

The voice of the florist.

A message about we-ness awareness

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Abstract

As a systemic therapist, I have found Karen Barad's physics-philosophy useful when trying to comprehend understandings of my responses from within the ongoing stream of my interactions with clients. In this writing, I attempt to share my understanding of Barad's ideas of "performativity" and "phenomena" through the making of a bouquet in the flower shop down the road. The essay unfolds around a brief dialogue with the florist, and around my inner dialogue and reflections in relation to his question to me: "Did they like what we made?". I am focusing on the entangled nature of doing, knowing and being, and the radical aliveness of relational responsivity in our encounters with people. Drawing upon the relational wisdom of everyday spontaneous living with others to enrich professional practice, I am showing that ethical concerns are not supplemental to practice but an integral part of it (Barad, 2007, p. 37).

The choice of episode is random but its spontaneous nature fits with the notion of a "phenomenon". It is a simple, brief, mostly non-verbal occasion, allowing for a real-ist performance improvisation of complementary intra-acting agencies, emerging from within their intra-action, without the need for evaluating and measuring separate individual agencies and actions. According to Barad (2007, p. 37), "realism is not about representations of an independent reality but about the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within and as part of the world."

Citation Link

In my effort to show that "values are integral to the nature of knowing and being" (Barad, 2007, p. 37), I have avoided the urge for reflections based on hypothesising about what might be indicating what or theorising about what might mean what in this essay. Instead, I let entangled and overlapping knowledges from various areas and times of my life and practice intra-act, and through a kind of "diffractive" writing, I am in dialogue with the reader; with myself backdated to the day when I went to the flower shop to buy the bouquet; with myself as a therapist and a researcher; with Barad through the use of a number of quotations from her work; and with a number of novel and fictional heroes who, although unrelated to the theme of this writing, come to my mind as I relive the episode I am writing.

Περίληψη (Greek)

Σαν συστημική θεραπεύτρια, έχω βρει τις φιλοσοφικές ιδέες της Karen Barad χρήσιμες στις προσπάθειες μου να καταλάβω διαφορετικές κατανοήσεις των τρόπων με τους οποίους ανταποκρίνομαι στους πελάτες μου μέσα στη ροή της διάδρασης μας. Σε αυτό το άρθρο επιχειρώ να μοιραστώ το πως αντιλαμβάνομαι τις έννοιες της «επιτελεστικότητας» και του «φαινομένου», που χρησιμοποιεί η Barad, μέσα από τη δημιουργία μιας ανθοδέσμης στο ανθοπωλείο της γειτονιάς μου. Το κείμενο ξεδιπλώνεται γύρω από ένα σύντομο διάλογο με τον ανθοπώλη, και την ερώτηση που μου κάνει: «τους άρεσε αυτό που φτιάξαμε;». Επικεντρώνομαι στην διεμπλεκόμενη φύση της πράξης, της γνώσης και της ύπαρξης και την βαθιά ζωντανότητα της σχεσιακής απαντητικότητας στις συναντήσεις μας με τους άλλους. Αντλώντας από τον αυθόρμητα σοφό τρόπο με τον οποίο σχετιζόμαστε στην καθημερινότητα μας, συζητώ το ότι «οι ηθικές αξίες δεν είναι ένα συμπληρωματικό κομμάτι της επαγγελματικής μας πρακτικής αλλά αναπόσπαστο μέρος της». (Barad, 2007, σ. 37)

