

Tingles, Tea Boxes
and Sticky Sounds
—ASMR Read
Diffractively with
Agential Realism

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Tiivistelmä

Opinnäytteessäni tarkastelen teoreettisen fyysikon ja uusmaterialistisen feministitutkijan Karen Baradin käsitteiden kautta ilmiötä nimeltä ASMR. Baradin teoria, *agential realism* (suom. agentiaalinen realismi), on kokonaisvaltainen ontologia, joka on muotoiltu kriittisessä vuoropuhelussa nykyfysiikan, tieteen tutkimuksen, (intersektionaalisen) feminismin, sekä posthumanististen ja jälkistrukturalististen teorioiden kanssa. Agentiaalinen realismi sulauttaa kvanttifysiikan tulkinnot ja metafysiikan peruskysymykset yhteen, ja ottaa kantaa todellisuuden materiaalisuuteen ja materian merkitykseen. Teoria pyrkii selittämään toimijuuden (agency) materiaalis-diskursiivista toteutumista ilmiöissä, joihin kuuluu sekä ”inhimillisiä” (human) että ”muuta kuin inhimillisiä” (nonhuman / other-than-human) osallistumisia. Agentiaalinen realismi ei ole entiteettien realismia, vaan sen sijaan se käsittää ilmiöiden olevan todellisuuden perusyksiköitä.

ASMR (sanoista ‘Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response’) on melko tutkimaton,

suhteellisen hiljattain tunnistettu ja tunnustettu ilmiö, joka on viime vuosina alkanut herättää kiinnostusta julkisessa keskustelussa. ASMR ilmiön ytimessä on spesifi, kihelmöivä hyvinolontunne (tyypillisesti ei seksuaalinen), joka koetaan rentouttavissa tilanteissa tiettyjen moniaististen ärsykkeiden yhteydessä. Yksityiset videoblokkaajat, jotka ovat leikkisästi nimenneet itsensä ASMRtisteiksi, lataavat miljoonia videoita YouTubeen, tarkoituksenaan synnyttää ASMR kokemus katsojassa. Ilmiön ympärille onkin syntynyt nettiyhteisö, jonka keskiössä ovat ASMR videot. Videoiden teemat vaihtelevat kuvitteellisista lääkärikäynneistä näennäisen absurdeihin leikkeihin tyypillisesti taloustavaroiden, tai vaikkapa ruoan kanssa. Erityistä videoiden sisällöissä onkin intensiivinen ja tarkoituksellisen pitkäkestoinen antautuminen kanssaoloon ”inhimillisten”, ”ei-inhimillisten”, ”elävien” ja ”elottomien” objektien ja materian kanssa (video saattaa esimerkiksi kulua hiusten, hehkulamppujen, vieraskielisten sanojen tai sametin parissa).

Avainsanat ASMR, inhimillinen, ei-inhimillinen, uusmaterialismi, agential realism, materia, toimijuus, intra-aktio, YouTube

Ykskantaan ASMR ilmiön voisi lukea visuaalisen alakulttuurin muodoksi: ASMR videot ovat itse-tuotettua sisältöä YouTubessa, joka on eräs osallistavan online-kulttuurin areenoista.

ASMR on kiinnostava esimerkki ilmiöiden toteutumisesta ja leviämisestä tässä ajassa. Mainonta, mielipiteet, politiikka, kuluttaminen, vastustaminen, trendit, ihanteet ja idolisointi ovat kietoutuneet YouTube kanavilla. Itsensä elättäminen ”tubettajana” on yhä tyypillisempi toiveammatti perinteisen näyttelijän tai opettajantyön ohella. Taidekasvatuksella tehdyn tutkimuksen pitäisi ottaa kriittinen tarkastelukulma (visuaaliseen) kulttuuriin, jonka erottamattomana osana niin taide, kuin taidekasvatus toteutuvat. Tämä kriittinen suhtautuminen tarkoittaa virittäytymistä (visuaalisen) kulttuurin käytäntöihin ja suhteellisuuksiin, joissa materia ja merkitys toteutuvat

ja tapahtuvat. Posthumanistiset ja feministiset diskurssit, sekä uusmaterialistiset teoriat ovat osa myös tämän päivän taidekasvatusfilosofiaa.

Tässä tutkielmassa laajennan ihmis-keskeistä käsitystä ASMR ilmiöstä silkkana kulttuurin tuotteena, fyysis-emotionaalisen aistikokemuksena, tai joukkona erikoisia YouTube-videoita. Tutkin Baradin käsitteillä miten, ja millaisissa *intra-aktioissa* (ei vuoro-, vaan kanssavaikutuksissa) toimijuus materialisoituu ja manifestoituu ASMR ilmiön kontekstissa. Metodini on diffraktiivinen: olennaista on, että oivallukset eivät synny pelkästä aineistosta, ja sitten selity teorialla, eikä teoria määritä huomionarvoisia havaintoja, vaan teoria, aineisto (keskeisimpänä kaksi ASMR ilmiöön kuuluvaa videota), ja minä toimimme kanssavaikutuksessa.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I contemplate a phenomenon called 'ASMR' through and with a few of the most prominent concepts of a new material feminist scholar and theoretical physicist Karen Barad. The chosen theory, agential realism, merges physics and metaphysics and proposes a fresh and comprehensive contribution on how matter matters, and how agency is produced in material-discursive practices involving "human" and "nonhuman" participants. Agential realism is formed in critical conversations with contemporary physics, science studies, (intersectional) feminist, posthumanist, and post-structuralist theories. Intra-action, matter, and agency are core concepts of agential realism, which is not realism toward entities (things), but realism toward phenomena.

ASMR ('Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response') is still a somewhat inscrutable topic, although it has become more and more recognized in public conversations. A bodily characteristic of ASMR is reported to be a pleasurable (non-sexual) tingly sensation, experienced in

relaxed situations and triggered by certain multisensory stimuli. Private vloggers, playfully calling themselves as ASMRtists, are uploading millions of ASMR videos to spark tingles in the spectator. A YouTube community has formed around the phenomenon. Themes of ASMR videos vary from imaginary medical appointments to seemingly absurd play with household items. Peculiar to the videos is that they feature extraordinarily intent and durational engagements with "human," "nonhuman," "animate" and "inanimate" objects and materials (for example with human hair, light bulbs, foreign words, and velvet). At its simplest, ASMR can be defined as an example of visual subculture: ASMR videos are user-created content on YouTube, which is a site of participatory culture online.

ASMR is a topical example of the emergence of phenomena in this era. Advertisements, opinions, politics, consumerism, resistance, trends, idolization and ideals are all entangled on YouTube channels. Making

Keywords ASMR, human, nonhuman, new materialism, agential realism, materia, agency, intra-action, YouTube

a living as a professional YouTuber has become an increasingly common wish for one's occupation, alongside the more traditional aspirations to become an actor or a teacher. Research in art education, then, is a critical prospect towards and within (visual) culture; it is and should be attentive to the practices and relations that constitute matter and meaning. Posthumanist discourses, emerging with new formulations of feminisms, as well as theories that account for materiality again, are influencing today's art education.

My challenge is to expand the instantaneous perception of the ASMR phenomenon as a mere example of human culture's production, a bunch of YouTube videos, and a human-centric physical-emotional sensorial experience. In this thesis, I contemplate how intra-active entanglements and the

production of agency materializes and manifests in the ASMR phenomenon. I'm not only interested in what is produced as part of ASMR, but *how* it is produced. My method is *diffractive reading*, which can also be phrased as "thinking the theory" (agential realism) "while reading the data" (ASMR phenomenon, with two exemplary videos serving as concrete examples of the genre). As I get entangled with ASMR, I strive to think with and within the box, as much as from outside it.



