

Immanent and diffractive critique in scholarship and publication

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Abstract

Criticality and critique require careful attention by authors, reviewers, and editors in *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* (CRiSTaL), since they form a central focus of the journal. Conventional views of critique are influenced by unexpressed assumptions that what is needed is an authoritative expert, who from a position of superiority and distance, diagnoses and pronounces on the inadequacies of the text. This article explores more generative approaches to critique and criticality such as immanent critique and diffractive methodologies. We argue that in order for immanent critique and diffractive methodologies to happen, sensibilities such as attentiveness, response-ability, accountability, generosity, and curiosity are necessary. The final section of the paper considers academic practices of reviewing, writing, reading, pedagogy, and conferencing in relation to immanent critique and diffractive methodologies and the sensibilities we propose which make these forms of critique and criticality possible.

Keywords: Diffraction, conferencing, criticality, immanent critique, pedagogy, reading, reviewing, writing

Introduction

Manuscripts sent in to *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* (CRiSTaL) that do not engage with criticality or critique have a high probability of rejection by the journal, as these two foci are what distinguishes CRiSTaL from other teaching and learning journals in the field of higher education. This is not to say that all other journals in teaching and learning in higher education do not require criticality; yet, the word critical is in CRiSTaL's title and is thus a central feature of what is looked for in manuscripts sent to the journal. Since criticality and critique form such a central focus of the journal, these concepts require careful attention by authors, reviewers and editors in CRiSTaL. This article provides alternative ways of thinking-with these concepts in relation to academic practices in higher education such as reviewing, writing, reading, pedagogy and conferencing. In doing so, it takes as its departure point the invitation to prospective authors interested in writing for the journal CRiSTaL 'to theorise, trouble, reconfigure and re-imagine



higher education teaching and learning practice', and to move beyond methodological, disciplinary and geopolitical boundaries. We also note that the journal invites prospective authors to be creative, take risks, and to think 'otherwise', framing contributions through 'a sensibility towards social justice'. Bearing these instructions to authors in mind, this paper considers how criticality and critique can be done differently in order to provide some provocations for authors, reviewers and editors to think-with. The theme of this special issue was formulated around critique and criticality and this article seeks to offer some novel perspectives which will hopefully assist those who wish to submit manuscripts to the journal.

Criticality or the mode of being critical is often associated with reflexivity and critical reflection in feminist and qualitative research. The US feminist philosophers of science, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad have proposed alternative optics to reflexivity and critical reflection (which they see as dependent on mirroring and sameness) - that of diffraction, which pertains to differences that matter. We explore how diffractive methodologies might offer alternative modes of criticality and alternatives to critique.

Conventional views of critique are influenced by unexpressed assumptions that what is needed is an authoritative expert, who from a position of superiority and distance, diagnoses and pronounces on the inadequacies of the text. Consequently, critique is frequently experienced by those who receive it as an epistemologically damaging process, where an author's ideas are insufficiently engaged with, dismissed out of hand, and seen as irrelevant or outmoded. In this article, we argue for more generative ways of engaging with criticality and critique for readers, authors, reviewers, conference presenters and editors. Such approaches include immanent and diffractive forms of critique and criticality. Immanent and diffractive critique are predicated on the idea that it is impossible to separate oneself from what one is examining, one is always already part of it. Similarly, texts and disciplines are seen as entangled and residing inside each other. This matters because the critic is no longer positioned as superior, judgemental, and at a distance from what has been observed, but rather pays careful attention to the fine details of the text. We think-with posthumanist and feminist new materialist writers such as Karen Barad, Vinciane Despret, Donna Haraway, Stephano Harney, Bruno Latour, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, and Fred Moten; all of whom have engaged with critique and criticality in - what we consider - more productive ways. Particular attention is given to how notions of attentiveness, response-ability, accountability, generosity, and curiosity may disrupt distancing and othering effects of the critical gaze. We consider how such sensibilities might be conducive to immanent and diffractive critique and criticality by focusing on a few examples of their use in academic practices such as reviewing, writing, reading, pedagogy and conferencing. We argue that thinking-with such alternative politico-onto-ethico-epistemological approaches generates possibilities for doing critique differently in scholarship and publication.

Why has critique run out of steam?