Η επιλογή του επεισοδίου είναι τυχαία αλλά ο χαρακτηριστικός αυθορμητισμός που το διακατέχει μας βοηθάει να πλησιάσουμε την έννοια του «φαινομένου» όπως το χρησιμοποιεί η Barad. Είναι ένα απλό, σύντομο, μη-λεκτικό ως επί το πλείστον περιστατικό, το οποίο επιτρέπει την αυθόρμητη αυτοσχεδιαστική πράξη και κίνηση συμπληρωματικών ενδο-δια-δραστικών ενεργειών, οι οποίες αναδύονται μέσα από την ίδια την ενδο-διάδραση τους χωρίς να προκύπτει ανάγκη για αξιολόγηση ξεχωριστών, ατομικών ενεργειών και πράξεων. Σύμφωνα με τη Barad (2007, σ. 37): «ρεαλισμός δεν είναι η αναπαράσταση μιας ανεξάρτητης πραγματικότητας, αλλά οι πραγματικές συνέπειες, παρεμβάσεις, δημιουργικές δυνατότητες, και υπευθυνότητες που αναδύονται ως μέρος της ενδο-δια-δραστικότητας του κόσμου».

Στην προσπάθεια μου να δείξω ότι «οι ηθικές αξίες είναι αναπόσπαστο μέρος της γνώσης και της ύπαρξης» (Barad, 2007, σ. 37), στο κείμενο αυτό αποφεύγω την παρόρμηση ενός αναστοχασμού βασιζόμενου σε υποθέσεις και θεωρίες, αλλά επιτρέπω την αλληλοεπίδραση διεμπλεκόμενων γνώσεων και εμπειριών από διαφορετικούς χώρους και χρόνους της προσωπικής και επαγγελματικής μου ζωής. Μέσα από ένα «περιθλαστικό» τρόπο γραφής μπαίνω σε διαλόγους με τον αναγνώστη, με τον εαυτό μου ως θεραπεύτρια και ερευνήτρια, με την Barad, μέσα από την αναφορά σε έννοιες που χρησιμοποιεί και ορίζει, και με διάφορους φανταστικούς ήρωες μυθιστορημάτων που παρόλο που δεν σχετίζονται με το θέμα αυτού του άρθρου, έρχονται στο μυαλό μου όπως ξαναζώ το επεισόδιο το οποίο γράφω.

“Life is desire which essentially aims at expressing itself.”

Braidotti, 2011

“Real-ness does not necessarily imply thing-ness” (Barad, 2007, p. 56)

The florist defined the making of the flower bouquet that day as *we-ness*, and I had felt it too. But being aware of *we-ness* so simply, naturally, and spontaneously as he was, he woke me up and refreshed my sense-making antennas; his simple words felt like a fuller and better account of *we-ness* than many articulate efforts I have been making to speak about it using more formal terms, like: connectedness, collaboration, relationality, interaction, with-ness, and so on.

How come his use of “we” meant precisely what *we-ness* was in that moment? I felt like *we-ness* touched his body and he was able to express it simply and directly; his words got me back to a body-led understanding of *we-ness*. And I wondered how the theoretical knowledge about the “things” which apparently exist out there quite specifically, guide what we are finding out and acknowledging. In the midst of all our acquired knowledges, is there room to meet with the unexpected? Do we even notice our bodily awareness? Are we able to *feel* our-selves-in-relation-to-the-world we are part of? And if we have lost some of these embodied abilities, are we able to express “aliveness” and respond to the world as part of the world in our work as therapists?

A quantum ontology

Barad’s agential realism philosophy is based on a quantum ontology:

“At the heart of quantum physics is an inherent ontological indeterminacy, which is only ever partially resolved in the materialization of specific phenomena”

Barad, 2012, p. 7

“Phenomena are the ontological inseparability/ entanglement of intra-acting agencies”

Barad, 2007, p. 33

I understand entangling and disentangling as the two sides of the same coin in the same way that Barad speaks about “agential cuts” cutting things together and apart. In Barad’s philosophy, the nature of relationality is reworked beyond the notion of causality through the idea of intra-action – the vitality, dynamism, and agency of entangled aliveness (Barad, 2007, p. 33). Determinate boundaries and properties of objects-within-phenomena and determinate contingent meanings are enacted through specific intra-actions. Outside of particular agential intra-actions, “words” and “things” are indeterminate: “‘Things’ don’t preexist; they are agentially enacted’ (Barad, 2007, p. 150). There is “wholeness” in phenomena: “The quantum state of a system is specified not by all the variables that the classical mechanics requires in its specification of state but by only those variables that are mutually compatible” (Barad, 2007, p. 293). The indeterminacy principle is an expression of complementarity: “There are an infinite number of possibilities for the creation of a phenomenon, but not everything is possible.” (Barad, 2012, p. 12).