CONTENTS

TIIVISTELMÄ	4	INTRODUCTION	13	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	39	TOUCHING(S)	53	TAKE CARE AND BE CAREFUL	87	CONCLUSIONS & EXCLUSIONS	119
ABSTRACT	6	Why Agential Realism				Let's Get Tingly		You Don't Get What You Give – Or Maybe Later, And It Is Something Else		FURTHER ADAPTATIONS & SPECULATIONS	122
		ASMR?		METHOD	39	Interiors and Exteriors in Making		Attentive Touch and Engagement with Objects			
		ASMR Videos in Short		Diffraction Reading – Thinking with & Plugging in		Not All the Bodies Produced Are Human Bodies		Learning of Caring		REFERENCES & TRANSCRIPTIONS	124
		Why to Engage with ASMR		Researcher – Knowledge Practices as Material, Entangled Methods		Touching Matters Are Bodies In Production					
		THEORY	27					STRANGE MATTERS	100		
		Brief Background for Barad's New Materialism		ANALYSIS	43			Distance and Proximity in Online ASMR			
		Terminology		Apparatuses in Baradian Theory: Background for the Analysis to Understand the Constitution of Phenomena		TOUCHING SOUNDSCAPE	67	Causality in ASMR			
		DATA	35			Sound Is a Material Matter		Waste of Time, Leisure Pleasure, or Time Well Spent?			
		"Unintentional" video #ASMR #BobRoss		Workings of the ASMR+Mystic Mountain -apparatus		Not Only Words, But the Sounds Can Be Touching Too		Spacetime Queerness and Absurdity of ASMR			
		Object-based ASMR video				Delicious Sounds					
						Sensualities of Matters and Meanings					
						ASMR AS AN INTIMATE ENGAGEMENT	79				
						Hands On Objects					
						Intimacy Is a More-Than-Human Matter					



INTRODUCTION

Niels Bohr¹ once visualized their² principle of complementarity in quantum physics by pointing to a cubist painting hanging on the wall. The painting portrays a person from seemingly contradictory perspectives. The ensemble simultaneously depicts many aspects of the person as all the taken perspectives were necessary to capture the subject's multifaceted nature.³ Bohr's attempt was to emphasize that there is a range of different, ostensibly conflicting ways of structuring understanding. For example, a sunset can be approached as a physical phenomenon and as an examination of the passage of light, or it can be comprehended through the aesthetics of color combinations. That is, all the "complementary" ways of processing a phenomenon enhance the understanding of it, nevertheless that from the perspective of one discipline the other ways may seem vague and frail (Kallio-Tamminen 2006, 159). It is essential to acknowledge how intra-twined the cultural phenomena, including arts, politics, ecological issues and "natural" phenomena, different disciplines, and matters of curricula, are.

I think that the research in the field of art education is a propitious playground to take a stand for the latest discourses *across* disciplines.⁴ Luckily, I do not have the heavy burden of traditional science-making on my shoulders. Whereas established contemporary natural science could never go back to the beliefs of, let's say, the 17th century, the arts do

not respect the limitations of linear conceptions of time, nor other strict chronologies⁵. As an artist, I can take visual inspiration from religious paintings made in the Middle Ages, mix it with today's news, and throw in some hypothetical utopias about the future-in-making. My way of theorizing as an art educator is similarly daring: it is a genuine curiosity to grasp, influence, shape and create reality⁶ while being sensitive to the ways reality does the same for me, as an integral part of it.⁷

Art education today is much more than a technical education about art making. Visual culture, whatever that term might include and exclude, and its vibrant phenomena are an important point of interest for contemporary art education⁸. To be mindful about the restrictions of the prefix "visual" is crucial here, especially within this discipline that has anchored its very justification in such a concept. "Multisensory"⁹ and "embodiment" are terms that come up frequently in the contemporary paradigms of Finnish art education¹⁰. It seems evident that the taken supremacy of vision is now being revised as that type of favoring is not inclusive enough to comprehend the subtle and multifaceted experience of being of the world, nor are rare (if any) phenomena, within the field of art or in life in general, *merely* visual.

There are no things that art or thought could not experiment with. Imagination is an intra-active, material phenomenon. Art education, at its best, is to set the

1. Niels Bohr (1885–1962) was a Noble Prize winning physicist, whose contributions were significant in the development of quantum mechanics. Bohr was a co-developer of the Copenhagen interpretation. Karen Barad is heavily influenced by Bohr's physics. In their theory of agential realism, Barad also applies many of the key insights of the Copenhagen interpretation, e.g. the downfall of subject/object dichotomy.

2. I will only use gender neutral pronouns in this thesis, for I am not in a position to make guesses on anyone's gender identity based on their name.

3. I do not include this metaphor to foster such analogy as the cubist school of painting and special relativity, but to present a simple idea of diffractive methodology. See: Terminology: Diffraction; Method: Diffractive reading

4. According to Barad, trans-disciplinary engagement (done with the realization that the production of the boundary between the disciplines is already a material-discursive practice) is the best attempt to grasp whatever phenomena under investigation is (2007, 90). Transdisciplinary practices, in means of agential realism, are not the same as practices that attempt to read the theories of two or more disciplines against each other, oftentimes ending up privileging one approach over other (usually natural sciences' arguments are valued over those of human sciences). Instead,

a diffractive transdisciplinary methodology aims to critically rethink the science and the social in their relationality (Barad 2007, 92-93). My project in this thesis is diffractive, and I think with ideas and conceptions, which can be thought to have their origin in other disciplines (when applying agential realism, I will necessarily think with conceptions that have been raised in social sciences' discussion with quantum physics, for example). Nevertheless, I have not written this thesis in cooperation with a quantum physicist, and thus I do not want to use the term 'transdisciplinary' when describing my methodology. However, I find the diffractive method justified in this thesis. I state that this project is not a trendy attempt to bridge disciplines, but about getting entangled with them in order to think broader, deeper, and most importantly, differentially, about matters that do not actually have such delimiting frames around them: reality is not divided into disciplines.

5. Actually, despite the fact that their theory is agential realism, Barad is also critical towards the historical narrative of scientific progress, which they refer to as "tales of the continuous accretion and refinement of scientific knowledge over the course of history, sagas of progress from an earlier time period to a later one punctuated with discoveries that lead the way out to the swamp of ignorance and uncertainty to the bedrock of solid and certain knowledge" (2014, 18). The reasoning behind this provocative statement, especially com-

ing from a physicist, will make more sense towards the end of this thesis.

6. Reality is not a fixed essence, but rather ongoing, manifold dynamics of spacetime mattering, reconfiguring through intra-activity (Barad 2007, 206). See: Terminology: Intra-action.

7. Importantly, I assume that this thesis would even be interesting to many – what I am saying, is that I am also delightfully compelled to rethink many fundamental concepts if I aim to comprehend Barad's theory.

8. *"In practice, many art teachers work with students to support their interests and involvement with local and global visual phenomena and networks, such as Manga, Cosplay, street arts, or, for example, different areas of digital gaming. It is also time for the national curriculum to offer space and possibilities to teach with a recognition of students' different and diversified visual cultures and visual engagements"* (Kallio-Tavin 2016, 38, n4).

circumstances for generative theoretical-practical experiments. What I find most interesting is to a) take a concept so familiar that it is a miracle to even consider of reconsidering it and to steal it from its taken context so that it becomes unconventional. Or, b) to take an emerging phenomenon that has not yet been categorized and exhausted with explanations. When first coming across ASMR a few years ago, it appeared as the latter for me. Binaural whispers in French? Why has someone recorded an extra-careful folding of towels? Why did they upload it on YouTube? Why are there hundreds of thousands of views for this hour-long video of a spoon display?

It feels self-evident why a phenomenon such as ASMR is interesting for art education. The awareness of ASMR has increased notably within a few years. I have remarked on this also on a personal level. I would estimate that every third person I've encountered and discussed about ASMR with already has some relation to it: they've heard about it, they've tried watching the videos, they engage with ASMR media frequently, or they recognize to have experienced the physical sensation.¹¹ Getting online was a significant factor in the expansion of the ASMR. People live in social media – the palpable reality and virtual are not separate realms, rather they co-constitute each other.¹² YouTube¹³ is a significant forum of influences, as it holds the second place ranking for the most visited website in the world.¹⁴ The amount of content produced and distributed on YouTube is astonishing, and hundreds of millions of

videos are viewed each day (Burgers & Green 2013, 83). The fact that YouTubers (vloggers on YouTube) have increasing power as shapers of (youth) cultures and as opinion leaders on an extensive range of matters from transgender rights to music taste should also be taken seriously in the realm of art education.¹⁵

Why Agential Realism

"Doing theory requires being open to the world's aliveness, allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise and wonder" (Barad 2012, 2).