Traditional critical practices which first emerged during the Enlightenment and persist today, tend to position the critic as a remote expert, epistemologically in command and in mastery of a field

of inquiry (Ruez & Cockayne, 2021: 96). The distancing effects of this type of critical practice are brought about by a decontextualised and all-powerful gaze that distances rather than engages with the object under scrutiny, detracting from matters of real concern. Donna Haraway problematises this stance in her conceptualisation of the 'God Trick', which debunks notions of so-called objective (or impartial) scientists whose transcendent 'view above, from nowhere' conceals the specific positionality of the critic as white, male, cis-gendered human (Haraway, 1988: 589). The God Trick activates a violent universalising gaze that annihilates situated and indigenous knowledge practices and production by rendering them inferior and invisible. Rather than focus on decontextualised objects in isolation, identified as 'matters of fact', Haraway contends that objects must be read within their contexts in order to foreground the relational complexity of how knowledge is generated, thus opening critique towards 'matters of concern'. Thinking with Haraway, Bruno Latour also brings attention to the limitations of the kind of critique that scrutinises 'matters of fact', without taking into account 'matters of concern' and suggests the need for an alternative strategy to this kind of critique - one that prioritises matters of concern which no longer 'debunk but [...] protect ... [and] ... care'. Matters of concern are entangled with matters of ethics and care, calling on scholars to acknowledge 'our own involvements in perpetuating dominant values, rather than retreating in the secure position of an enlightened outsider who knows better' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012: 197).

The queer feminist quantum theorist and philosopher, Karen Barad also expresses their¹ discomfort with traditional notions of critique. They challenge the epistemological damages caused by dismissive and superior critique that 'put[s] someone or something down— another scholar, another feminist, a discipline, an approach, et cetera' (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012: 49). They distinguish between deconstructive and destructive critique, explaining the former as 'a practice of reading for the constitutive exclusions of those ideas we can not do without' (ibid). According to Barad (2007), traditional views of critique are premised on Cartesian and Newtonian representationalist habits of thinking which presume the existence of individual entities that pre-exist relations and occupy specific places in the world. These views enable an analysis from a distance which is performed by a Cartesian thinking individual human subject which pre-exists and is separable from what is being examined. Barad also alerts readers to binary logics and the linear temporality assumed by traditional notions of critique and criticality. From this perspective the material and discursive, now and then, subject and object, matter and meaning, nature and culture, here and there are all understood to be separate. Barad's agential realism calls into question these dualisms, seeing them as inseparable, as will be discussed further along in the paper. For Barad, matters of fact, matters of care and matters of concern are intertwined and cannot be severed.

Erin Manning (2020), and Stephano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) are scholars who are wary of the assumptions and presumptions of neurotypicality, whiteness, and neoliberalism that underpin conventional notions of critique. According to these philosophers, traditional notions

¹ Identifying as a queer theorist, Barad uses the personal pronouns of their/them.

of critique-as-distance and subtraction are never neutral or apolitical, but are based on neurotypical and white habitual ways of viewing the world, which are taken for granted, overcoding what is seen, rather than attuning to what is under scrutiny. This is done through viewing the work from outside, or judging it in relation to the critic's own work or a lineage of previous work, rather than an ethos of encounter with what moves the work from within. This neutralises the immanent field of value thus making it redundant, which Manning (2020) refers to as a form of debased interpretation. Questioning, from a position of traditional critique, can be deadening in its arrogance, in that the answers to the questions are already known. This is why Manning (2020) and Harney and Moten express an aversion for such "false" kinds of questioning: 'The critical academic questions the university, questions the state, questions art, politics, culture' (Harney & Moten, 2013: 38). This kind of criticality and critique, which assumes a givenness to knowing and doing, serves to maintain the status quo, stifling creative sensibilities and ways of doing academia differently. Brian Massumi (2015) is even more dismissive of traditional critique, viewing it as a sadistic and moralistic practice of mastery, in which something is separated out and pinned down, objectifying it, in order to pronounce a final judgment on it.

Are there more conducive notions of criticality and critique, which involve attunement and risk-taking, opening up the potential for the as-yet-unthought and the more-than in academic practices? In the next section we consider two alternatives to conventional critique and criticality - immanent critique and diffraction to consider more participatory, open and productive ways of actively engaging in academic work which does not silence that which exists outside of normative frameworks.

Immanent critique and diffraction

While immanent and diffractive critique have been used interchangeably with each other (see for example Barad & Gandorfer, 2021), we find it fruitful to diffractively read the work of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, who have largely written on immanent critique, through the work of Karen Barad, who has written extensively on how diffractive methodology provides an alternative to traditional critique. We pay close attention to how these approaches resonate with one another in order to develop a number of sensibilities for practicing immanent and diffractive critique.

Immanent critique

The etymological roots of immanence are found in the Latin term *immanere* which can be understood as 'to dwell within' (Hein, 2021: 512). Deleuze's philosophy conceptualises immanence as immanent only to itself. In other words, unlike transcendence which is grounded in a hierarchical and dualistic two-world structure that privileges one over the other (ibid: 513), immanence is structured as a one world ontology in which everything dwells within. Unlike transcendent thinking that is premised on binary oppositions, immanent critique refuses inherent separations and explores instead the relational space within binaries whereby the binary poles are contained within each other (ibid: 514). Accordingly, a philosophy of immanence not only opens spaces wherein binary categories such as mind/body, inside/outside, above/below,

self/other, subject/object are undone; it also foregrounds their unquantifiable and ongoing entangled relations (Manning, 2016: 29).

