 100 particles and sorted them according to the x-value (SGx), it would result in another even distribution: 50 particles distributed 'up' for the x-value, 50 'down.' Things get interesting when those 50 particles sorted 'up' for the x-value are then placed back in an SGz device to sort according to the z-value. Curiously, while classic physics would presume those particles—already sorted 'up' for the z-value—to predict their future finding, they would instead find another even distribution between eigenvalue 'up' and 'down' for the z-value (Barad 2007: 256-261). Following Bohr, Barad understands quantum entanglement as an attempt to explain the role of observation in the determination of value. According to Bohr's principle of 'indeterminacy,' a particle value is indeterminate when not under observation (Barad 2007: 19). At the point of measuring the x-value, the z-value is not hidden, nor is it outside the domain of humanity's epistemic grasp (i.e. unknowable). Instead, 'indeterminacy' holds that the z-value does not *exist* outside of when it is being measured. Here, 'superposition' is a term that describes indeterminacy: in a superpositioned state, the value of 'z' is indeterminate. According to this interpretation of quantum entanglement, the indeterminacy of a superpositioned state institutes an epistemological shift regarding the knowability of values. The very act of observation is *entangled* with the value under observation. It is impossible to separate the phenomenon of the particle (as value-ing) and the action of the observer (in observing); the two are one phenomenal intra-action.



is therefore distinct from transcendental understandings of an individual's formation (whether caused by an otherworldly 'essence,' 'form,' or 'idea'). For Barad, material productions—or phenomenal performances—are the process of individuation. Intra-action, prioritizing phenomenal processes rather than identities, refuses to grant ontological or epistemic privilege to any individual. The individual is thus an 'individuation' or *haecceity*: an allagmatic⁴ process of intra-active cutting across matter.

Intra-action is the basis for Barad's critique of reflective and representational epistemologies, which "position us above or outside the world we allegedly might reflect on" (2007: 133). Critiques of reflection are not new, as more 'situated' or 'relational' epistemologies have been proposed at least since Hegel. A more recent example of this pursuit can be seen in the work of Bruno Latour, who argues that empirical findings are always already determined by considerations of 'care' and 'concern' [*Sorge*], which render any neutrality in epistemic claims void (2005: 114). For Latour (2004), the histories of any discipline, the tools of measurement, and the values of the discipline are implicated in any empirical findings. The findings of physics, for instance, are limited by both the practices and tools of the discipline, as well as by the desired outcomes of its practitioners. Barad takes this a step further: where for Latour the structure and history of measurement epistemically determine the measurement, intra-action posits that the act of measurement both epistemically *and* ontologically determines the value. Intra-action conceives of ontology and epistemology as intra-active within a phenomenal cut: the entanglement of being is mutually individuated alongside the individuation of knowledge (Barad 2007: 185). Drawing from the work of Judith Butler (1990), intra-action is taken to be 'performative': constituted through action rather than some intelligible form. Each cut is a material performance. Barad's performative epistemology consists in a break from representation: "a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being" (2007: 133). For Barad, human rationality is not viewed as separate from the world under observation. Instead, the observer is implicated in their research as co-constituted in and through the performance of observation.

Representational epistemology relies on binary distinctions between a rational 'human' and a represented 'non-human' or 'nature.' For critical post-humanists, this binary imposes divisions whereby those included in the category of humanity are justified in subordinating and dominating those classified as 'non-human,' including populations designated as insufficiently human, sub-human, or in-human. Entanglement and intra-action attempt to undermine this justification for domination. Barad argues

⁴ The term 'allagmatic' is adopted from the work of Gilbert Simondon. The term refers to a "theory of operations" (Simondon 2020: 663) and attempts to describe the relationship between process and structure.



that a break from the “metaphysics of individualism” undoes “traditional ethics” in favor of “intra-active ethics” (2007: 393).⁵ This notion of ethics has roots in the work of Emmanuel Levinas: taking responsibility in the ethical relation as the ground of subjectivity (2007: 391). Barad conceives of ethics as prior to (and in some sense determinate of) the individual subject: ethics is entangled with subject formation and is not simply something a subject engages in. This means at least two things: first, the subject cannot be separated from this prior responsibility. Second, that responsibility extends to all with which the subject is entangled. Barad promotes a broader form of responsibility or accountability, which “entails an ongoing responsiveness to the entanglements of self and other” (2007: 394). More recently, their work poses this as ‘response-ability,’ which takes entanglement as a starting point for “being ethically in touch with others, as opposed to pretending to theorize from the outside [...] which is a form of violence” (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 24). Barad’s ethics is thus distinguished from this representational violence—a violence aligned with the classical justification for domination (the idea that human superiority is justified in subordinating and using as means the non-humans it can epistemically represent). Barad’s situated and intra-active ethics is ontological: entanglements are constituted through “irreducible relations of responsibility” (2017: 48). This is not to say, as René Rosfort (2012: 61) has suggested, that Barad conflates ethical, ontological, and epistemological domains. Rather, Barad sees these categories as co-constitutive *haecceities* that, though analytically distinct, are determined through their mutual cuts (Hammarström 2012: 40). Each domain, therefore, interacts with the others: “[a]n agential realist ontology (which is neither singular nor one) is in this sense an undoing of the conventional notions of ontology and an undercutting of the colonizing epistemic impulse to give over what the world is” (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 16). Barad and others working in critical post-humanism should be praised for their commitment to moving away from humanistic justifications for the domination of nature, and for providing a starting point for thinking more intra-active, relational ethical obligations.

