

Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology
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Neo-Materialism and the Future of Feminist Phenomenology

ABSTRACT

In a recent published interview, the physicist turned philosopher, Karen Barad, is asked to speak about her concept of agential realism. She prefaces her reply with the statement that agential realism is not the “same old humanist” notion of agency, whereby agency is a property of persons or things, which is, she says, “an ironic notion, no?” Elsewhere, she adds that phenomenologists, who concern themselves with the nature of conscious subjective experience, are among those theorists who do question only apparent visual self-evidence of bodily boundaries, which she identifies with the mechanistic conception of the embodiment, there are others, called Cyborg theorists who also find it *ironic* to stop with this.

If these positions are ironic, they are literally the opposite of what is really the case, and give rise to a series of questions. First, there is the question of how to characterize human agency, and whether it implies independently existing individuals and liberal choice. Second, there is the question of how phenomenologists concerned with conscious experience have come to understand subjectivity. Third, there is the question of whether or not their concern with conscious experience binds phenomenologists to mechanistic theories about embodiment even as they question it. And fourth, there is the matter of whether or not agential realism is in fact a theory without irony, that is, one that gives an account of what is real.

This paper will answer these questions by examining Barad’s proposed ontology grounded in her interpretation of quantum theory and contrasting it with a feminist phenomenological perspective that is grounded in alternative interpretations of quantum theory.