A philosophy of immanence offers radical possibilities for the practice of 'immanent critique' as a participatory critique that comes from within, as within a logic of immanence 'there is no situation of being outside situation' (Massumi, 2015: 71). In a one world ontology, the critic is always positioned within the inquiry rather than an external or outside authority who imposes a pre-existing methodology that would be transcendent to the inquiry itself (Hein, 2021: 517). Accordingly, immanent critique rejects those pre-established codes of correctness and principles that are enacted and reinforced through so-called authoritative judgement and mastery. Instead, immanent critique 'enacts its own principle' (Massumi, 2015: 107) whereby critics enter into the inquiry in ways that actively alter conditions of its emergence and participate in the process of generating new becomings that refuse superimposed judgements and inhibit open-ended inquiry (ibid). Immanent critique as a practice focuses on an ontology of becoming rather than being, in which there is ongoing generative experimentation that is always 'in the process of coming about—the new, remarkable, and interesting' (Hein, 2021: 517). For example, immanence rejects an anthropocentric worldview that privileges the human subject over all else and linked to this, it challenges entrenched values associated with mastery and authority (Massumi, 2015: x).

Erin Manning problematises traditional critiquing practices that proclaim judgements and do the work of mediation which, rather than offering new insights, reinforces the status quo. She proposes instead immediation² as a practice of immanent critique that resists 'inserting a mediating gesture[s] at the heart of experience' and argues that immanent critique 'moves from the force of the in-act to discover not only what the conditions of a singular mode of existence are, but what its merest existences reveal' (2019:49). Put differently, immanent critique takes into account the process of '*how* the work does its work ... [and] ... *what* the work can do', rather than re-inscribe generalised and externalised encoded values of how the work should be (Manning 2020: 112) [our own emphases].

Research-creation and study are modes or activities of immanent critique for Manning and Harney and Moten. Manning describes immanent critique as 'an act that only knows the conditions of its existence from within its own process, an act that refuses to judge from without' (2016: 12). Immanent critique builds valuation tools from inside the process, engaging with the work under scrutiny, rather than judgements from outside of it (Manning, 2023). Both study and research-creation as pragmatic speculative practices, do not start with a preformed or pre-existing subject and object. Rather they invent problems and propel knowledge-in-the-making, the more-than, and as-yet-unthought, into the event. Research-creation and study activate events and event-time, which remains indeterminately untimely, and cannot be hierarchised or systematised into static preformed categories. Immanent critique is a different logic, in that it does not dwell on either-or, for or against - setting up one thing against another, - it 'does not

² Immediation is a relational practice which sees time as unstable and experience as part of the welter of the event. Manning (2021: 51) notes 'A politics of immediation proposes this schizz of experience in-forming as the site of existence's potential'.

do its work in the register of contradiction' (Manning, 2016: 203). Manning (2016) proposes a Nietzschean affirmation, which is not based on conventional critique that judges from the outside but is speculative and experimental in that it does not predict or devalue experience in advance of its coming to be, accommodating the what-else rather than the what-is. Without judgemental interpretation, a reaching toward potential that can make a difference from within the process of the work that is being focused on, becomes possible.

Immanent critique shifts critique from a distanced and subtractive stance that enacts a breaking-down, towards an up-close, attentive, and affirmative approach that makes visible the complexity and interconnectedness of the real world and highlights the possibilities for critique as accountable, generous, and response-able.

Diffraction

Diffraction can be seen as an alternative to traditional forms critique and criticality that are commonly associated with reflexivity and reflection in research processes. Diffraction is a physical phenomenon which is unique to waves, such as water, light, or sound waves. Diffraction refers to the behaviour of waves when they combine and overlap, or bend and spread out when they encounter an object. In contrast to reflecting apparatuses (e.g. mirrors), which display images, which are more or less faithful to the objects placed in front of them, thus producing sameness, diffraction patterns mark differences in the relative characters (i.e. amplitude and phase) of individual waves as they combine (Barad, 2007).

Both Haraway and Barad propose diffraction as an alternative optic to reflexivity and reflection, which they maintain are involved with mirroring and displacing 'the same elsewhere' (Haraway, 1997: 16). Haraway proposed diffraction as a metaphor and a strategy for making a difference in the world instead of reflection, which she regarded to be reductionist in its representational mode of thinking about words and things. This refers to the Cartesian belief that as independent individual knowing subjects, we do not have access to the material world but rather representations of the world and our own thoughts (Rouse, 1996). Representationalism according to Barad (2007) is the belief that words, ideas and concepts accurately reflect the things to which they refer. This gives rise to the belief that it is possible to turn the mirror back on oneself as in a reflexive methodology.