Despite Barad’s claims to the contrary (2018: 220), both their ontological and epistemological developments functionally operate as if they were descriptive positions relating to the reality of being and knowledge. ‘Functional,’ here, derives from the philosophy of mind, and indexes an attempt to develop an understanding of mental states through action rather than a hermeneutics of intention (Levin 2023). Even if Barad asserts (or intends) that their work does not attempt an onto-epistemic grasping of reality (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 45), but is instead “radically open” (2021: 16), their deployment of entanglement and intra-action functionally posits a fundamental

⁵ ‘Metaphysics of individualism’ refers to any metaphysics that takes individuals (whether forms, essences, or ideas) as prior to the process of intra-action or individuation.



(rather than a world-historical) onto-epistemology.⁶ Take, for example, the opening of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: “[e]xistence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (2007: ix). Barad’s claim is not a world-historical or a contingent determination but a fundamental ontology. Their claim is that ontology *is* entangled intra-relating. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that Barad would suggest that Platonic forms or Leibnizian pre-established harmony were at one point constitutive of reality. Rather, these positions would be taken as faulty epistemic representations characteristic of the ‘metaphysics of individualism.’ I am not suggesting that entanglement is identical to prior dominant forms of ontology but only that it functions in a structurally similar manner. Barad (and other critical post-humanists) provide an important corrective: one that centers care against the violence of humanist domination. Barad’s position is certainly ‘radically open’ on the level of world-historical phenomena, which remain open, indeterminate, and unfixed. Nevertheless, entanglement should be understood as offering a description of the fundamental nature of being: as intra-active phenomenal cuts through which beings are individuated and continue as an ongoing process of individuation. Epistemically, Barad pursues a more accurate description of reality. While Barad might claim an epistemological position between the inverted schism of epistemological relativism and strong objectivism—by way of feminist thinkers like Haraway and Sandra Harding (2007: 44)—their epistemology is grounded in a form of strong ontological objectivity: the objectivity of entanglement.⁷

Insofar as entanglement is a fundamental ontology, it is difficult to espouse an intra-connected ethico-onto-epistemology. Barad’s normative concerns provide a notable imperative for the adoption of posthumanist ethics (2007: 392). ‘Response-ability’ leads to a better understanding of humanity’s intra-active participation as “being ethically in touch with the other” (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 24) and encourages individuals “to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world’s differential becoming” (2007: 396). These are important ethical principles that are worthy of pursuit. Yet, if entanglement provides a ‘true’ account of onto-epistemic reality and the production of knowledge, then the very conditions of humanistic domination—which Barad and other critical post-humanists like to identify with the violence of the dominant onto-epistemic separation in the ‘metaphysics of individualism’—must necessarily emerge out of the conditions of entanglement. Sexualized, racialized, homophobic, ableist, gender-based,

⁶ I adopt these terms from Heidegger and Marx respectively. Where a world-historical ontology shifts according to material changes in the base and super-structure, a fundamental ontology seeks the conditions necessary for any ontological claim. While a world-historical ontology is open to change, a fundamental ontology precedes temporality.

⁷ As Barad notes, feminist thought has been critical of both a generalizable objectivism and epistemological relativism, in favor of alternatives grounded in one’s standpoint. What I am suggesting here is that Barad’s position remains grounded in the sort of strong objectivism this middle position argues against. While it may be the case that any specific claim regarding one’s material intra-activity *is* situated, the claim of entanglement itself remains a fundamental ontological position.



anthropocentric, and species-based forms of violence must therefore result from intra-active entanglements, not unilateral ideals determined through theories of perception.