A tale of a performative self and a fluid sense of knowing-with others

“Together, we become other than what we were before we came close.”

Braidotti, 2011, p. 199

The work of a florist has always been a puzzling thing for me. Quite often, I would stand outside the little flower shops around my area, looking at the beautiful flowerpots, admiring the collections of flowers and the lovely bouquets. Not knowing many things, even the names of the flowers – except for just a few: rose, daisy, tulip – if you asked me, I would have no idea about colours, varieties, sizes, seasons, scents. I have never thought of myself as a person capable of making nice flower bouquets in creative arrangements. I have never known how to select from a variety of flowers; how to combine the colours, shapes and sizes; whether to add greenery; what to do with the leaves that sit below the water level in the vase; how to start; which flowers to use as a base for the bouquet; how tall the bouquet must be; how wide, and so on. Not knowing any “rules”, I have always felt inadequate in creating bouquets.

I grew up in the city of Athens, in a fourth-floor apartment, quite central. Although I spent most of my summer holidays in our holiday home and my parents were very fond of flowers, there were always more exciting things for me to do as a child than get to know the flowers in our garden and take care of them. As I was growing up, I always felt I had no idea about flowers and was unable to do anything with them. Of course, that wasn't a big deal – I knew that for flower bouquets, I could rely on the florist's taste or some ready-made arrangements.

For a person who needs to feel confident and “at home” in order to get involved with something, my inexperience in making bouquets always kept me distant from this creative activity; I was convinced that special knowledge and artistic abilities were required for an aesthetic result. But it is interesting how a random interaction can sometimes lead us to experience the world (as if) from a different (multi) dimension and enable us to grasp connections with our surroundings (human and non-human) we never thought we had an idea about. Surprising situated understandings can come out of everyday coincidental happenings; what we call “our position”, the “who we are” and the “what we know”, is an “endless reconfiguring of boundaries” and properties – never an absolute or an “a priori determinate feature” (Barad, 2007, p. 293). It is as if there is a thread running through time-space-individual entities-objects-subjects-matter-meaning like an entanglement of practices of knowing and becoming in an inconceivable way.

In the story in the flower shop, I try to stay in the specialness of the moment, a random interaction, a phenomenon emerging from within spontaneous intra-activity which feels like traversing to a tangent universe where the notion of “*becoming-with-others*” extends beyond our usual, linear way of seeing it as changing, growing, or learning from within interactions. It feels more like a dis-continuous “*being transported-with*” -others to places outside our usual space-time conceptual fields, places which are private and communal at the same time, brand new yet familiar, multifaceted yet commonplace, places which appear like windows on the wall in the midst of our living-with-others. Like Harry Potter's platform nine and three-quarters (9 ¾), a platform which can be accessed by walking straight through the apparently solid barrier between platforms nine and ten. Barad writes:

“Neither space nor time exist as determinate givens outside of phenomena. As a result of the iterative nature of intra-active practices that constitute phenomena, the “past”

and the “future” are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through one another: phenomena cannot be located in space and time; rather, phenomena are material entanglements that “extend” across different spaces and times. The production of the new can’t be located and it certainly can’t be owned. Neither the past nor the future is ever closed. It’s not that the new is generated in time; rather, what is at issue is the intra-active generation of new temporalities, new possibilities, where the “new” is the trace of what is yet to come.”

Barad, 2007, p. 383

The florist’s call

Heading back home from work for my mid-day break, I pass opposite the little flower shop where I have regularly been buying flowers during the last year, when I suddenly hear a voice from the other side of the street: “Did they like what we made?”