According to Barad diffractive methodology is an alternative to the practice of formulaic and predictable modes of critique (Barad, 2007; Barad & Gandorfer, 2021; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012; Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012; Juelskjær, et al., 2021). Diffraction is a practice which is attentive to how differences come about, what is excluded and included and how these exclusions matter in the world. Diffraction is also a tool which highlights the entanglement of material-discursive configurations of the world in its process of becoming. Diffraction and immanent critique are premised upon a relational ontology which holds that subjects and objects do not pre-exist but come into being through relations. In this way, matter and meaning are co-constituted through ongoing material arrangements which are part of the world. From a quantum physics point of view, diffraction is a matter of entanglement, where politics, ethics, ontology and

epistemology are seen as inextricably bound together. From this perspective, it is impossible to critique from a distance. When we understand ourselves as part of and entangled in the world, rather than outside it, we can move away from habits of critiquing and representing the world as if we are outside it. Diffraction marks differences from within, whereas critique as reflection holds objects at a distance in order to reflect on them.

Critique as diffraction can, therefore, be seen as a direct material engagement, a cutting-together apart, where agential cuts are both separate and together simultaneously. In the same way, different disciplines, theories, oeuvres, and texts are entangled, always already residing inside each other. Rather than pinning one text, discipline, etc. down and contrasting it against another as a fixed frame of reference, a diffractive methodology allows us to read important insights through each other.

In order to think critically, the particular material-discursive conditions under which thought has become sedimented need to be followed and traced. This means that phenomena are not taken as given, but are seen as historicised in specific iterative intra-actions³. From a relational ontology, agencies, like entities, do not precede their intra-actions. Rather they come into being through their intra-actions. As a methodology, diffraction 'enables genealogical analyses of how boundaries are produced' (Barad, 2007: 30), and assists us to get underneath thought by tracing material and historical entanglements in which certain ways of thinking have come to matter (Barad & Gandorfer, 2020).

Thus, the notion of diffraction as critique sees matter not as given or fixed states of being, but as indeterminate. This means that diffraction incorporates a radical openness to an infinity of possibilities for reconfiguring academic work and for thinking otherwise. Unlike juxtaposition that focuses on difference as negative, diffractive readings are 'respectful, detailed and ethical engagements' (ibid) that reveal entangled relationships across differences and show how these differences matter. This approach is not fixated on value judgements that reinforce binaries of right/wrong, relevant/irrelevant which tend to narrow inquiry and inhibit curiosity. Diffraction foregrounds the fine details and patterns in a work that have the potential to take the process somewhere interesting.

In what follows in this paper, we propose an immanent and diffractive form of critique, which we argue, is made possible through a number of sensibilities - attentiveness, response-ability, accountability, generosity, curiosity, surprise and wonder - that are foundational to the practice of Levinasian relational ethics whereby our encounters with the world become meaningful through active receptivity and openness to the other (Levinas, 1979). We do this in order to move beyond 'the traditional disembodied rational subject of traditional ethics but rather an embodied sensibility which responds to its proximal relationship to the other through a mode of wonderment that is antecedent to consciousness' (Barad, 2007: 391). We then turn to a number of academic practices which use critique and suggest alternative ways of going about doing these.

³ Intra-action is a neologism invented by Barad (2007) to indicate the mutual entanglement of agencies.

Sensibilities for doing critique differently

Attentiveness

For Barad, justice, which entails 'acknowledgment, recognition, and *loving attention*, is not a state that can be achieved once and for all' (2007: x) [our emphasis]. Justice is therefore an ongoing ethical practice which is never achieved at any particular point, and is thus referred to as a justice-to-come. Loving attention or attentiveness is an important sensibility in Tronto's (1993, 2013) political ethic of care, where a need is noticed and recognised. Attention involves an immersion in the immediacy of what is happening and an attunement to forces which are usually side-lined in neurotypical and conventional frameworks. In immanent critique and diffraction, one attends to the encounter and entanglements and the particular insights which emanate from this attunement. One also attends to what is excluded and side-lined in the process and why this matters.

Attentiveness to historicity and to breaking out of binarised ways of thinking are important for a practice of immanent critique, which entails interrupting Cartesian cuts that separate concepts, such as material discursive, here there, now then, nature culture. This requires the careful tracing of entanglements of material and historical conditions and paying attention to how to open these up to reworking, in order to reconfigure academic practice. It is entanglements rather than objects that matter in immanent critique and diffraction, where critique is a material practice as part of the world rather than a judgement of something from the outside, or 'critique-at-a-distance' (Barad & Gandorfer, 2020: 33).

Response-ability

Immanent critique and diffractive methodology are dependent on the sensibility of being open and alive to entanglements and encounters. Such openness makes possible an attuned response to the work under scrutiny and enables whatever is under scrutiny to respond back. Being open to responding in immanent critique would require that preconceived certainties in relation to forms of knowing, being and doing are put aside, in order to encounter what Manning (2016) refers to as the 'thisness' of the event. Such forms of responsiveness and response-ability in immanent critique and diffraction potentiate possibilities for becoming-with (Haraway, 2016), and bring forth new ways of thinking about who and what come to matter in the world.