Intrastructural Necropolitics

Barad's theorization of entanglement may still pose a way forward. One recent analysis of their work stresses that intra-action determines not only inclusion but also exclusion (Hollin et al. 2017). This is true. Barad discusses the role intra-action plays in the development of exclusion throughout *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, and their more recent work has often focused on issues of erasure (e.g. 2017). Of central interest here is the relation of that ontological exclusion with a post-human ethics. Stressing 'exclusion' is beneficial for thinking through the entangled production of domination. On the topic of exclusion, it is worth pondering the narratives often excluded from critical post-humanism, which has been critiqued as having neo-colonial aspirations (Watson 2011; Butler 2018; Martin 2020; Polsky 2022) and for failing to account for the developments of race (Weheliye 2014; Jackson 2015; Ellis 2018). For instance, Jasbir Puar notes the tendency of post-humanism (as well as object-oriented ontology and new materialisms) to offer "unraced genealogies" (2017: 25-26). Critical post-humanism has been accused of failing to work through Blackness in pursuit of universal inclusion (Butler 2018: 109-116). And, as Stephanie Polsky notes, "Blackness remains relegated to the substructure of the world" (2022: 151). For example, during one notable roundtable, several prominent thinkers associated with the post-humanities and new materialism theorized the 'Plantationocene' as the "slavery of plants" (Haraway et al. 2016: 556) without reference to the role of Black Slaves on the plantation (Polsky 2022: 107-109), thereby re-writing the exclusion of Blackness by minimizing "the ways in which racial politics structure plantation life" (Davis et al. 2019: 5).⁸ Where does Barad fit into this picture? While their work does make mention of race as one of several "material-social factors" (2007: 224) that arise through the process of exclusion, and while they recognize entanglement as "racialized" (2018: 227), critics have suggested that they largely fail to incorporate critical genealogies from queer, colonized, and racial scholarship (Bargetz and Sanos 2020: 510).

It is curious that while some scholarship in the critical post-humanities is quick to invoke the work of Black and post-colonial scholarship, there is little to no engagement

⁸ It should be noted that many of these critiques made of (critical) post-humanism for its exclusion of racialization come from figures invested in thinking through the conditions of post-humanity from a racialized position. It may be possible, then, to distinguish between dominant- and counter-narratives *within* the areas of post-humanism and new materialism, suggesting diffracted alliances within post-humanistic counter-narratives. This area of thought is by no means monolithic, as it is open to a diversity of theories regarding (post-)humanization. While integral to a discussion of post-humanism as a whole (and a topic that would make for an interesting article), a more overt cartography of standard and non-standard post-humanisms is beyond the scope of the present analysis, with my focus on intra-action. My aim here has merely been to show prior critiques of post-humanism made from critics sympathetic to its overall aim.



with more recent scholarship working through the ontological structuring of Blackness in relation to humanity, even though such engagement would likely “deepen posthumanist thought” (Jackson 2013: 676). One exception might be Rosi Braidotti, who discusses the work of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter from Black scholarship, and the work of post-colonial scholars like Edward Said, Paul Gilroy, and Homi Bhabha. Yet, it remains curious that Braidotti’s work continues to sidestep engagement with more recent Black thinkers who actively discuss the ontological foreclosure of human identity (the way many populations, such as women, Black people, and Indigenous people have been systematically precluded from the category of ‘humanity’). For example, Braidotti’s rare discussion of Afro-pessimism (2021: 224-229) is largely dismissive and uncharitable. Misreading Black dispossession as a form of alienation (2021: 225), Braidotti quickly sides with the ‘affirmative’ position of Afro-futurism because it posits the “generative capacities to overturn that negative historical past by imagining better” (2021: 224). Braidotti takes Blackness as yet another example to help universalize their post-humanist schema; Black people are just another figure within the larger schema of “posthumanist solidarity” (2021: 229). Braidotti’s use of Wynter’s work is telling: they adopt Wynter’s “revision of Humanism in relation to concepts of Blackness” (2019: 160) to reduce Black experience to one ingredient among others within a flat ontology where “we-are-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-the-same” (2019: 161). This universal inclusion erases the situated and unique production of Blackness. Despite their appeal to post-humanism, Braidotti is largely content to work with Black scholarship that (maybe outside of Fanon) remains steadfastly humanistic: maintaining the promise of liberal individualism for Black people. Such a “romantic humanism,” to adopt a phrase from Calvin Warren (2018: 91), contains a plea for those historically produced as ‘non-human’ to now be recognized as ‘human’ (Jackson 2020: 1). Yet, if it is the case—as Frank Wilderson III (2010: 59) argues—that Blackness constitutes “a structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions,” such a recognition is structurally, which is to say *ontologically*, impossible. Beyond Braidotti, I am interested in what impact such noncommunicability may have on intra-activity. How might an ontology beginning from the position of inherent relationality (i.e. entanglement) engage with a refusal of relation? This is worth teasing out.