I chose to apply agential realism in this thesis for two reasons. *Firstly*, it moved something in me: never have I ever felt that a theory can resonate with me in such an intimate and elemental manner. Reading Barad's texts has (in multiple senses of feeling) than engagements with any other theoretical cogitations before. It *feels better* (in the multiple senses of feeling) than any other theoretical cogitation I have read before. *Secondly*, I found no reasons for *why not* to apply it. I had already decided to contemplate ASMR phenomenon in my thesis, when I came across with Barad's theory. Agential realism's new materialist proposal seemed like an interesting perspective to ASMR. That is, I was curious about the role of materia in ASMR, the ways of being with materia and objects presented in the videos, and in the ASMR phenomenon in general. Agential realism is very much about *relations* and *agency*, as well as about

9. For example, a lecture series in the Department of Art titled, 'The Realm of the Senses', introduces different approaches to the questions of perception, sensory experiences, and the dynamics of the senses in a context that is meaningful for art education. It is urgent to be critically attentive of the ways that multisensory stimuli are used in public spaces to maneuver citizens ("consumers"; thus we live in a capitalist system). Through personal experience, I realize how carefully chosen scents, just like visual advertisement and certain music, are used in shopping malls in Brazil, most probably to lure customers to make them buy more. Ironically, ASMR is already harnessed as a piquant advertising gimmick in an online advert by IKEA: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/asmr-what-is-it-autonomous-sensory-meridian-response-ikea-advert-relaxation-video-a7887881.html> (Retrieved 27 Mar 2018).

10. Mira Kallio-Tavin elaborates on the possibilities of appropriate curriculum changes in contemporary Finnish art education and proposes a shift that would account for "social changes and reflects contemporary art and cultural practices" (37). Slowly but surely Finland is changing from a homogenous culture to a relatively multicultural society, and the diversification is not only happening in local communities, but also in and through identities linked to virtual groups. Kallio-Tavin notes that being a member of a culture "that is overly visual" is about being

involved with a multiplicity of visuals and hyper-realities such as TV, Internet, comics, toys, entertainment, fashion and advertisement. (2016, 37-38).

11. Indeed, earlier in 2015, I interviewed a handful of friends who currently engage with ASMR content online, and some comments are included in this thesis. Nevertheless, in this project, I did not want to approach the phenomenon merely from the obvious human perceptual perspective, nor did I yearn to apply a patchwork of phenomenological theories to understand my topic. However, the ASMR phenomenon could be a fascinating topic to contemplate through some more familiar concepts such as gaze and spectatorship.

12. This applies to art as well, which is emerging increasingly on and with the Internet, and has, in the postdigital age, become more blurred with "other" content online. Moreover, the distinction between "art" and "visual culture," as well as between "visual culture" and other forms of culture, seems to be a more and more complex project.

13. YouTube was launched by three former employees of the online trading website PayPal in June 2005. YouTube declares their values to be based on "Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Information, Freedom of Opportunity and Freedom to Belong" (About YouTube. (n.d.). Retrieved 11 Jan 2018, from: <https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/index.html>)

From the very beginning, YouTube allowed users to upload videos unlimitedly, provided simple community functions and easily linkable web page codes for accessible blogging. This all actuated YouTube to become very popular. As a site of participatory culture, YouTube is in the middle of the debates that consider the meaning and legitimacy of popular culture. These conversations touch politically important questions, such as who gets the attention and voice to speak, what are the rewards for creativity, and what sorts of uncertainties are there around forms of expertise and authority. Although YouTube was primarily established to be a service for personal, amateur video sharing, it is now a hybrid of user-created videos and broadcast media content that capture the public imagination. Copyright issues and market structures of online video distribution are hot topics in disputes around YouTube. (Burges & Green 2013, 83.)

14. Youtube.com Traffic Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved 11 Jan 2018, from: <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/youtube.com>

questionable distinctions, like those between human and nonhuman¹⁶. The entangled processes and practices through which these very boundaries and categories are materially produced, differentiated, stabilized, and destabilized is what agential realism's post-humanist and performative¹⁷ account calls into question. However, this theory is not the simplest and is also not the most obvious. Taking a phenomenological perspective, for example, might offer me a much more accessible point of view on the matter. Nevertheless, agential realism made such an impact on me that I could no longer look at *any* topic from a more conventional or unchallenging perspective.

Poetic language is not suitable for scientific description, nor is psychological argumentation valid within neuroscience as such (Kallio-Tamminen 2006, 159). I am not throwing equations or square roots into this thesis: such mathematical concepts are far out of my area of expertise. Barad's agential realism is a comprehensive theory that takes a stand for profound epistemological and ontological issues that are relevant in various fields. Barad notes that the attempt is not to present the micro scale's quantum phenomena as *analogous* to the situations in the macro world as such (2007, 70).¹⁸ In contrast, what agential realism proposes is a philosophical perspective that is attentive to scientific comprehensions. At the core of its interests are questions concerning the conditions of objectivity, the nature of bodies and identities, the role of natural and cultural factors in technoscientific and other

social practices, as well as the very production of such categories as human/nonhuman, nature/culture, and object/subject (Barad 2007, 70). An ethical dimension is embedded in agential realism's contingent ontology. There is no way around the fact that (our) practices matter: phenomena materialize differently in different circumstances (Barad 2007, 89).

The classical physics' mechanistic order emphasizes the external relationships between independently existent entities - indeed, according to this model, there are no other kind of relationships than an "external contact" (Pylkkänen 2007, Introduction). Pylkkänen (2007) delineates, following David Bohm's description, that the mechanistic model is termed by independent entities existing in different regions of space and time so that their interaction does not bring about any changes in their essential natures. Developments of contemporary physics invalidate this description of the world and challenge the conventional assumptions about the nature of reality, thus making physics inevitably important for philosophical considerations, that is, for metaphysics (Pylkkänen 2007, Introduction). Nevertheless, the interpretational issues of contemporary quantum physics and the basic notions of the quantum theory suggest a significant revision of the insights of metaphysics, at least in the hypothesis of a realist philosopher (Kallio-Tamminen 2006, 111). Barad does not approve an absolute distinction between physics and metaphysics - indeed, the origin of the terms is thoroughly entangled, as

15. For example, in 2017 the Time magazine made their suggestion of the 25 most influential people on the Internet, naming characters such as Donald Trump, J.K. Rowling, the maker of the Pepe the Frog meme, beauty and fitness YouTubers and Gigi Gorgeous: a transgender YouTube star, whose transition is documented in full on vlog posts online. List retrieved 13 Feb 2018, from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4641188/Time-s-25-influential-people-internet.html>

Helsingin Sanomat (21 Jan 2018, B6-B7) recently wrote a story on a Finnish YouTuber Roni Back: “Super celebrity Roni Back - Roni Back’s occupation is to publish videos on YouTube. Their channel has 324 000 subscribers. Youngsters know how their home looks like, whether their knee surgery was successful, and what they did on a New Year’s Eve. Adults, in contrast, know nothing about Roni.” (Headlines, writer’s translation) The story can be read online from: <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000005531116.html> (Retrieved 27 Mar 2018.)

To make a living on YouTube, one does not need to be an adult – the configuring of material-discursive practices (like “work” in West) that segregate childhood and adulthood as phenomena are iteratively remade.

16. Following the project of other feminist, poststructuralist, post-colonialist, queer and critical social theorists, Barad undertakes the issues of dichotomies, such as the juxtaposi-

tion of nature/culture. Barad is not only assured that these distinctions matter, but they seek answers to how they matter and for whom. (Barad 2007, 87.)

17. Barad’s (2007, 184) performativity is not about “iterative citationality (Butler), but as iterative intra-activity”. Not only different descriptions, but different material-discursive configurations, different differences (diffraction patterns) are produced by different material-discursive apparatuses (Barad 2007, 184).