I turn towards the voice, and I see the florist standing outside his little shop, arranging his flower display. I look at him with a smile on my face, puzzled for a moment, but then I realise what he is talking about, and I respond: “Oh, yes, they loved it!”. Then I continue walking at a fast pace as my daughter will be arriving home from school any minute.

“Did they like what we made?” His words keep echoing in my mind as I walk home. He could have asked whether they liked the flowers I bought from him, whether they liked the bouquet I offered them – but why did he refer to “what we made”? I remember the day, a week ago, when I went to his flower shop to buy a bouquet. I remember how at some point I dared to ask him to swap some of the flowers he was putting in the bouquet for me for some other more brightly coloured flowers. I dared to walk straight through the solid (for me) barrier between “expertise” and “ignorance” – that’s how I felt!

When I had the finished bouquet in my hands, I thought he had created something really beautiful – or was it *we*?

The “historical narrative” in my mind is clearly about the florist making the bouquet for me. But that “we” he used makes sense to me. What specifically was my contribution to that bouquet? As I try to decide who made the bouquet, him or us, I am reminded of the questions Barad raises about the nature of two-ness and one-ness:

“Quantum entanglements are generalized quantum superpositions, more than one, no more than one, impossible to count. Quantum entanglements are not the intertwining of two (or more) states/entities/events but a calling into question the very nature of two-ness, and ultimately one-ness as well. “Between” will never be the same. One is too few, two is too many.”

Barad, 2010, p. 251

“Did they like what we made?” That “we” he used felt just right and, in a way, it doesn’t need any justifications. On the contrary, I feel like it validates exactly what happened and articulates in a unique way systemic ideas about collaborative work, relational responsibility, relational reflexivity, not knowing positions, expert positions, power and empowerment positions – all of which start to fly

through my mind as I reflect on the event. And right now, I feel the florist's use of "we" bringing alive for me what in systemic practice we call with-ness interaction. "Did they like what we made?" This "we" captivates my mind as I re-live my favourite idea about knowledge, as a fluid and performative sense of self and a fluid and emerging sense of knowing-with others. Barad writes: "An intra-action is a single event that is not one" (2010, p. 244), and "Quantum entanglements tell us that being and becoming is an indeterminate matter" (2010, p. 251).

In the few minutes before arriving home, I go back in my mind to that day last week when I bought the flower bouquet from him, only to realise that I cannot distinguish that day from other days in his flower shop. I realise that with him, it has always been like this – was just his question that made me notice. What I am looking to find in my mind cannot be located by rewinding my memory to the details of that day: "Scenes never rest but are reconfigured within and are dispersed across and threaded through one another" (Barad, 2010, p. 244).

"As Hans-Jörg Rheinberger points out 'the new isn't the new until it is already not new — for the new becomes a novelty only in a transformation which makes it a trace of something to which it has given rise'."

Barad, 2007, p. 382

"...the historicity of phenomena is written into their materialization, their bodily materiality holds the memories of the traces of its enfoldings."

Barad, 2007, p.383

So, as I search in my mind, an image comes straight to me from that day: *us* making the bouquet together, although it was his hands making it. How strange! How is it possible to remember making the bouquet together when my recollection is of him making it? And it is not just me - the florist also thought that *we* had made the bouquet together.

"The condition of possibility for objectivity is not absolute exteriority but agential separability-exteriority within phenomena."

Barad, 2007, p. 184

Day-dreaming on my way home: Karen Barad and the three fairies

A scene from the Disney movie *Sleeping Beauty* pops up in my mind as I turn the corner in the street where I live. Despite the oath they had made not to use their wands for as long as Princess Aurora was living with them, on the occasion of her sixteenth birthday the three fairies decide they cannot continue living an "ordinary" life and agree to bring out their wands. With the use of magic, the three fairies, together with everything else in the room, in a harmonious, rolling, dance-like, collaborative flow, clean up the place and make Princess Aurora's dress and birthday cake. And, although it is clear in the movie that Merryweather is responsible for tidying up the room, Flora for designing and sewing the dress, and Fauna for making the cake, in the surprise party preparation scene, we cannot really tell who – between the flour, the broom, Merryweather, the eggs, the milk, the fabric, the needle, Fiona, the sugar, the cups, the candles, the thread, the scissors, the water, Flora, the light, the kettle, the chair – is doing what. The harmonious collaborative becoming is being performed as a magical intra-acting system with blurred boundaries between the agencies of everything in it.