If entanglement and intra-action are ontologically true (at a fundamental level), then intra-action is a condition of domination. Domination emerges through intra-active phenomena as the material practices and performances that cut across being. Barad’s concept might be better understood when traced through the production of domination. In *Unpayable Debt*, Denise Ferreira da Silva uses Barad to think through these processes. Drawing inspiration from the concept of intra-action, da Silva conceives of ‘intrastructure’ as an onto-epistemological and political architecture (2022: 28). Intrastructure can be understood as the intra-active or allagmatic production of colonial,



racial, juridical, and capitalist structures. Da Silva positively draws upon Barad's concepts to expose the "wounded captive body" produced within a racialized infrastructure. This task, which "blackness alone" can perform, seeks to "unravel the interpretive episteme" of post-Enlightenment thought (2022: 28). I take da Silva's 'infrastructure' as an oblique extension of Barad's 'intra-action.' Infrastructure signals the intra-active conditions of inclusion/exclusion and in/determinate domination through performative cuts. It shows how performativity is concretized in the structures of domination. Separation emerges through, not in spite of, entanglement and relation. Whilst drawing upon Barad, da Silva's analysis bypasses Barad in at least two ways (which I explicate below): first, their analysis more concretely centers the production of racialization through intra-action (which Barad allows for, but does not discuss in depth); second, as I highlight in the discussion of the 'oblique,' their acknowledgement of the incapacity to truly overcome representation allows for a more strategic way through epistemic representation.

The production of racialization, which is highlighted by da Silva, connects to a racialized necropolitics. Achille Mbembe introduces this latter concept to conceive of the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (2003: 39) as deployed through "technolog[ies] of racist power" (2019: 18). From the slave ship to the plantation, the Slave is technologically moulded by "Slavery's technologies" as an "imperceptible and fungible" object (2010: 14) of instrumental rationality by way of a structuring violence applied to the body or 'flesh.' These technologies include both the 'hold' of the Slave ship (Sharpe 2016) and the whipping post (Mbembe 2003: 23). Necropolitics describes the "living death" inscribed on the body as a site of memory (Ferrándiz and Robben 2015: 15). For Mbembe, race is not given (as *quiddity*) but produced through a racialized machinery and instrumental calculus (2017: 79). Both the 'human' and 'Blackness' are plastic and malleable in their intra-relation. Exclusion, thus, takes the form of a psychosomatic inscription. Drawing upon Fanon, Mbembe notes these inscriptions work through "cuts, wounds, and injuries" (2017: 174).

This structuring violence is the foundation of Black dispossession that operates by rendering a fungible object available for human use and accumulation (Hartman 1997: 25). Hortense Spillers describes this violence as ontologically distinguishing the 'body' from the 'flesh,' with the latter conceived as susceptible to "total objectification" (1987: 68). Wilderson III notes this production as a "violence which turns the body into flesh, ripped apart literally and imaginatively, destroy[ing] the possibility of ontology, because it positions the Black in an infinite and indeterminate horrifying and open vulnerability" (2010: 38). These are "technologies of accumulation and fungibility" (2010: 55) or what Weheliye terms a 'racializing assemblage': a "set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (2014: 4). While this violence is structural, it is repeated historically from the Slave ship to the



whipping post to Jim Crow to the continued threat and use of police violence. Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton show how “the impunity of racist police violence” (2003: 173) maintains the onto-epistemic reproduction of racialization as fungibility: at once the “performance” and “practice” of Blackness (Hartman 1997: 58). Through repeated incidents of police abuse of Black people for entertainment (through measures like stop and frisk and the gratification of violence against the flesh), this foundational violence constitutes the intrastructural necropolitical division of (white) life and (Black) death. Nevertheless, necropolitical and intrastructural violence should not be understood as the unilateral imposition of violence by one identity upon another, but instead the intra-active co-production—the *cut*—of inclusion and exclusion vis-à-vis sovereignty and subjectivity. To bring intra-action and necropolitics together posits the material inscription (*qua* violence) of racialization through the mutually entangled production of the ‘human’ and the (fungible) object or Other. This is a material instantiation and/or performance. Thus, while (as Mbembe repeatedly suggests) race is not material, racialization is a material, psycho-somatic process of persistent wounding and inscription through a foundational violence against the flesh.