18. Indeed, the very notions of “micro” and “macro” worlds are troubled by agential realism, which does not count on geometrical analysis (nesting shapes and sizes), but relies on topological perceptions of reality (as producing connections and disconnections that are entanglements and agential cuts) while it defies the conventional notions of space, time, and matter at the same.

19. Thinking along with agential realism, the construction of reality is not necessary to be a relationship that grows in nesting scales, but rather contemplated through topological dynamics, of which there will be more following.

20. For example: Without the insights of quantum mechanics, such ordinary devices as cellphones or laptops would not had been invented (Barad 2007, 252). Quantum mechanics inform studies on artificial life in quantum

biomimetics (objects of investigation which are necessarily meeting the metaphysical problem of consciousness), biomimetic materials (e.g. paint that rejects dirt), inventions of thermodynamics (e.g. cooling and heating systems that use quantum bits), not to mention the developments of quantum computing, which opens up unseen possibilities for data processing and developments of artificial intelligence.

See (listen) for example this podcast: Tiedeykkönen: “Kvanttiteknologia ja luontoa jäljittelevät aineet ovat tulevaisuuttamme. Toimittaja: Sisko Loikkanen. Yle Areena. Retrieved 27 Mar 2018 from: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/46m7vJg3Hfe51nRhuWhe7x?si=lkTiR5eATHGGvVaH2rcOZA>

21. Guest on an Internet conversation thread on ASMR, when the sensation was still unnamed: WEIRD SENSATION FEELS GOOD. (n.d.).

Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.steadyhealth.com/topics/weird-sensation-feels-good>

“metaphysics” initially signaled to Aristotle’s writings that followed their theorizations on physics (2003, 812: n14).

Intra-action, matter, and agency are the most prominent concepts in agential realism. *Intra-action* is the entangled nature of being and it is different from the more common ‘interaction’. ‘Intra’ means from *within*: parties involved in intra-action co-constitute each other *within their entanglement*, instead of merely communicating and remaining in a state of independency. Agential realism is not realism toward entities (things), but realism toward phenomena. *Phenomena*, as differential patterns of mattering, are the primary ontological units in the constitution of reality. Barad is informed by Foucault’s theory of discourse and Butler’s thesis of performativity most heavily, as well as Bohr’s principle of complementarity in quantum physics.

Quantum theory started from physics studies on an atomic level. However, the revolutionary findings of quantum mechanics made it necessarily significant, in a very general way when contemplating the nature of reality. Indeed, Barad affirms, that quantum theory is concerned to be the correct theory of nature (reality) that applies at “all scales” (or rather, just throughout) – so far no reckoned theory has proposed that the universe would be broken into two separately existing micro- and macroscopic domains (2007, 85). In the recent decade, quantum theory has been modulated to also study phenomena on a “macroscopic scale” (Kallio-Tamminen 2006, 111). Nowadays, the

quantum phenomena are worthy not only for physicists, but also for researchers in other disciplines. Take chemists, for example, who are interested in the structure of an atom, atoms forming molecules and molecules forming materia.¹⁹ Quantum phenomena are also remarkable in the fields of technological development, and the applications of quantum research have been forecasted to greatly shape the future of everyday life.²⁰

ASMR?

“There are different triggers for me like: when someone (mostly girls) drew on my hand but slowly...i used to love getting pen tatoos [sic] when i was a kid because it gave me this feeling even though after it was over it took 10 minutes to wash off... watching cooking shows..where the person is cutting something or doing something with great care...listening to my grandma’s childhood stories..also quietly [sic] and soft toned” - Guest26370807587955²¹

ASMR videos, and the phenomenon in total, is often referred to ‘bizarre’, ‘odd’ or ‘weird’²². Where does this eccentric queerness come from? For me, it was the intense sense of intimacy that made me feel more or less awkward, especially when engaging with the role-play type of ASMR videos. Being unfamiliar with the phenomenon, the peculiar way of touching objects, whispering, ASMRtist’s devotion to their role and the home video

22. In the Guardian's interview, Davis, the other of the researchers behind the first study on ASMR, explained that "ASMR is interesting to me as a psychologist because it's a bit 'weird'. –The sensations people describe are quite hard to describe, and that's odd because people are usually quite good at describing bodily sensation. So, we wanted to know if everybody's ASMR experience is the same, and if people tend to be triggered by the same sorts of things."

Etchells, Pete. "ASMR and 'head orgasms': what's the science behind it?" The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 8 Jan 2016. Retrieved 27 Mar 2018 from: www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2016/jan/08/asmr-and-head-orgasms-whats-the-science-behind-it.

23. Another Internet trend that is about hypnotizing / mesmerizing / weirdly appealing videos are the so called "satisfying videos", which mostly depict different materials touching each other, or things falling into place neatly. These videos are sometimes referred as ASMR, but I suppose it is more likely that some of the satisfying videos work as ASMR for some, but ASMR and the satisfying videos are not the same phenomena per se. That is, they are entangled with each other, as satisfying videos can in some cases have audiovisual similarities with ASMR triggering content.

For example, the video 'The Most Satisfying Video In The World' ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljeKw-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljeKw-0B8PG8)

0B8PG8) is composed of a selection of "satisfying" scenes: spiral shaped glass blowing, compressing cans in a row, slicing a tomato super thin, coloring a helmet, a carrot picking machine at work, surrealistic 3D animation of a gigantic ball smashing a jelly armchair. The introduction to this video proclaims: "Have you ever seen something that makes your skin tingle and for some unknown reason provides you with a sense of unbridled peace and happiness? Gears working in perfect synchronization, a cake frosted with absolute precision, marbles rolling so smoothly it hurts. Something that is just...satisfying? Well here's five solid minutes of that feeling." This video has 17 835 288 views on 30 Mar 2018, when I accessed it on YouTube. YouTube search with words "satisfying video" gives about 3 260 000 results, whereas the word "asmr" is tagged in 19 300 000 videos. (Retrieved 20 Mar 2018 on youtube.com.)

24. Retrieved on YouTube 2 Apr 2018 with search "ASMR": https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ASMR

25. Gentle Whispering ASMR YouTube Channel: Retrieved 2 Apr 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/user/Gentle-Whispering/about>

26. See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20XE6GM7xWo> (Harry Potter ASMR - Hogwarts Library); https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9ke_ZFkpMU (Donald Trump's Therapist role-play ASMR)

27. For example: The Washington Post, The Independent, BBC News, Helsingin Sanomat, Ilta-Sanomat, The Süddeutsche Zeitung. See References.

28. Kobayashi, Juri. (2015) Musically Induced ASMR: An Amalgamated Experience. Master's Thesis. Department of Music: University of Jyväskylä.

29. 'Autonomous sensory meridian response'. Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_sensory_meridian_response#Scientific_commentary

30. Barratt EL, Davis NJ. (2015) Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR): a flow-like mental state. PeerJ 3:e851 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.851>

31. Barratt EL, Spence C, Davis NJ. (2017) Sensory Determinants of The Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR): understanding the triggers. PeerJ 5:e3846 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.3846>

aesthetics caused confusion – but even more, curiosity. Themes of the ASMR videos vary from imaginary medical appointments to seemingly absurd play with household items. ASMR is not only about the visuals: binaural effects are important ASMR triggers, and thus the spectator is instructed to use headphones. A typical ASMR video could depict a folding and unfolding of napkins for 40 minutes, for example. What is peculiar in the videos is the extraordinarily intent engagements they feature with "human," "nonhuman," "animate," and "inanimate" objects and materials (for example with human hair, light bulbs, foreign words, and velvet).²³

The name 'ASMR' stands for 'Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response'. ASMR is reported to be a pleasant, emotional, and multi-sensory experience, characteristically appearing as a tingling feeling at the back of one's head while often spreading across the scalp and spine, sometimes also to the back and limbs. Specific visual and auditory stimuli trigger the sensation. ASMR causes a notable positive, calming shift in emotional states (Barratt & Davis, 2015; Smith, Fredborg & Kornelsen, 2017). ASMR has also been called "Attention Induced Euphoria", but this is a less common term. Fascinatingly, the phenomenon did not really have a consistent name before 2010 (Stattford 2013; Etchells 2016).

