



Tracing entanglements

Drawing on Karen Barad's theory of agential realism (Barad, 2007), this workshop aims to:

- Raise students' awareness of how material objects are inevitably entangled with questions of ethics and justice.
- Encourage students to think collaboratively across different disciplines.
- Remind students that conducting any type of analysis is an 'infinite task', but worth engaging in.

In Barad's agential realist framework, material objects are considered in their 'entanglements', which are not only scientific, but always also social and political. Barad explains this significance of tracing entanglements as follows: *"Each phenomenon (whether it's a word or a thing) is ultimately entangled with everything else [...] in specific ways, and not all the entanglements matter equally or in the same way. So it is an infinite yet crucially important task to engage in. Tracing the entanglements is essential to facing questions of justice; both are infinite tasks."* (for full citation, see Barad and Gandorfer, 2021, p.33). This workshop plan aims to apply Barad's notion to interdisciplinary higher education practice, in different contexts.

By the end of this workshop, you should be able to ...

1. Trace the social, political and ethical entanglements of material objects.
2. Work collaboratively across disciplines to think differently about what matters.
3. Think rigorously about entanglements, through engagement with specific questions.
4. Recognise that tracing entanglements is an infinite process, by taking forward questions for further discussion and analysis.

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Lesson plan

1. Instructor / lecturer selects a material object(s) relevant to the learning objective or interests of the class. Examples could be:
 - a piece of metal, plastic, wood or a sample of liquid such as water or oil;
 - a microscope, measurement tool, or any other scientific apparatus;
 - a plant or seed;
 - a piece of glass, paper or cloth;
 - an artefact or sculpture from any historical period;
 - an item of technology such as a phone, keyboard or mouse.
2. Working individually or in groups, students sit with the object and consider some or all of the questions below (30-40 mins; the questions can be adapted as needed):

What practices is this object entangled with?

For example: where has it come from, what does it do, what *can* it do, what has it been used for, in what context, for what purpose?

What human and nonhuman entanglements can be traced?

Who or what relates to this object, and how?

How is this object entangled across time?

Consider specific times when this object may be or may have been important. Is it equally important at all times? Why (not)?

What disciplines are entangled with this object?

How does this object matter to your discipline? How might it matter differently to students on another course in the university?

What words/texts/discourses relate to this object?

What do different humans call this object? What has been written or said about it, by whom and why?

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What aspects of this object matter most to you, here and now? Why?
What aspects of this object matter less to you, here and now? Why?
Only you can elaborate here, because the answers will depend on your entanglement with the object in the specific moment.

3. If there is time, circulate the objects so that the individuals/groups are now sitting with a different object. Repeat step 2. (30-40 minutes, as applicable)
4. As class, share the different discussions. Depending on the context, the students could present their analysis of each object to the class. In what ways do the individuals/groups think differently?
5. What questions about these objects will you take forward for future tracing and analysis?

Key readings or resources

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

Barad, Karen, and Daniela Gandorfer. "Political Desirings: Yearnings for Mattering (,) Differently." *Theory & Event*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2021, pp. 14–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2021.0002>.

Murris, Karin, and Simone Fullagar. "Entanglement." *A Glossary for Doing Postqualitative, New Materialist and Critical Posthumanist Research Across Disciplines*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2022, pp. 62–63, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003041153-31>.

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