

# BECOMING COMMUNITY - A POSTHUMAN PERSPECTIVE

*Dr Joanne Cassar*

*Senior Lecturer*

*Department of Youth and Community Studies*

During the past decades, posthumanism has established itself as an autonomous field of study, revolving around 'new materialism' as a theory which centralises the role of matter in understanding reality (Coole & Frost, 2010). Posthumanism attempts to link understandings of human subjects with the non-human, in order to better understand the world. It regards matter as "not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency" (Barad, 2007, p. 210). Matter is not separate from meaning making, as both are entangled and "mutually articulated" (Barad, 2007, p. 152). This article draws on posthuman perspectives (Braidotti, 2019, 2012; Barad 2007, 2003) to discuss the ongoing formation of communities, as they bring people together through shared understandings of their human condition. This view regards communities as dynamic, unfinished and in a process of 'becoming'. Posthuman knowledge recognises that the state of becoming is full of potentialities. It also regards human beings as "neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming" (Barad, 2007, p. 150). I draw on this perspective to highlight the possibilities of community engagement to act as a force that creates spaces for commonalities to be productive through encounters that encourage the sharing of strengths, fears, vulnerabilities, hopes and aspirations.

From a posthuman perspective the notion of 'becoming' results from relationships between multiple phenomena. Becoming signifies a fusion of matter and discourse and is based on the understanding that interconnections between different entities form the basis of life. This notion regards becoming as emerging out of various possibilities occurring at each moment and as coming into existence through the entanglements of social and material phenomenon, which are not distinct entities (Bar-ad, 2007, 2003). The implications this perspective might have, suggest that community-driven affirmations are not merely the result of haphazard causality and effect. Community engagement forms an integral part of the world in its "open-ended" and "differential" becoming (Barad, 2003, pp. 821-829). Community building within and outside institutions (Cassar & Cremona, 2017) is not separate from global forces and is dependent on human solidarity based on mutual collaborations and sense of belonging that embrace the knowing that communities are capable of evolving through interconnections with human and non-human entities.

Becoming community entails "a stabilizing and destabilizing process" (Barad, 2007, p. 210), that is dynamic and enmeshed with material-discursive practices of transitioning from one state to another (Barad, 2007, p. 142). This ongoing activity does not merely occur in space and time "but happens in the making of spacetime itself (Barad, 2007, p. 140). The process of becoming community develops simultaneously with past, present and future reconfigurations of the world. It happens between the "no longer" and the "not yet" and is fuelled by a force that "traces the possible patterns of be-coming" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 32). The development of community is often embedded in rituals of performativity and reconfigurations of personal and social worlds, enmeshed with each other. A community becomes aware and sensitised; it becomes a vehicle for activism against racialisation, oppression and brutality. New desires, hopes and expectations are generated through becoming community. These require material, social and cultural "apparatuses" (Barad, 2007, pp. 141-146), that also include components that carry an emotional element, such as excitement, pain, disappointment, despair and curiosity, which are vital for motivating communities. Barad explains that the function of apparatuses is inherently part of becoming:

apparatuses are not mere instruments or devices that can be deployed as neutral probes of the natural world, or determining structures of a social nature, but neither are they merely laboratory instruments or social forces that function in a per-formative mode. Apparatuses are not merely about us. And they are not merely assemblages that include nonhumans as well as humans. Rather, apparatuses are specific material reconfiguring's of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure space-time-matter as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming (Barad, 2007, p. 142).

Becoming community also entails embracing contradictions and affirming diversity. Making community does not exclude individualities and subjectivities. In acknowledging the potentialities of the posthuman condition, Braidotti affirms that “We-Are-(All)-In-This-Together-But-We-Are-Not-One-And-The-Same” (2019). Acknowledging difference is central in the formation of community in its “differential becoming” (Barad, 2003, p. 818). Posthuman ontology conceptualises becoming as “occurring upon relational continuums upon which exist human and nonhumans, mutually inclusive yet retaining difference” (Kumm et al., 2019, p. 343). Working with differences in community engagement signifies reconfiguring the taken-for-grantedness of binaries surrounding class, gender, race and ability and mitigating their influential power. ‘Posthumanizing’ (Braidotti, 2019) community also means working with conflict to determine ethical agency that ensures social justice, equity and equality. The relationalities involved in becoming community require ethical responsibility and accountability that present themselves with every possibility (Barad, 2007, p. 393). Ethics signify responsibility not as obligation but as a consequence of relationality (Barad, 2010, p. 265).

Communities embrace uncertainties and imagination and engage with what is outside of them. This implies acknowledging and facing the possible fragmentation and disintegration of communities. Communities embody the intertwining of knowing and not-knowing, especially when confronted with complex issues of social justice:

There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter? How to understand what is entailed in the practice of meeting that might help keep the possibility of justice alive in a world that seems to thrive on death? How to be alive to each being's suffering, including those who have died and those not yet born? How to disrupt patterns of thinking that see the past as finished and the future as not ours or only ours? How to understand the matter of mattering, the nature of matter, space, and time? (Barad, 2007, p. x).

The multiple trajectories leading to becoming or unbecoming community open up encounters between matter and human beings through various reconfigurations of what is yet to happen (Barad, 2007, p. 182). Being attentive and “alive” to the numerous possibilities of becoming is an ethical call in itself (Barad, 2007, p. 396) and implies that being responsive to life in all its forms is imperative for becoming community.

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