Although the abbreviation 'ASMR' has originally referred to the physical sensation, it is oftentimes used to indicate all things related or associated with the matter (in this text, too). In a point of fact, ASMR is now a widespread (online) phenomenon, thanks to the ASMR videos,

which are sprouting out on YouTube²⁴ in increasing numbers. ASMR videos are created by private vloggers, and they are composed of multi-sensory stimulus to particularly trigger the ASMR experience in the spectator. A search on YouTube with a tag 'ASMR' reveals that there is a vast population around the globe which gets something out of the videos. 12 million, ASMR tagged videos can be found on uploaded YouTube, and the most popular video channel 'GentleWhispering' has 445 956 900 views and 1 250 430 subscribers.²⁵ Naturally, ASMR is not only experienced via engaging in ASMR videos. Triggers are also evoked in everyday environments in various situations and circumstances. Indeed, ASMR videos have started as imitations of such situations, with the exception that the triggering elements are taken to the extreme. However, ASMR videos have developed their whimsical aesthetics, themes, and styles to great lengths, and are intertextually influenced by other online movements, popular culture, politics etc.²⁶ The (internet) community around ASMR is constantly growing: bloggers share their experiences over ASMR on social media, ASMR apps, podcast, Spotify playlists, Facebook pages and so forth. Several well-established newspapers and online-media²⁷ have published stories about ASMR, interviewing people who consume and produce ASMR videos. In 2015, in the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, a masters' thesis was written about the connections between the ASMR experience and that of listening to music.²⁸ During the writing of this thesis, ASMR also got

a Wikipedia page²⁹. Barratt & Davis conducted their first peer-reviewed research on ASMR in 2015³⁰ and their second study came out in 2017³¹, in the latter their focus especially being in object-based ASMR triggers.

Before the online community, many people experiencing ASMR thought they were the only ones.³² In The Guardian's interview, the researchers, Emma Barratt and Nick Davis from the Swansea University, were asked why, despite its popularity, the psychological research community has not taken the ASMR sensation as real until very recently (Etchells 2016). Barratt and Davis say that the reasons might be many, one being that ASMR is an "inherently personal, private experience, and perhaps one that hasn't traditionally lent itself to cropping up in conversation all that often" – it is "a difficult sensation to explain to someone who doesn't experience it" (Etchells 2016).

"I knew other people had to have this, I've had it for as long as I remember. Mostly what sets it off is when people gesture with their hands while talking. I used to watch TV evangelists talk and tell their bible stories and I would just ride the 'brain-gasm' for hours sometimes. I wish I could take a drug to set it off, it rivals ecstasy at times." -Guest³³

In the past, the ASMR sensation was often confused to be a weirdly described form of frisson ('goosebumps') (Etchells 2016). Scientific interest is arising to examine

ASMR's neurobiological background. Studies look forward to enlighten what is happening in the body at the moment of reported euphoric shivers, as well as to unravel why some people recognize the feeling whereas others have no such experiences. A following question would be whether everyone has the physiological premises to experience ASMR. A research group from the University of Sheffield is currently working on a study to pin down the physiological basis of the sensation (Etchells 2016). They are examining people who report ASMR experiences to see if they show consistent changes in their physiological measures, like heart and breathing rates, and skin conductance. The first step to examine the neural underpinnings of ASMR was taken in 2017 by a research group from the University of Winnipeg, Canada (Etchells 2016). The group published a second peer-reviewed study about ASMR³⁴ in the journal *Social Neuroscience*. This study is an investigation of the workings of 'default mode network' (DMN, a large-scale brain network of interacting brain regions) in individuals experiencing ASMR sensations. Indeed, the study revealed significant functional differences in DMN between the control group and the individuals experiencing ASMR (Smith, Fredborg, et al., 2017, abstract). Tingling, in its various forms, is interesting in contemporary neuropsychology. A study from year 2017³⁵ investigated tingling as a broad sensory-perceptual sensation, and the findings of this review article can be read against the reported ASMR experiences too. ASMR is



mentioned in the paper as a recently noted tingling sensation, which is related to other hedonic and emotional peek -experiences (Tihanyi, Ferentzi, et al., 2017; 4.3 Affective processes).

The bodily aspects are an important part of the construction of the ASMR phenomenon. I will briefly contemplate these different aspects in order to understand the phenomenon in its multiplicity. Importantly, throughout this thesis, my analysis is done by thinking with agential realism: I am curious about the multiplicity of different ways ASMR configures intra-actions as

a material-discursive entangled phenomenon. That is, I will not accommodate extensive human-centric, phenomenological reflections, nor do I go deep to some neurobiological speculations. Instead, thinking with Barad's concepts, I aim to take a more posthumanist perspective on the matter and thus call into question my own presumptions about the production of the ASMR phenomenon. ASMR, as an object of investigation, is still a somewhat inscrutable yet emerging topic in academia, and I'm certain it will be interesting for researchers across disciplines.

ASMR Videos in Short³⁶

ASMR videos are based on deliberated audiovisual content, which is put together in order to trigger the ASMR sensation in the spectator/experiencer.

Video makers playfully title themselves as ASMRtists.

ASMR videos may last from ten minutes to tens of hours. A common length would be from a half of an hour to an hour

3D microphones are often used in the making of ASMR videos, thus they are efficacious in creating immersive soundscapes. The spectator/experiencer is advised to use headphones in order to enhance the binaural audio triggers.

ASMR videos typically feature an atmosphere of intimate personal attention and close proximity (e.g. such as you get when having a haircut), or are centered around observing someone conducting a trivial task or activity very attentively and gently.

Videos are shot in a point of view perspective, placing the spectator/experiencer in the "front row" or in the middle of the events.

Themes of the videos vary from imaginary medical appointments to seemingly absurd play with household items. A typical

ASMR-video can be, for example, a button collection display, or a recording of a person whispering random words in various languages or accents. It can depict someone's hands folding and unfolding napkins or turning book pages for nearly 40 minutes. Or, the video might simulate an appointment in a spa where the spectator gets a virtual facial massage. It can also be a document of hands preparing sandwiches in an exceptionally touchy manner.³⁷

Some of the videos resemble therapeutic self-help tutorials, some have features of role-play, and many depict grooming in some form, whether it be oriented towards objects, the viewer, or another person in the video. The objects, materials, transcript (or the absence of it), roles of the performer and spectator, and the situation as a whole creates a unique and often bizarre scene in each video.

Barratt & Davis found four substantial types of triggers that over 50% of the participants in their study experienced. The most common triggers are whispering sounds (75%), personal attention (69%), crisp sounds (64%) and slow movements (53%). Watching repetitive tasks works as a trigger for 34% of participants. (Barratt & Davis, 2015.) Most of the triggers come about simultaneously. For example, a scene featuring personal attention often also entails whispers and repetitive motions.

ASMR phenomenon is often juxtaposed with a flow state, mindfulness, and meditation (Barratt & Davis, 2015). My friend Maria mentioned meditation when they described their preferences in ASMR: *"I am also a fan of videos that instruct you how to give yourself a face massage. I think the vocabulary of a massage therapist is relaxing. That can put me in a deeply relaxed state and trigger the ASMR. It's almost like meditation through listening"* (Personal communication 28 Nov 2015).



Why to Engage with ASMR

A vast majority, 70-98% of the people who engage with the ASMR media³⁸ (make/watch/listen the ASMR videos on YouTube, listen to ASMR tracks on Spotify, post comments, take part in online conversation and so forth),

are looking for relaxation, sleep aids or stress-relief.

The results of Barratt & Davis' study proposes that ASMR consumers suffering from depression experience a temporal uplift in their mood stress-relief (Barratt & Davis, 2015). The more severe the depression, the more significant the reported relief in mood was. Indeed, many depressed individuals disclosed that they consume ASMR in order to improve their mental state. Similarly, those suffering from chronic pain benefited from consuming ASMR and reported a remarkable reduction in their symptoms with relief lasting hours after an ASMR session. Importantly, these positive effects were experienced even in the absence of the tingling sensations (Barratt & Davis, 2015).