Structures of Exclusion

To be fair to Barad, their more recent work in political theory and political theology does come closer to addressing something like an intrastructural necropolitics. For instance, they pose that ‘response-ability’ emerges within the concretizations of an entangled domination, promoting an attempt to recognize and seek reparations for the exclusions inherent in intra-action: “to come to terms with the infinite depths of our inhumanity, and out of the resulting devastation, to nourish the infinitely rich ground of possibility for living and dying otherwise” (2018: 242). This is a step in the right direction: a focus on the destructive tendencies of entanglement. Yet, the claimed intra-connection of Barad’s ethico-onto-epistemology falls apart when one attempts to read the ethical or normative production of response-ability as entangled with the onto-epistemic production of material intra-action. In understanding ethics as entangled with material phenomena, Barad takes ethicality as materially instantiated, rather than grounded in representation or a social contract (Kowalcze 2022: 15). The issue is that, insofar as entanglement consists in ethico-onto-epistemology, it is necessarily the case that all ethical, ontological, and epistemological positions—including the dominant forms grounded in a ‘metaphysics of individualism’—are instantiated through intra-active processes. In other words, the positions of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, etc., must necessarily be understood as performative cuts through intra-active processes. Insofar as both ‘intra-active ethics’ and ‘traditional ethics’ emerge through material intra-action, the promotion of one against the other is necessarily materially instantiated. This means that in its various configurations, ethics is instituted through differential apparatuses of power (and not through the power of rational judgement, reflection in pure reason, or a social contract). And yet, Barad and other critical post-humanists consistently appeal to



the rhetoric of imperative: “We *need* to meet the universe halfway” (2007: 397, emphasis added); “We *need* to switch episteme right now” (Ferrando 2016: 170, emphasis added); “it is *urgent* to set a new posthuman agenda” (Braidotti 2013: 196, emphasis added). However, by appealing to an imperative that we adopt an ‘intra-active ethics’ or ‘response-ability’ against ‘traditional ethics,’ these theorists cannot be understood as instantiating an ethics through material intra-active processes but instead return to the purview of rationality, recognition, and representation.

Appeals to the imperative betray that, as an ontological condition, entanglement is insufficient for necessitating emancipation from contemporary forms of domination. By offering an imperative, the ethical positions provided by theorists of entanglement and connection retain humanistic models of representation. One might recall that Barad conceives of representation as a sort of violence grounded in human exceptionalism (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 21), which imposes mediated representations onto reality (2021: 32). For Barad, entanglement seeks to deny representationalism through “a direct material engagement with the world” (2007: 49). As I have articulated thus far, while Barad is able to deny representationalism on the level of studied phenomena, they are committed to a fundamental position (of entanglement and intra-action) that attests to the fixed nature of reality. Functionally, this entanglement operates as the foundation for subsequent (world-historical) ontological, epistemological, and ethical commitments. Entanglement is the foundation of performativity, but entanglement is not itself a performance. Thus, Barad provides an ontological account of the truth of a primordial reality, which constitutes an attempt to provide a superior representation of reality. Barad is not fond of representation, suggesting that it displays a “linguistic narcissism” (2007: 42); assumes a separation and mediation between independent entities (2007: 47); and “fail[s] to take account of the practices through which representations are produced” (2007: 53). Representationalism thus takes ‘knowledge’ as the act of a rational observer at once reflecting on and imposing their determination of reality using representational ideas or concepts (2007: 86). Representationalism is bound to both ‘metaphysical individualism’ and ‘humanism’ (2007: 134), given that the human is provided with the unique, rational capacity for reflection and representation. Historically, humanism has been driven by the pursuit of a better understanding of both humanity and the external world. For instance, Kant’s (1799) defense of intellectual freedom is tied to intellectual progress across the faculties. As Foucault (1970) suggests in *On the Order of Things*, this Enlightenment period saw the development of the human sciences through an empiricism applicable to humanity. While a performative epistemology notably shifts away from certain confines of representation and reflection on the level of individuating *haecceities*, the maintained promotion of a fundamental ontological foundation (even if that foundation is itself constituted as indeterminacy) maintains a representational account and continuation of the humanist project. Barad’s work seeks a superior understanding of the fundamental principles of the human



condition (as entanglement) to develop superior models for thinking ethics and epistemology. Thus, entanglement functionally maintains the humanistic impulse of providing better representations of reality. While, ontologically, entanglement shifts the object of ethicality beyond human-centeredness (and this is something that needs to be praised), epistemically the project remains structurally similar to the ethical justifications of humanism because it continues to valorize the capacity of the human mind to accurately represent the world. Representation remains the foundation of ethics.

Because ethics is maintained through the appeal to the imperative, the conditions of ethics are simultaneously maintained through a principle of recognition. The condition of ethicality may be materially instantiated, but the appeal to an imperative reveals that the instantiation must be subsequently recognized and acted upon. As Ellis notes, “this powerfully expanded map of the entanglements of being and knowing does not tell us what we ought to do with its information” (2018: 165). This is where critical post-humanism runs into problems. Barad cannot maintain that any specific form of ethics is superior to any other without an appeal to representation and reflection. Any ethical promotion—whether it be deontological, utilitarian, virtue ethics, or even divine command theory—is always, by way of entanglement, materially instantiated (which is to say, intra-actively cut). Thus, the appeal to imperative maintains a principle of recognition: to recognize our entanglements as the grounds for our ethics. Recognition serves as the basis of Barad’s ‘response-ability’ and what others have termed “ecologies of repair” (Blanco-Wells 2021). Despite the appeal to a process-oriented ontology, critical post-humanism maintains a “faith in liberal recognition” (Ellis 2018: 155) by “extending recognition to nonhuman being[s]” (2018: 152). Unlike some other critical post-humanists, Barad does attempt to account for intra-active exclusion (e.g. 2007: 93). Yet, their appeal to recognition, as evidenced through the ethical imperative of “accountability” (2007: 135), remains bound to representation.