I think that one of the things which distinguishes the concept of intra-action from the concept of interaction is that we measure interactions in steps, even as we go, by way of processing time and considering causality, to produce “continuous” understandings of what is happening. But with intra-action, it is different. An intra-action “is a single event, that is not one” (Barad, 2010, p. 244). We can’t measure intra-actions in the same way as we emerge as part of those intra-activity “phenomena” that we seek to understand. According to Barad’s mention of Bohr’s philosophy-physics:

“Our ability to understand the world hinges on our taking account of the fact that our knowledge making practices are social-material enactments that contribute to, and are a part of, the phenomena we describe.”

Barad, 2007, p. 26

When we refer to an interaction, we use static representations of the world, describing the actions taken by the various participants in turns. When describing reflexive interactions, again the actions are described as coming from separated agents acting upon one another, only this time each action somehow is seen to entail a denser quality because the reflexive participant in an interaction is looking back on the actions, becoming aware of important aspects, thinking about alternative ways of actions and trying them out.

Intra-actions cannot be described in those terms. Barad’s concept of intra-action involves the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad, 2007, p. 33) where complex material practices assemble in particular ways to produce specific phenomena (Hill, 2017, p. 3). At its simplest level, entanglement is the idea that two things which are separated in time and space can still be the same thing. According to Barad, (2007, p. 33) “the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with independently determinate boundaries and properties but rather what Bohr terms ‘phenomena’”:

“In contrast to the usual [concept of] interaction, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.”

Barad, 2007, p. 33

What “actually” happened on that day?

Last week, I was going to a birthday party and wanted to buy a flower bouquet for the birthday girl. So, I went to the flower shop and asked the florist to make me a nice bouquet. Straight away, he started moving around in the shop, showing me different flowers which I could choose for the bouquet, asking me which ones I liked. I didn’t know what to say or where to start. I had no idea how to mix and match the flowers together. So, he started making the bouquet. And although he was making it by himself, he was making it with me. He was choosing the flowers and arranging them nicely together for me. I was watching him closely: how he was thinking what to choose next, how he was using his hands, how he was removing the excess leaves. He was working silently and carefully, with a smile on his face. He wasn’t looking at me and he never verbally asked my opinion about the flowers he was choosing, but his body language was telling me, “This bouquet is an attempt to make something that you will like”. He was designing and refining the bouquet in a focused but uncertain way, and he was alert to picking up on what was odd or “wrong”. I felt his expertise was not making bouquets but trying and experimenting.

And then, at some point, from knowing nothing about flower bouquets, I started to know something about this particular developing bouquet that the florist was making for (with) me. I felt that some flowers in the bouquet-in-the-making were a bit dull and I thought this bouquet would look better with brighter colours. And I imagined pink and orange roses in the bouquet, many of them. Straight away I told him.

“The vitality and energies of the imagination do not operate at will; they are fountains not machinery.”

James, cited in Langer, 1995, p. 27

I wasn't sure if what I said was worth saying, whether it would lead to an aesthetically better outcome or whether it would destroy the lovely arrangement, but I dared say it. I felt I could join him in experimentation! I felt he was with me and so I was able to notice my dissatisfaction about the flower combination, experience it as part of creating with him, and share it with him. Expressing my opinion about a different combination of flowers felt like an extension of his hands. He took out the pale flowers and he added brightly coloured roses. And he kept adding more bright flowers to the bouquet. At that point, I couldn't tell the difference between his selecting, my suggesting; his silence, my watching him; his expertise, my daring to voice my desire; his understanding, my preference; his doing it, my doing it. Hill talks about the overlapping and interference of waves with one another creating fluidly changing boundaries which are continually illuminated and reconfigured in their meeting (Hill, 2017, p. 3).