Response-ability to the dynamism of indeterminacy is also important for immanent critique, which means being in touch with how the past is never finished and the future is not only what is yet to come, but that both are threaded into the thick present. The ability to respond to historicity and the hauntology of inheritance enables radical undoing of taken-for-granted simplistic notions of linear time and space, so needed for immanent critique to happen (Barad, 2007; Barad & Gandorfer, 2020). Cultivating such response-ability would include a sensitivity to what is presumed to be the void or absence, but which is actually a teaming presence which is ongoing in the world. Response-ability enables the rendering capable of all partners affected by the immanent critique, not just the work towards which the critique is directed (Despret, 2004). Here a range of possible responses by the other is welcomed and enabled, as well as inhabiting

the work oneself and responding to it from within. Inviting such responses is made possible by asking what Despret (2016) refers to as asking polite questions - by which she means questions as practices of engagement which create an interest for the work or person under focus, making the unanticipated and unexpected possible (Haraway, 2016).

Accountability

Immanent critique and diffraction in their responsiveness to phenomena - the invitation and enabling of responses, require an accountability for marks which are made on bodies and for the inherited hauntologies - the ghosts in all their materiality, in the lively practices of worlding and becoming of which we are a part. This means that we need to be accountable for specific histories in our practices of engagement. It also involves accountability for the cuts that are made in the practice of immanent critique, of undoing and destabilising binary oppositions and awareness of how relations remain co-constituted in an agential cut - a cutting together/apart. It also means being accountable for the exclusions that happen with agential cuts in academic practices which produce new possibilities.

Being accountable in a diffractive process would be an acknowledgement of and willingness to do the hard work of tracing entanglements of phenomena. This would lead to being apprised of the assumptions underlying neurotypical, white and neoliberal ways of knowing and being, by undoing the taken-for-granted metaphysics of individualism. This would also require what Barad and Gandorfer refer to as 'getting underneath thought' by tracing the historical and material conditions in which such patterns of thought have become sedimented (2020: 17).

Immanent critique and diffraction take into account matters of fact, matters of concern and matters of care, acknowledging their inextricable intertwinement. Transdisciplinary thought which investigates phenomena from multiple angles assists in realising such entanglements.

Generosity

Although it is possible to view generosity as a troubling concept in that it may be seen as 'a dangerous orientation', for example, as in 'white supremacy or colonialism' where largesse or generosity comes from excessive privilege (Ruez & Cockayne, 2021: 91), we argue that it can also be used in productive ways for immanent critique and diffraction. Boulos Walker (2016), for example, in her work on Slow Philosophy considers how generosity is productively used in academic work such as writing by, philosophers such as de Beauvoir, Nietzsche, and Cixous. Generosity, according to these philosophers, requires an openness towards the other and a giving without reserve. As Boulos Walker elaborates:

Cixous differentiates here between a masculine economy of production, accumulation and profit and a feminine economy of giving, spending and excess. She argues that these represent two possible relations with the other. While the masculine gives only in the certainty of some immediate return, the feminine reaches out towards the other in an

excessive gesture of generosity or grace. (2016:162)

Cixous proposes generosity as a feminine form of writing which offers itself as a gift and remains open to and welcomes the strangeness of the other. Both immanent critique and diffraction are attuned to the stranger or the other within. In diffraction, quantum superpositions mean that all bits of matter are always already a multitude as each is constituted by all possible histories of intra-actions with others. This alerts us to the other in the self and how difference, or the stranger within becomes possible (Barad, 2012:16). Ontological indeterminacy and quantum superposition allow for a radical openness towards the other, which is important in immanent critique in its resistance of adversarial relations towards the other.

In eschewing conventional practices of critique which are dominated by fear and closure, generous scholarship 'has the potential to foster positive outcomes that arise through practising reciprocity, nurturing collegiality, and building community' (Martinovic et al, 2022: 49). Moving away from the constant masculinist pressure to produce research outputs at all cost, a generous approach gives of time, care and labour. It also depends on an openness to the unknown, to curiosity, surprise and wonder.

Curiosity, surprise and wonder

Being open to the world's liveliness means allowing oneself to be lured by wonder, curiosity and surprise (Barad, 2014b). As sensibilities for enabling immanent critique and diffraction, curiosity, surprise and wonder open academic practices towards ongoing experimentation rather than attending to predetermined questions. Such sensibilities can be unsettling because they require a relinquishment of control, as Maggie MacLure describes in opening herself to the affects of wonder: 'When I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has chosen me, and it is that mutual "affection" that constitutes "us" as, respectively, data and researcher' (2013: 229). Like the affective encounter of an event that Massumi describes as 'a something doing' that 'snaps us to attention together', surprise opens up new ground for exploration and invention in ways that are both risky and indeterminate (2015: 57).