While ethical recognition may be initially inviting, racial scholarship suggests recognition often exacerbates division and domination. Intrastructural necropolitics expresses the allagmatic cut of inclusion and exclusion: the “scission of humanity into ‘useful’ and ‘useless’” (Mbembe 2019: 12). Technologies of racialization instill a material cut between the ‘human’ and the fungible, accumulable object. Scholarship on the foreclosure of humanity to Blackness is often suspicious of the inclusion of Black fungibility into human recognition. For instance, like Barad, Saidiya V. Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* notes the violence of recognition to “tether, bind, and oppress” (1997: 5) rather than liberate. She describes how the bifurcated structure of ‘human’ and ‘object’ allagmatically reinscribes Blackness. Hartman notes a letter from Abraham Lincoln where, regarding the condition of twelve slaves chained together, he notes their apparent contentment amidst their captivity. This ‘recognition’ of Black subjectivity as



content in captivity is described as a violent imposition of white representation (1997: 34-35). As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson notes, liberal humanization serves as a technology of Black fungibility: “Blackness has been central to [...] liberal humanism: the black body is an essential index for the calculation of degree of humanity and the measure of human progress” (2020: 96). Liberal recognition thus maintains Blackness as a fungible token of its own progress. The inclusion of a select group of Black people into the sphere of ‘humanity’ repeats the tendency of recognizing the Slave as both subject and object: to recognize the Slave as a person in select circumstances (such as the juridical increase of liability for unreasonable violence against Slaves) and not others (the decriminalization of violence when necessary to preserve the institution of Slavery) “shroud[s] the violence of such a beneficent and humane gesture” (Hartman 1997: 94). Fanon expressed how Blackness faces the double bind of a universal “bodily schema” and “historical-racial schema”: at once a part of the universal humanist project and a representation of their ancestry and race (2008: 91). These twin universalities at once include and exclude. Any attempt to achieve a liberal universalism is thwarted by the second schema—one might be a teacher or a physician but only ever “the Negro teacher, the Negro physician” (2008: 97).

For Afro-pessimists like Calvin Warren and Frank Wilderson III, the structuring exclusion of Blackness from humanity (an ontological condition) necessarily forecloses the possibility of inclusion (an ethical recognition). As Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics suggests, humanity is determined by way of an intra-active exclusion: “Humanity recognizes itself in the Other that it is not” (Ronald Judy qtd. by Wilderson III 2010: 42). As Fanon suggests, “[o]ntology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (2008: 90). If Black dispossession is a structural condition of recognition, then the very attempt at recognition reinforces Black dispossession as the intrastructural cut that co-determines Black fungibility and white identity. Warren provides an example of freedom certificates given to emancipated Blacks in the pre-civil war United States. “[F]reedom papers deceive through appearance” (2018: 102). Beyond the fact that the paper could easily be physically destroyed, their logic reveals dispossession in the structure of recognition. The emancipated Black person was required to present their papers to any figure of authority who requested them. Under the law of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, this authority would include all white citizens (2018: 104-105). Structurally, the condition of freedom was bound to the white gaze. Reciprocally, white power was bound to Black subordination. The (Black) fungible object is always already dependent on (white) humanity to instigate and recognize its freedom. If the paper goes unrecognized (or is destroyed), that freedom vanishes. This bifurcation (human/thing) is continually re-enacted and re-performed through the insistence on Black recognition. Recognition structurally re-enforces the incapacity to be recognized. Black freedom is always on the



threshold of being withdrawn by white recognition: both through police killings, including the murder of George Floyd (Stephens 2022), and the racial hoax, exemplified through the “Central Park birdwatching incident” (Russel-Brown 2020). As Warren writes, “Renisha McBride, Jordon Davis, Kody Ingham, Amadou Diallo, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Frederick Jermain Carter, Chavis Carter, Timothy Stansbury, Hadiya Pendleton, Oscar Grant, Sean Bell, Kendrec McDade, Trayvon Martin, and Mike Brown, among others, constitute a fatal rupture of the Political” (2015: 217).