“Did they like what we made?” My opinion about the more brightly coloured flowers was not an indication of anything specific; it did not represent knowledge, or expertise; it did not indicate a preference based on some exact logic. My sense of knowing about the more brightly coloured flowers was based on nothing specific, nothing which I could classify as having some pre-determined, measured value. Value was being continually and mutually assigned in our interface as differences were cutting through and re-splicing with one another. My experience was one of a performative self and a sense of knowing with him.

I think that in the therapy profession we are still grappling with the issue of what “indicates” what, and what else could be a better “indication” of certain “things” we value. With evidence-based practice, there is a belief that there can be “measures” of objective evidence of the “work”. Trustworthiness in mental health care is mainly provided by reductionist outcome research and the standardisation of evidence-based practice. But our measurements are not identical to that which has been measured (van Hennik, 2018, p. 43). According to Barad (2007, p. 49), performative understandings “take account of the fact that knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from a direct material engagement with the world”.

“We are not outside observers of the world. Neither are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity.”

Barad, 2007, p. 184

We-ness in our bodies

But isn't even the use of the expression "my practice" a performative breach of that which one means to address? Have we not already determined too much about "it" simply by pronouncing the expression "my practice"? What does "collaborative" mean? What has the word "work" got to do with what we were doing that day in the flower shop? How can one be "relationally responsible", who is giving the order and when? What is the difference between "responsible" and "relationally responsible"? Who decides what is responsible and what a proper "relational" looks like? How can we disentangle the entanglements of life if not as part of other intra-acting entanglements? Who can specify "positions"? What is the metric of "expertise"? What is the measure of "power"?

"Nothing stands separately constituted and positioned inside a spacetime frame of reference, nor does there exist a divine position for our viewing pleasure located outside the world."

Barad, 2007, p. 376

The following vignette about the baobabs comes to my mind from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book, *The Little Prince*. I feel it can be a metaphor for dominant power structures which tell us what knowledge is, and evidence-based practice frameworks which can oppress our creativity and humanity in our work, and constrain our being attuned, practical and able for empathic understanding and ethics of care.

Now there were some terrible seeds on the planet that was the home of the little prince; and these were the seeds of the baobab. The soil of that planet was infested with them.

A baobab is something you will never, never be able to get rid of if you attend to it too late. It spreads over the entire planet. It bores clear through it with its roots. And if the planet is too small, and the baobabs are too many, they split it in pieces...

"You must see to it that you pull up regularly all the baobabs, at the very first moment when they can be distinguished from the rosebushes which they resemble so closely in their earliest youth. It is very tedious work," the little prince added, "but very easy."

...I do not much like to take the tone of a moralist. But the danger of the baobabs is so little understood, and such considerable risks would be run by anyone who might get lost on an asteroid, that for once I am breaking through my reserve. "Children," I say plainly, "watch out for the baobabs!"... Perhaps you will ask me, "Why are there no other drawings in this book as magnificent and impressive as this drawing of the baobabs?" ...When I made the drawing of the baobabs I was carried beyond myself by the inspiring force of urgent necessity.

de-Saint-Exupéry, 2016, pp. 18-20

If what I am writing here was not about the florist and the bouquet, but it was some "example from practice", I would almost automatically dive into what we call "reflection on practice". I would reflect on important areas of the work, aiming at better understanding the position I took in terms of knowing, power, curiosity, how I used myself in the interaction, whether I was relationally reflexive, whether I practised collaboratively. I would look back at the process to discover (McNamee and

Hosking, 2012, p. 99) what justified my choice of actions, what the outcome was, and what else it was possible for me to do. With the observation apparatus called “my practice”, discovery and justification go hand in hand.