Haraway (2008) draws attention to how care and curiosity expand possibilities for critique whereby author and critic might intra-actively learn, build and become-with each other through their encounters with text. For Haraway, caring entails 'becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning' (2008: 34). In other words, curiosity emerges out of immanent practices that elicit carefully attuned positions of 'thinking from' specific situated encounters through which beings render each other capable. Despret argues that in order to practice attuned curiosity, researchers need to cultivate a 'virtue of politeness' arguing that 'it is not the hosts who are required to be politely accountable as social beings but the observer' (2015: 19). In other words, it is up to researchers to take care to ask questions that matter to those who are being asked. Practiced in this way, immanent critique is both emergent and creative in that it follows from the event and pulls practitioners along with it, tracing as yet uncharted paths. This resonates with Puig de la Bellacasa

who draws attention to the entangled relationship between matters of concern and matters of care when she argues that the provision of adequate care depends on 'a form of knowledge and curiosity regarding the situated needs of an "other"—human or not—that only becomes possible through being in relations that inevitably transform the entangled beings' (2017: 90).

Immanent and diffractive critique in academic practices

We now turn to five examples of academic practices which incorporate immanent critique and diffraction and the sensibilities which are conducive to these alternative forms of critique, in order to give readers some indications of how they might work - we focus specifically on reviewing, writing, reading, pedagogy and conferencing.

Reviewing

Reviewing a manuscript is a process which requires attentiveness and attunement in a richness of engagement to the particular focus of the text, thinking-with and alongside the text, how it works, and how it might work differently with the incorporation of the comments from the reviewer. In a similar vein to a diffractive reading, reviewing requires paying attention to the fine details of the text in order to do justice to what the author/s have tried to put across.

For reviewing to be a successful process, it needs to respond in sensitive ways to the contribution the text is putting forward, rather than viewing it as an expert from a distance. The review should be done in such a way that it produces helpful paths for the author/s to respond to the review in ways which generate new insights for both authors and reviewers. Ideally there should also be opportunities for authors to respond to reviewers' comments and to indicate what they do and do not agree with in the review, or for authors and reviewers to write critical rejoinders to each other's responses (Davis, 2010). In this way, all involved in the process are being rendered capable - the reviewer/author/s and the text.

For reviewing to be accountable, the reviewer needs to have a generous stance where the author's interests are prominent, rather than their own. This would mean that the author's own positions and interests must be responded to, rather than the reviewer imposing their own theoretical, methodological, or philosophical positions on the author/s. Reviewing is a process which is a generous gift on the part of those doing this work, since it is an unpaid job in academia which is very time-consuming and involves reading and re-reading, and sometimes dwelling with the manuscript, as well as making detailed annotated comments on the text and writing a more comprehensive review report. Generosity also pertains to the act of giving new ideas that the author/s had not contemplated, and how the text might be revised and changed through the incorporation of new insights (Davis, 2010).

Reviewing based on traditional forms of critique-at-a-distance may well do epistemological damage, whereas the point of departure for immanent critique and diffraction is to take the text to places where it could not have gone without the review. This kind of reviewing is what Manning refers to as 'affirmation without credit', in the Postscript of her 2016 book *The Minor Gesture*. Affirmation without credit focuses on the ineffable and the more-than, opening

up writing to the potential or possibilities not-yet-thought about, to what the text can become. This kind of review opens up thinking in its indeterminacy, rather than closing it down or imposing what the reviewer from a distance wants of the text, in the certainty of their own knowledge. Manning (2016) describes her own experiences of receiving the reviews for her book manuscript, where she felt that her writing was pushed to the limit and allowed her to be 'in contact with the tremulousness of thinking in the act', which for her is a minor gesture, activating 'a tendency already in germ and embolden[ing] it toward an altering of what that tendency can do' (Manning, 2016: x). Unconventionally, she names the reviewers of her manuscript, expressing her gratitude to them for making it possible for her to 'think beyond the limit of what seemed thinkable' (Manning, 2016: x). Conventional reviewing is concerned more with the form that knowledge is taking. With immanent critique, reviewing acts more as a force towards what might become thinkable. As one of our reviewers aptly pointed out there are contested politics that would have to be engaged with if using immanent and diffractive critique in some of the 'traditional' higher education journals where critique (in the destructive mode) is what seems to be sought and required. Journal editors often have a stake in 'what passes as critique' and may be hostile – or just not recognise the value of – alternative modes of doing critique. Being a 'good' peer reviewer often seems to mean to be inculcated into the prevailing practices of the journal and this is a problem in such a hierarchical field if QI journal is synonymous with conventional critique.