Beyond the structural impossibility of Blackness, Warren and Wilderson III hold Black dispossession as the condition of white possibility. This takes both the form of police violence, but also movements by white liberals towards Black inclusion. For Wilderson III, this comes in the form of Blackness as an absolute Other, against which all claims to sovereignty can be expressed (2010: 45). In his terms, “Blackness cannot be dis-imbricated from slaveness” (2017: 20). Blackness is necessarily integrated outside the World order as Slave: for Wilderson III, Black people are precluded from civil society. He suggests that “from the incoherence of Black Death, America generates the coherence of white life” (2003b: 23). From its inception, the United States and capitalism have been anti-Black. This foundation is retained in both the prison-industrial complex and the continued violence against Black people. For Wilderson III, Blackness serves as the foundation for (white) civil society. Adopting Spillers’ use of the term, Black ‘flesh’ is allagmatically inscribed as non-white and non-human to allow the perpetuation of white sovereignty. The division of white worker from Black slave instigates this division through capitalism’s history: “work is a white category... from the very beginning we [Blacks] were meant to accumulate and die” (2003a: 238). Warren affirms, “[t]he American dream, then, is realized through black suffering. It is the humiliated, incarcerated, mutilated, and terrorized black body that serves as the vestibule for the Democracy that is to come... it almost becomes impossible to think the Political without black suffering” (2015: 217). If Wilderson III is right in suggesting that Black dispossession serves as the intra-active production of white/human possibility, then Black dispossession constitutes the very condition of possibility necessary for recognition (2010: 43). The recognition of Black humanity is self-defeating, affirming the production of dispossession in the very act of recognition. Even if Afro-pessimism is incorrect in aligning Black dispossession as the necessary underside of white possibility, it is difficult to work past the reality that “[d]emocracy, the plantation, and the colonial empire are objectively part of the same historical matrix. The originary and structuring fact lies at the heart of every historical understanding of the violence of the contemporary social order” (Mbembe 2019: 23). Entanglement is therefore a condition of domination.



Oblique Apostasy

Entanglement remains within the purview of what da Silva terms the ‘transparency thesis’: “the ontoepistemological account that institutes ‘being and meaning’ as effects of interiority and temporality” (2007: 4). Transparency invokes both the “transparent I” (Kantian self-reflective representation) and a “transcendental poiesis” (Hegelian immanentization of reason as ruler of the universe) to form the rational “will to truth” of modern thought (2007: 20). With a rationally grounded representation serving as the basis for truth, transparency is central to what da Silva terms an “analytics of raciality” (2007: 3), which links the (in my terms allagmatic) production of race and raciality to representations of transparency. As da Silva notes, transparency remains the ontological assumption of most critical scholarship (2007: 16), including post-structuralist strategies that attempt to challenge historicity as representation, which “rehearse the very historicity they challenge” (2007: 167-168). Both human and Black fungibility emerge through a transparent grammar of “racial and cisheteropatriarchal subjugation” (2022: 49). While world-historical, the violence of this transparent grammar repeats in every instance of transparency to designate a distinction between ‘human’ and ‘thing,’ ‘dignity’ and ‘fungibility’ (2022: 24). Thus, any appeal to recognition in transparency reveals the impossibility of that recognition. Humanism’s ‘transparent I’ consistently repeats this subjugation by mediating between itself and the ‘non-human.’ Yet, da Silva is not satisfied either with attempts that fail to address this persistent reproduction, such as Judith Butler’s return to Hegel (2007: 5), nor those that attempt to completely escape the grammars of transparency. Critical post-humanism should be taken as an example of the latter, given that it “[has] but (re)produced its (highly productive) effects” (2007: 260). The difficulty, as da Silva positions it, is to struggle with/in the grammar of transparency. To abandon this grammar is not an option, lest one “fall into risible oblivion” (2007: 260) with Nietzsche’s madman.

Intrastructural violence is not a thing of the past in need of repair but an ongoing allagmatic process of transparency. This article cannot escape its trap: it is written with the aim of representation and transparency, while recognizing the poverty and violence of those principles. To pose a way ‘forward’ seems an error, given that any attempt at moving ‘forward’ would repeat the tendencies of possibility and transparency without adequately separating from the anti-Blackness inherent to those principles. In this sense, my conclusions are slightly distinct from many of the Black critics of post-humanism, such as Ellis (2018: 168), Butler (2018: 108), and Jackson (2013), who often maintain a hope in the possibility of integrating Black scholarship with the post-humanities. While these possibilities may offer a way forward, I remain skeptical that post-humanism offers a true epistemological shift (even if it does offer an important ontological one). These are the tensions acknowledged by da Silva. Neither adoption nor complete refusal of transparency are available positions. Instead of seeking a way ‘forward,’ da Silva opts for “facing modern representation sideways through an oblique