“While, within the scope of classical physics, the interaction between object and apparatus can be neglected or, if necessary, compensated for, in quantum physics this interaction thus forms an inseparable part of the phenomenon.”

Bohr, 1963, cited in Barad, 2007, p. 196

Well, professional theoretical lenses often tend to become my observation apparatus in practice and in life, and I am very conscious of the danger of these ideas getting entangled with the “phenomenon” I am looking at. They will make it another! And the problem is, they will make it foreign, looked at from the outside just when I must own it because I am part of it – and this is where my responsibility lies.

In the same scene from *Sleeping Beauty* that I mentioned above, there is a little dialogue between the three fairies which has stayed with me since I watched the movie with my daughter years ago. When the three fairies, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather, are preparing the little birthday party for Princess Aurora, magic provides the connecting glue for a harmonic collaborative flow of the preparations. However, the three fairies had promised not to use magic at all as long as Princess Aurora was living with them. To be loyal to their oath, they first tried to make the preparations for the party without using magic, following the how-to guides just as “ordinary” people would do. But despite their persistent efforts and constant encouragements to each other – “It’s simple: all you do is follow the book and do it as it says here!” – an “ordinary”, by-the-book way, of doing things never worked. Flora, Fauna and Merryweather are never “ordinary”; magic is part of who they are.

I wonder whether my passion to try to live in “phenomena” – not just in language and concepts – is what makes me bring in my writings casual, everyday living “phenomena” which don’t necessarily fall into some fixed category. I have noticed my difficulty when writing the so-called “examples from practice”, a difficulty related to the pre-determined nature of what I am about to write. The context is too closed for what I mean to address. What does it mean for something to be an “example” of some category? What kinds of things does the category “my practice” include and, most importantly, what does it exclude? How can life-with “clients”, this dynamic fountain of relational phenomena, be examined using an observation apparatus called “my practice”? An apparatus which tends to yield results of the on/off type. Collaborative? Yes/No. Responsible? Yes/No. Empowering? Yes/No. Barad writes:

“Concepts are indeterminate outside of the appropriate material conditions needed to make them intelligible. Any particular experimental arrangement which gives determinate meaning to a particular concept will, by necessity, always produce its constitutive exclusion, that is an equally necessary “complementary” concept, which is thereby left outside the domain of intelligibility. That is the contingent determination of the meaning of any concept, necessarily entails constitutive exclusions. Every concept is haunted by its mutually constituted excluded other.”

Barad, 2010, p. 253

Indeterminate and precise

There isn't anything concrete in terms of fixed concepts which can be said to describe how the florist and I were building our "collaboration" together; it is not about the sum of specific and measurable actions that each one of us took which created the we-ness. Positions and properties cannot be determined outside the ever-emerging conditions specifying them, but they are precise within the phenomenon they create and determinate as part of it. In Barad's physics-philosophy, the indeterminacy principle can be stated as follows:

"Bohr's indeterminacy principle (...) is an ontic [not an epistemic] principle: the point is not that measurements disturb pre-existing values of inherent properties but properties are only determinate given the existence of particular material arrangements that give definition to the corresponding concept in question. In the absence of such conditions, the corresponding properties do not have determinate values. And the determinateness of one set of properties materially precludes the determinateness of a complementary set."

Barad, 2007, p. 261

A way to understand the "phenomenon" I have been writing could be that it is a state of openness and trustfulness from within our spontaneous fluctuating together in the space of relationality.

I would like to borrow from Quantum Field theory the idea of a *vacuum* as a metaphor for the space of our relational movements. In a quantum vacuum, virtual particles are quanta of vacuum fluctuations, quantized indeterminacies of existence/nonexistence-in-action. Barad writes:

"No determinate words are spoken by the vacuum, only a speaking silence that is neither silence nor speech but it is the conditions of im/possibility for non/existence. There are an infinite number of im/possibilities but not everything is possible. The vacuum isn't empty but neither there is any/thing in it."

Barad, 2012, p. 12

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