At first sight it might seem that ASMR videos have to do with eroticism. This is a rather common interpretation amongst people who are not familiar with the phenomenon. Nevertheless, it turned out that ASMR is about another kind of pleasure, another kind of involvement/ engagement/ being-with than, at least explicitly, eroticism. Only 5 % of the participants in Barratt & Davis' study reported sexual motivation for ASMR (Barratt & Davis, 2015).

32. EtcHELLS, Pete. "ASMR and 'head orgasms': what's the science behind it?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 Jan 2016. Retrieved 27 Mar 2018 from: www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2016/jan/08/asmr-and-head-orgasms-whats-the-science-behind-it. This story is based on the interview of researchers Emma Barratt and Nick Davis.

33. Guest on an Internet conversation thread on ASMR, when the sensation was still unnamed: WEIRD SENSATION FEELS GOOD. (n.d.). Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.steady-health.com/topics/weird-sensation-feels-good>

34. Stephen D. Smith, Beverley Katherine Fredborg & Jennifer Kornelsen (2017) An examination of the default mode network in individuals with autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR), *Social Neuroscience*, 12:4, 361-365, DOI: 10.1080/17470919.2016.1188851. Accessed 27 Mar 2017 from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470919.2016.1188851>

35. Benedek T. Tihanyi, Eszter Ferentzi, Florian Beissner, Ferenc Kőteles (2017): "The neuropsychophysiology of tingling." *Consciousness and Cognition*. Available online 31 October 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2017.10.015> Checked online 28.11.2017 : <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053810017302805?via%3Dihub>

36. This information is construed mainly based on Barratt & Davis' (2015; 2017) studies. Also, YLE Areena recently broadcasted *The Guardian's* short documentary about ASMR. It's a brief and compact introduction to the videos and ASMR sensations. In the documentary, the descriptions of the interviewed ASMRtists are in line with the available information and description of the features and purposes of the ASMR videos. See: Aivo-orgasmit | Kioski suosittellee: Guardian-dokumentit. (2017, October 5). Retrieved 16 Oct 2017, from: <https://areena.yle.fi/1-4126509>

37. See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzGopHWPauU> (ASMR Show & Tell Button Collection ~ Southern Accent Whisper) ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EeLrhFIZFCA> (ASMR - Trigger Words in English, German, French, Spanish & Italian - Male Whispering) ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpuZ4eDenWI> (~o/o/~Relaxing Napkins Folding Tutorial ~o/o/~) ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nbrPJU-q6w> ([ASMR] Page Turning : Old Book, Comic Book & Magazine - No Talking) ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFIBKsYK1wA> (☞Dreamy Creamy Spa Facial °oO☞ Relaxation | ASMR | Face Massage) ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3lO2FNV1BY> (ASMR Tasty Triggers)

38. I mostly use the terms 'spectator' and 'experiencer' in this thesis, because making up a whole new term would have made the already complicated text unnecessarily difficult to follow. Having said that, both of the mentioned terms are somewhat misleading. 'Spectator' does not account for how multifaceted the sensory ASMR phenomenon actually is, and privileges vision over other forms of sensorial perception and sensuality. 'Experiencer', on the other hand, takes for granted that the person engaging with the ASMR videos would experience specific ASMR tingles, and thus simplifies the phenomenon: ASMR media does not exclude any motivations for engagement, although most getting into it are undoubtedly looking for tingles amongst the other positive features of the sensations. In Barratt & Davis' (2015) study, they also use a term 'consumer', which I want to avoid in this thesis because it in turn narrows the role of the experiencer/spectator within the phenomenon, and in my opinion leads the notion of the role of an individual in a direction I wish not to pursue.

39. Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 118, as cited in Akaimo & Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of in Materiality in Feminist Theory' in *Material Feminisms*, 2008, 5.

THEORY

"Nature is agentic - it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and the nonhuman world. We need ways of understanding agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world – ways that account for myriad "intra-actions" (in Karen Barad's terms) between phenomena that are material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological."³⁹

Brief Background for Barad's New Materialism

The Cartesian attitude towards nature as fixed and measurable paved the way for Newtonian physics, which considers material objects as passive, inert and discrete, reacting only to an external agent, in a time-space which is based on chain reactions of cause-and-effect (Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 110-11). Tarja Kallio-Tamminen notes that Cartesian dualism, Newtonian physics, and Darwin's theory of origin of species also have had a large and far-reaching impact in various fields of the humanities (2006, 78-79). For example, in sociobiology and in evolution psychology the trend has been to reduce human behavior and societal phenomena to the workings of physics and chemistry. In many humanistic schools of thought the underlying foundation for explanations of complicated material-discursive dynamics (language, art, religion) dates back to classical physics – no

matter that already over one hundred years ago classical physics was revealed to be inadequate to even explain the material phenomena most evidently belonging to its discipline. (Kallio-Tamminen, 2006, 79.) **The primal qualities of physical objects were believed to exist as such, independently from the observer, and the subjective qualities were believed only to exist in the observer's consciousness.** Atomistic reductionism, for example, would assume that mental perceptions, such as the feeling of warmth in one's body, are caused by bodily stages, which in turn were reducible to the objective features of the atoms in the body causing reactions in perceptual organs. Thus, the secondary qualities also could be seen as mechanically derivative of the primary qualities. This chain of reasoning bypassed the fact that without perception the primary qualities, such as size, shape and momentum, could not be observed to begin with. (Kallio-Tamminen, 2006, 74.)

After the invention of quantum mechanics and its first and still applicable interpretation, the so-called Copenhagen interpretation, the traditional understanding of reality came to a dead end. The Copenhagen interpretation demanded the destruction of the mechanistic-deterministic comprehension of reality that has its basis in classical physics. The new explanations meant radical abandonment of the prospect that science-making would be a practice through which it was possible to discover objec-

40. discursive practices > material reality

41. I use the term 'becoming' in this thesis to distinguish that materializing is an active process (not a continuous, linear flow, but iterative and non-deterministic) instead of a static 'being'. An important note is, that in terms of agential realism, however, there is no substantial dichotomy between being and becoming (Barad 2012, 13: n18).

42. discourse <> materiality (<> signifying intra-action)

I use 'reciprocity' here by means of intra-action, which is a co-constitutive yet asymmetrical relation and, according to agential realism, an existential condition per se. Intra-activity is the production of differential becomings (mattering), manifesting in peculiar ways and volumes in phenomena. See: Terminology: Intra-action; Diffraction

43. That is, there is no *relata* existing independently outside of their relations within intra-actions (Barad 2007, 429).

44. Barad notes that feminist science studies scholars have been attuned to issues of relativism and reflexivity for a good while already. They have argued that mainstream science studies have not been mindful about crucial social-material factors, such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, religion and nationality. The paradox lies in the fact that while science

studies emphasizes the importance of tracking "the-science-in-the-making" by being attentive to the specificities of laboratory practices, it vastly fails to question the social variables, and continues to assume that those are destined categories of the social. In other words, "the-gender-in-the-making" – the production of gender and constitution of other social attributes through and within technoscientific practices is oftentimes forgotten. That means to ignore the mutual constitution of the "social" and "scientific" is, ironically, at the core of the very project of science studies. (Barad 2007, 87.)

45. See more: Method: Diffractive reading.

46. I chose to use 'object-based' instead of 'object-oriented' in this thesis for two reasons:

1. Because the term 'object-oriented' easily associates with object-oriented ontology (OOO) and object-oriented philosophy. Mentioned theories take a very different perspective on the matter from that of agential realism (nevertheless, these schools of thought are sharing the same rejection of anthropocentrism, and the same urge to foreground the matterings of non-human forms).

2. Moreover, while plugging in my data and the concept of 'intra-action', I realized that the expression 'object-oriented' is too exclusive, because it suggests that the intra-action at hand would be principally one-way in its causal direction.

tive facts about objects or phenomena separately existing from the observer (Kallio-Tamminen, 2006, 135). While Newtonian mechanics was significant for the preceding materialisms (materialist philosophies of the 19th century, notably those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), matter has turned out to be much more unattainable and complex for post-classical physics, forcing us to reconsider the ways we understand and interact with nature (Coole & Frost 2010, 5). Or rather, as Barad would probably put it, *intra-act within nature; as of nature*.