Writing

Writing with immanent critique and diffractive methodologies, opens up the practice of writing towards a more-than human, iterative and performative process that unsettles inscribed subject/object binaries between author and text as well as misconceptions that writing is created from beginning to end by a pre-existing 'I' following linear trajectory (Barad, 2007: xi). In recognising writing as a performative act, we come to understand how it comes into being through attuned relational encounters and begin to respond to what it *does* rather than what it represents. This requires close and careful attention to what the process of writing brings into being, as well as the need to take accountability for that which is expressed *and* that which is excluded. For example, in reference to Saadiya Hartman's response to these absences, in which she initiates new ways of telling by writing from a 'fabulating middle', Manning shows how new modes of writing can be acts of immediation that, rather than mediating the archive of history from a distance, generate novel modes of existence that would not have been possible had Hartman positioned herself as critic 'observing the world from a mediating distance' (2021: 50).

Diffractive writing is a materialisation of thinking anew rather than a mirroring of that which is already known. This is important when challenging the imperatives of the neoliberal academy that pressurises academics to produce research outputs that regurgitate pre-existing knowledge following prescribed formats of traditional academic texts. Drawn by curiosity, wonder and surprise, diffractive writing methodologies neutralise the distancing effects of quantification and measure and call on us to get our hands dirty. As Haraway writes, 'Curiosity gets one into thick mud ... and "becoming-with-companions" that might matter in making *autres-mondialisations*

[other worlds] more possible' (2008: 38). Writing with immanent critique is experimental, experiential and generative of new and ongoing iterative connections and interconnections that matter. Crucially, these processes refuse colonial notions of transcendent mastery that mould text to fit human thoughts, attuning instead to how we are situated as part of, rather than separate from the text. As authors, our relationship to writing is thus understood as one in which writers (and readers) are rendered capable through our encounters with writing.

Reading

A diffractive reading is an intra-active process, which involves reading one or more texts/oeuvres/theories/approaches/disciplines *through* rather than *against* one another. This means that neither of these texts etc. are pre-existing or fixed in advance. One is not held as primary over the other, as a fixed referent for understanding the other, and there is no analogy or comparison between them (Barad, 2011). Rather, what emerges are new insights which pertain to questions or issues at hand – each reading providing a richer account than with a single text or reading. For example, Barad explains how reading Butler's theory of performativity through their framework of agential realism produced mutually beneficial insights and enriched understandings:

Reading agential realism and Butler's theory of performativity through each other is not about some proclaimed symmetry between subject and object, or social and scientific practices, but rather about the production of mutually informative insights that might be useful in producing an enriched understanding of materiality, agency, and the nature of technoscientific and other social processes. (2007: 208)

Diffractive readings are ethical practices which are affirmative, care-full and acutely attentive to the fine details of the text in ways that do justice to the ideas that the text is putting forward. A generous stance to reading involves an openness to what may be encountered in the text, a responsiveness to the text, where the text and the reader become-with the other (Boulous Walker, 2016; Haraway, 2016). Immanent critique and diffraction encourage a curiosity towards strangeness in the text - which involves a willingness to dwell with the text in different ways. Barad proposes a Slow and generous reading, moving slowly and walking around in words and sentences as an antidote to the dismissive tendencies of focusing on the pathology or faults as in conventional critique (Barad, 2017; Barad & Gandorfer, 2021). Boulous Walker (2016) sees institutional reading as extractive and instrumentalist - an information-mining process, calling instead for Slow forms of reading against the institution that cultivate a receptive rather than authoritative attitude towards the text. This is reminiscent of Despret's polite questioning, which requires careful listening to what the text is bringing. Dwelling-with the text helps to apprehend its complexity, which might require a reading and re-reading of the text, in order to glean different insights from the multiplicity of its material-discursive effects. Immanent critique calls for a close reading which explores what the work does from the messy midst, '[f]or it is in the

midst of the field of relations, in the undercommons, that practices are at their most inventive, at their most intense' (Manning 2016: 39). This is made possible through a curiosity and wonder which opens us to strangeness, indeterminacy and otherness of the text.

Pedagogy

Moten and Harney's practice of study, which they describe as 'a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you' (2013: 10) is helpful for those interested in immanent learning and teaching processes. For them study is 'what you do with other people' in the undercommons, it is a speculative practice that is 'already going on' (2013: 112) that does not begin in the classroom and reaches beyond the university. Manning (2016) foregrounds the resonances between immanent critique and study by showing how both refute the subject and object of study and highlights how both are concerned with creating problems that stimulate inquiry. She argues that when this occurs, study 'opens the field of experience to the more-than of objects or subjects preformed ... [it activates] ... the as-yet-unthought' (Manning, 2016: 12).