engagement” (2007: 260). An oblique engagement is notable for refusing to assume the sufficiency of the position engaged. The ‘oblique’ might be understood through da Silva’s use of “hacking,” which “is not so much a method, as it is refusal as a mode of engagement” (2017: 22), or through da Silva’s use of Barad, an attempt to turn ontological indeterminacy against claims of ethical recognition. The oblique shows the strength of intrastructure as distinct from intra-action. Oblique engagement or hacking aims at an indeterminacy more radical than what is offered by Barad: “a Nothing by which I mean Everything and Anything else than the World as we know it today” (2017: 38). Because it is oblique, intrastructure does not posit a clean break from representationalism. Like Barad, da Silva sees representation as violent. Yet, the strategy of an oblique engagement recognizes the impossibility of ever truly escaping representation. Rather than an ethics grounded in representation and recognition, the oblique tendencies of intrastructure reflect a politics focused on power: one that takes the incapacity of thought to escape representation as a starting point. Recognition cannot serve as the determination of ethical accountability but only an indetermination.

Oblique engagement may align with Warren’s ‘black nihilism.’ For Warren, “[n]ihilism, then, presents itself as the philosophical reflection of social decay; it offers a politico-philosophical death (the death of ground as the only ‘hope’ for the world)” (2015: 224). When life structurally determines death, the affirmation of death serves as im/possible ungrounding. Black nihilism takes on the tendency of an active nihilism in the Nietzschean sense—a political apostasy that renounces the Political itself:

[a]s political apostate, the black nihilist renounces the idol of anti-blackness, but refuses to participate in the ruse of replacing one idol with another... We can think of political apostasy, then, as an *active nihilism* when an ‘alternative’ political arrangement is impossible. (Warren 2015: 233)

Such is the affirmation of a ‘nothing’: the oblique tendency to disrupt the rules by taking the rules seriously and on their own terms. The oblique engagement of Black nihilism may best be described through Jared Sexton’s statement: “[t]he most radical negation of the anti-black world is the most radical affirmation of a blackened world. Afro-pessimism is ‘not but the nothing other than’ black optimism” (2011: 37). This ‘nothing’ relates to da Silva’s shift away from Barad: “[w]hat interests me is not the ‘exclusions’ that are constitutive, but the fact that they are not so much excluded as not determined, that is, not even an option” (2022: 278n14). This motivates the adoption of the prefix ‘non’ rather than ‘in’: to consider ‘non-equality’ (rather than inequality) as the impossibility of equality; ‘non-human’ (rather than inhuman) as the impossibility of inclusion into humanity. The oblique affirmation of Blackness—the affirmation of this impossibility—is nothing other than the end of the world.



In his youth, the French anarchist and cultural theorist Paul Virilio worked with architect Claude Parent to develop the ‘oblique function’: an architecture without distinct floors or walls, using a series of inclined planes to impose a consistent visible and gravitational “instability” (Özdamar 2022: 60). While Virilio’s work on technology is often taken as conservative (see Connolly 2002: 78), his concept of the oblique, and several offhand remarks, suggest something much closer to Warren’s active nihilism and da Silva’s own use of the oblique. Virilio’s work is filled with references to an ‘integral accident’—something greater than a paradigm shift that would “explode” the world (2009: 31)—caused by bio-technological and dromological innovations. Where Virilio differs from other critics of speed, however, is in never appealing to a rationalistic or reflective moralism. When questioned on his ‘negativity’ regarding technological progress, Virilio responds:

I am not at all negative [...] I am not crying about progress. I am not crying about the despair of the world. I am profoundly excited by this catastrophe. This is what it means to be a *revelationary*. It’s not to turn away from the gaze of negativity. One must look at negativity with a mirror. (2009: 52)

Neither by promoting some utopic future nor by defending humanity against catastrophe, Virilio seeks the revelation brought forward by catastrophe. This response is incredibly oblique: Virilio shifts the stakes to undermine the game according to its rules, to affirm techno-scientific progress because of (rather than in spite of) the acceleration towards catastrophe. Da Silva’s use of the oblique—to affirm a sort of Black and active nihilism in the face of impossibility—works to reveal something similar about the structuring of ‘human’ and ‘Blackness’ without a simple affirmation or refusal of transparency.

If a repair is not possible—that is, if the conditions for (Black) possibility simultaneously render (Black) possibility impossible—then perhaps an oblique affirmative refusal or active nihilism is the only affirmation available. An oblique account of critical post-humanism, entanglement, and intra-action would not simply abandon those terms but attempt their use through and against themselves. Neither the simple affirmation of critical post-humanism’s ethical accountability and universality, nor the simple rejection of its transparency in a return to a metaphysics of individualism. Instead, the usage might follow something like da Silva’s adoption through the development of ‘intrastructure’ as an oblique rendering of intra-action. In this article, I have attempted such an oblique rendering through my discussion of an ‘intrastructural necropolitics.’ Such an attempt works without offering a solution or an aim but is instead an allagmatic rendering that maps the tendencies of its operations.



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