Barad sometimes refers to their new materialism as "onto-epistem-ology". The onto-epistemology, *knowing in being*, takes further and deeper the materialist tradition of the modern era and turns the tables of the post-modernist disposition of privileging linguistics (Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 119). New materialism, then, is a post-Cartesian approach to matter as agential, active and nondeterministic: new materialism states that *matter becomes* instead of saying that *matter is* (Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 110-11). Agential realism diverges from many feminist postmodern and post-structuralist theories in its attitude towards the material-discursive dichotomy and the direction of effects in these realms. For Barad, material is a co-constitutive force with discourse, and thus does not only ask what the material consequences of discursive practices are, but is also interested in what the *relationship* between discourse and materiality is. Barad inquires *how* does the discourse work its effects on material, and how could materiality in turn constrain and

reconfigure discourses and discursive consequences. Agential realism does not only problematize the more commonly applied understanding of the direction of causal structures between discourse and materiality,⁴⁰ but understands their dynamisms as intrinsically reciprocal - materialization is not homogeneous, nor a uniform process, but a diffractive becoming⁴¹ of the world.⁴²

Terminology

I am about to apply Baradian philosophy, and obviously I will also use specific terms that are central in agential realism. In their texts, Barad repeatedly uses particular expressions such as "entanglement", "reconfiguration", "iteration", and "bodies-in-production". These are descriptive terms that Barad uses in multifaceted manners (for example, in terms of quantum entanglement and entanglement as a feature of orienting in intra-action), so that some "typical Baradian vocabulary" is not explicitly explained *per se*, but rather Barad uses them to explain the other, more distinctive concepts, such as "intra-action" and "exteriority-within". **To not change the very specific meaning of what is stated, I have not found it judicious to extensively replace these explanatory words (like "reconfiguration) by synonyms (which are never the same) – there is a reason why Barad has chosen to use these particular words. Agential realism is a theory that materializes in words and in the ways words are used. As I aim to make the theory work in the context**

of my topic, I also widely use the language in a Baradian manner: in parts, the theory starts to work as a method too (for further annotations, see: Method: Diffractive reading). Now I will briefly introduce the most prominent concepts of agential realism. I'll apply the following throughout my analysis, and aim to make them work by plugging them in with my data.

Matter, for Barad, is not a thing or a property of independently existing objects in the world. Matter is substance in a repetitive intra-active becoming, *it's a doing, a "congealing of agency"* (Barad, 2007, 210. Italics mine). Phenomena come to matter through the process of intra-activity. In agential realism, matter refers to the materiality and materialization of phenomena (Barad, 2007, 210).

Intra-action is one of the most important concepts of agential realism. Intra-activity is the *mutual constitution of matter and discourse*. It is important to understand that Barad's *intra-activity is different from interactivity*, which is often used to indicate the interpersonal encounters between "distinctive" bodies (Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 115). Where the prefix *inter* signifies *among/in the midst of*, *intra* means *(from) within*. When two bodies *interact*, they remain in a state of independence. That is, each of these subjects are understood to exist before the encounter with one another. When two bodies *intra-act* they in turn co-constitute each other. This means that the individuals/entities materialize through intra-action, and the ability to act emerges *from within the relationship*, not outside of it (Barad 2014, 30: n4). In contrast

to Merleau-Ponty's conception of 'being-in-the-world', Barad would rather say 'being-of-the-world' (2007, 160). Being-of-the-world emphasizes the entangled nature of reality - how bodies are constituted along with the world, as integral parts of it.

Agency basically refers to *an ability to act*. For Barad, the primary ontological units are not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties, but *phenomena* (Barad 2007, 141). Agency is not something someone (human or nonhuman) has, but a shifting ability to act. **Intra-action** is the production of agencies within phenomena. **Agential cuts** negotiate the object and the subject over and over again. *However, these agential components are not ontologically separable or preexisting entities, but emergent only through and within their relation*. That is, according to Barad, *relata* do not preexist before the relations, and therefore we should talk about *relata-within-phenomena*⁴³ to begin with (Barad, 2007, 140). This perception is radically different from the more familiar Cartesian understanding, which takes the dualist distinction between a discrete object and a discrete subject for granted.

Agential separability means the production of the agential subject and agential object within a specific intra-action. In Barad's theory of agential separability, objectivity is not lost along with the rejection of a metaphysical individualism. Indeed, *objectivity is possible through an agential separateness within the phenomena*. This separateness is an agentially enacted material condition that Barad refers

as an "exteriority-within-phenomena" (see below). The dynamic separateness (agential separability) of elements (agential objects and subjects) within the phenomena are emergent through "agential cuts". The agential intra-actions are processes which determine where the boundaries and properties of the components within the phenomenon emerge, and how the particular concepts/ material articulations of the world become meaningful. (Barad, 2007, 139-41.) In experimental settings, an agential cut enacts a causal structure among components of a phenomenon in the marking of the "measuring agencies" ("effect") by the "measured object" ("cause") (Barad, 2007, 140).

Exteriority-within-phenomena: the continuous reworking of the agential boundary is also referred to as a condition of exteriority-within-phenomena. Following and further developing Bohr's ideas towards a posthumanist approach, Barad disputes spatial separability and the Cartesian cut (fixed, distinctive object and subject) and instead offers an agentially enacted cut to better explain the recent findings of quantum physics (which indeed insist a new kind of ontic and epistemic approach to reality). The pivotal point in an agential realist understanding is that the observer can never stand outside of the world - there is no such absolute exterior observational spot. (Barad 2007, 184.)

Diffraction works in many ways in agential realism: it is a trope that describes the workings of agential realism on a meta level.

First of all, diffraction is a term that Barad, following (most notably) Donna Haraway's

example, uses as a counterpoint to *reflexion (reflectivity)*⁴⁴. Both are optical phenomena, but whereas reflection is about mirroring; reflections, sameness, mimesis and homologous copies of the original; diffraction is about patterns of differences and relationalities (Barad 2007, 71, 89). Reflection is grounded on representationalism: it assumes that representations reflect the social or natural reality. The conviction behind reflexivity is that we have somehow easier access to the representations than to the objects themselves. Reflexivity holds the world at a distance, and it also holds on to the epistemological gap between the knower and the known. Even when the observer is aimed to be put back into the game, reflexivity only mirrors mirroring, because it still concerns the subject and object as discrete, believing that this separation, a gaze from a far, is the condition for the possibility of knowledge. (Barad 2007, 87-88.) Diffraction, in turn, is not about interaction between separate entities, "a self-referential glance back at oneself", but an intra-active "way of understanding the world from within and as part of it" (Barad 2007, 88).

Secondly, diffraction is a methodological approach (that is also applied in this thesis): it is reading insights through one another, while being sensitive to the exceptions, exclusions and delicate details, and being attentive to the relations of differences and how they *matter*.⁴⁵

Thirdly, diffraction, as a physical phenomenon, is a prominent object of investigation in physics and in the philosophy

47. Hashtags (#) on the headline indicate the way the content related to a certain topic is marked online with metadata tags. In the case of ASMR, unintentional content is oftentimes marked with #ASMR by other users, who classify it to be part of the phenomenon. I think that the hashtag is also a topologically fascinating phenomenon, because it makes visible the phenomenal workings of spacetime-mattering: it entangles information which is “seemingly scattered” on the Internet. That is, when I attempt to think with agential realism, the Internet is not an abstract, virtual container where separate bits of data float like particles of dust in the air. The Internet is not a separate realm from “the palpable” reality, nor is the entanglement of information a fishnet where hashtags would connect data like dots located in space. Rather, hashtags should be understood as parts of the multiplicity of apparatuses at work, apparatuses that do not work explicitly in the Internet or in the “reality outside of it”. According to Barad, reality is spacetime-mattering, which does not constitute of individually existing entities located in space and evolving in time, but of phenomena that are material entanglements extending across different spaces and times (2007, 317). When I use ‘online’ in this thesis, I refer to the Internet and to ways ASMR phenomenon are (re)configuring on YouTube, at the core of which are the intentional ASMR videos. ‘Offline’ is to mark the (re)configurations of the phenomenon that are “elsewhere”

than online, e.g. the physical, material changes on the spectator’s body (notably, the tingles). Crucial here is to understand that this division is not about absolute categories or distinct realities, because the offline and online are profoundly entangled. However, I will use these terms in order to understand the intra-active constitution of ASMR phenomenon as emerging and materializing in configurations that are both online, offline, and crossing that distinction.