Key to immanent critique is the practice of 'backgroundingforegrounding' that 'amplifies attunement to contrast' and 'makes palpable the excess of what emerges [...] in experience' (Manning, 2020: 103). Manning argues that this is crucial for educators because it raises ethical issues pertaining to what is meant by critique and how difference is perceived, experienced and valued within pedagogical encounters (ibid: 107). In other words, teachers must not evaluate students' work in relation to preconceived, distancing and universalising accounts of what it means know is and how knowledge is expressed (ibid: 107). Instead they are encouraged to recognise the need for different ways of doing critique that de-centre neurotypicality and practice methods that do not exclude or silence those who do not fit into the so-called normative mould. For Manning, backgroundingforegrounding processes are forms of immanent critique practices that matter in all contexts including 'the blind review, the conference paper [and] the student presentation' (ibid: 107).

When it comes to artistic critique for example, Manning (2020) encourages educators to move away from interpretive critique, that reinforces a hegemonic normative gaze that has negative effects on both the artist – who is subjected to the superior knowledge of the educator's point of view and the artwork – whose agency has been nullified. Opening up spaces for immanent and new modes of valuation, Walter Benjamin (Salzani 2021) also proposes a practice of immanent criticism that, rather than distancing the critic as judge and the artwork as subject of critique, imagines the artwork as facilitator of an engagement between the critic and the artwork. Here, the performative function of the artwork is foregrounded, freeing the artwork from being a passive object of scrutiny, allowing it instead to do its work. Critique practiced in this way draws attention to how the immanent field of value that the artwork expresses is brought to the fore, allowing the distancing effects of the critical gaze to dissolve as new modes of valuation that are immanent to the encounter are activated and art is no longer judged according to pre-conceived criteria. In other words, by attending to immanent processes from within, we

understand what the work can do rather than align with normative accounts of what the work could or should be.

Conferencing

There are currently a number of lively debates and practices about doing conferences differently (see for example, Fairchild, et al., 2021). Immanent and diffractive critique contribute to reconfiguring traditional academic conferences by generating knowledge differently (Osgood, et al., 2020: 596). Moten and Harney conceptualise text as 'a social space ...] where the text is open enough that instead of being studied, it actually becomes the occasion for study' (2013: 109). Understanding text as a social space is helpful for reconceptualising conference practices in ways that reject authoritative and hierarchical distancing. Their positing of study is an invitation for people to 'take turns doing things for each other or for the others, and where you allow yourself to be possessed by others as they do something' (ibid: 112) undoes traditional conferencing relations. For example, in preparation for the upcoming September 2023 CRiSTaL special issue entitled *Thinking with ocean/s for reconceptualising scholarship in higher education*, the special issue editors organised a colloquium in Simonstown, Cape Town, at a venue adjacent to the sea. In an attempt to engage differently with papers in the special issue, the editors sought to create a supportive environment in which the more-than of the shared encounter might augment the experience of writing. In order to do this, prospective authors were invited to present their research to each other, as a precursor to writing up their articles. In addition to sharing their work, the authors were taken through a process of affirmative reviewing practices as a form of pedagogy that might build their confidence when engaging with blind peer reviews of their work and give them direction in their writing. The gathering fostered generosity and care amongst the participants who rendered each other capable through sharing their respective inquiries. The venue's proximity to the ocean also allowed participants to think with ocean/s throughout the event that included sunrise and sunset plunges into the icy waters where thoughts were taken for a swim. The practice of swimming with ocean/s not only decentred the human subject, but foregrounded relational ethical entanglements of ocean and higher education. In so doing, these 'affective, material, sensory, and embodied conferencing encounter[s]' (Osgood, et al., 2020: 597) further nurtured entanglements between all actors (human and more-than-human) in ways that generated knowledge differently and unsettled business-as-usual approaches to academic conferencing.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to stimulate thinking on alternative views of critique and criticality for academic practices, which are especially pertinent for CRiSTaL, but which also pertain to other journals and to academic practices more generally. What we are calling on authors, editors, reviewers, readers and writers to do, is to put aside their preconceived notions of doing academia and instead encounter what Manning (2016, 2019) calls the 'thisness' of the event. This allows for each encounter or event to bring forth new possibilities for becoming-with (Haraway, 2016),

consequently constituting who and what comes to matter in the world.

In doing critique and criticality differently, as Barad (2007) reminds us, we need to be alive to how each moment is constituted in a myriad of other moments, how the thick present constitutes the past and the future 'to disrupt patterns of thinking that see the past as finished and the future as not ours or only ours' (Barad, 2007: x). This would require a radical undoing of taken-for-granted and simplistic notions of being, time and space in the world (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021). For example, the notion of the pre-existing individual who is awaiting representations is an assumption which is undone in immanent and diffractive critique. It is thinking- and doing-with that brings academic work into expression. Immanent and diffractive critique energises new modes of doing academia, germinating new ideas from immersion in the fabulating middle by taking into account the conditions of possibility and patterns of mattering in academic work. They offer affirmative processes of reading insights through each other, rather than the crafting of questions that we already know the answers to.

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