This same notion applies to other seemingly distinctive terms used in this thesis, e.g. the human/non-human, animate/inanimate. I argue that usage of such terms is well reasoned here, because it is necessary in order to be sensitive to the diffractive practices of materialization. Recognizing exclusions starts by being aware of the inclusions. Importantly, all categorizations are always permeable, and the differentiation between matterings is iteratively remade.

48. The Joy of Painting ran for 11 years from early 80s to early 90s on American television, and meanwhile won three Emmy Awards. Source: The Joy of Painting. Retrieved 27 Mar 2018, from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Joy_of_Painting

49. Marsden, R. (2012, July 20). ‘Maria spends 20 minutes folding towels’: Why millions are mesmerised by ASMR videos. Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/>

[maria-spends-20-minutes-folding-towels-why-millions-are-mesmerised-by-asmr-videos-7956866.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/maria-spends-20-minutes-folding-towels-why-millions-are-mesmerised-by-asmr-videos-7956866.html)

50. See for example: <http://discoverasmr.com/what-is-asmr/bob-ross-asmr/>; <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-youtube-videos-that-will-give-you-asmr-shivers/>; <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/18486/1/bob-ross-king-of-the-tingles>; <http://mashable.com/2015/01/26/asmr-youtube/#ni0EsmqzsPq5>; <http://www.stuffmomnevertoldyou.com/blogs/why-do-whispering-women-cause-asmr-brain-orgasms.htm>; <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/10/soothing-sounds-bob-ross-274466.html>

of physics. In classic physics, diffraction, sometimes also called interference, is a characteristic behavior that exhibits in certain conditions. Diffraction patterns mark the difference between particles and waves: according to *classical physics*, only waves produce diffraction patterns, whereas particles do not because they cannot occupy the same place in space at the same time. Waves, in turn, are not “things” that can be localized to one point, but disturbances that propagate in a medium (like water) or as oscillating fields (like electromagnetic waves; light, for example). Unlike particles, waves can overlap at the same point in space: their amplitudes (heights) can combine creating a composite waveform. When two water waves overlap, for example, the resulting wave can be bigger or smaller than either of the waves coming together. When the crests meet, the waveform is larger, but when the crest of one combines with the trough of another, the disturbances can cancel each other out and might appear relatively calm. That is, the resultant wave is a sum of effects, a combination of individual disturbances. The combining of effects is called *superposition*. (Barad 2007, 266.)

When two stones are dropped into calm water simultaneously, circular disturbances occur in the water. The disturbances caused by each stone start to propagate outward, and then overlap with each other producing a pattern that results from the relative differences (in amplitude and phase) of the overlapping waves. Now the waves are interfering with each other,

and the pattern produced is called interference or a *diffraction pattern*. (Barad 2007, 76-77.)

What makes the diffraction phenomenon so interesting are the empirical findings of a famous two-slit diffraction experiment. This experiment plays a crucial role in the development of quantum physics and demonstrates that in some circumstances *matter* (classically thought as composed of particles) can indeed produce a diffraction pattern. Since the first discovery of such weird performing, the experiment has been repeated extensively and the evidence against the classical comprehension of waves and particles is only getting stronger. Not only does matter manifest wave behavior under certain experimental circumstances, but it has been proven that the same works vice versa: light, for example, can act both as a wave and as a particle. Diffraction patterns are evidence of superposition. But here is the dilemma: the superposition of particles is a paradox (Barad 2007, 82-83). Diffraction phenomenon do not only bring to the light the entanglements of the research settings in the laboratories, but is itself an entangled phenomenon (Barad 2007, 73). The puzzling findings of contemporary quantum physics (like diffraction patterns, superposition and quantum entangled states) force one to rethink many of the taken-for-granted formulations of Western epistemology and ontology (Barad 2007, 82-83).



let me extend a personal
invitation for you

DATA

For me, ASMR is a topical example of an emerging phenomenon, which (literally) touches the most recent thematics of new materialism, both through its content and its functionalities. For this thesis, I have selected two (2) videos that ground my contemplations of the ASMR phenomenon. Both of the videos are on YouTube. Regardless of the fact that the selected videos form the core of my data, my approach to the phenomenon is manifold. I give voice to polyphonic sounds in this thesis: I cite articles, stories and studies, as well as my two ASMR “capable” / ASMR experiencing friends.

While the themes of ASMR videos vary distinctively, Barratt & Davis abstract two (2) main sorts of videos that emphasize different settings to bring about the ASMR response. The two categories are principally directive, not absolute (2015).

1) In the first type of video, the focus, solicitude and attention is oriented towards the viewer. These videos often simulate a situation of intimate personal attention, and they are typically conducted with binaural narration in order to enhance the sensation of close proximity and face-to-face encounter. The ASMRtist is typically visible in the video. Barratt & Davis delineate these type of videos to contain “interpersonal triggers” (2017).

2) In the second type of video the nurture and attention are directed towards articles, objects (human or nonhuman) and materia. These nonhuman/object/materia -based⁴⁶

videos are often conducted with limited or indistinguishable narration, or completely without it (“no talking” ASMR). In these cases, the triggering sounds and visuals are created merely by playing very attentively with different materials and articles. The human factor to these videos is often diminished so that the ASMRtist is not visible except for their hands. Likewise, in the case of most of the ASMR videos, the viewer/spectator/experiencer is advised to use headphones for binaural audio sensations.

In their second study on ASMR, Barratt & Davis remark that the previous exploration of ASMR focused more on “interpersonal triggers” (introduced in type1 videos). Barratt & Davis analyze that the role-play type of online ASMR is so typical because many of the efficacious triggers, like whispers and crisp sounds “are incorporated into a situation that implies close contact with the ASMRtist, such as a dental examination or a beauty therapy appointment” (Introduction). They emphasize that “merely approaching ASMR through type1 videos would misrepresent the multifaceted character of ASMR phenomenon, which is not only about “interpersonal” triggers: “As a result, the qualities of effective triggers not directly related to interpersonal actions made by a host, such as the properties of effective trigger objects, have largely been overlooked” (Barratt & Davis 2017, Introduction).

Selected videos

I already summed up some well-recognized features of ASMR videos. Next I will introduce the two selected exemplary videos and justify the choosing of these particular videos. I want to remark here, that there are transcriptions of the videos attached to the thesis. Even more importantly, I would like to suggest you to actually open the links to the videos, and engage with them, rather than merely reading the transcripts.

1) “Unintentional” video #ASMR #BobRoss: Mystic Mountain (Season 20 Episode 1)

2) Object-based ASMR video: .•. Intoxicating Sounds .•. ASMR

1) An “Unintentional” Video #ASMR #Bobross⁴⁷

BobRossInc (2015, April 20).
Bob Ross - Mystic Mountain
(Season 20 Episode 1).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlucWfTUo1A>.
See Transcriptions.

This video is often referred to as a classic example of an “unintentional ASMR”. This means, that the clip is originally done for another purposes than ASMR, but has later been vastly interpreted and engaged with as ASMR media. This video is an episode called ‘Mystic

Mountain (Season 20 Episode 1)’ from Bob Ross’ legendary television show *The Joy of Painting*.⁴⁸ I’ve selected this video because it exposes the scope and historicity of the ASMR phenomenon (as not only limited to the ASMR videos intentionally done in the recent years). This videos’ format is kindred to the type1 ASMR videos, where the focus (“personal attention”) is directed towards the viewer/spectator/experiencer. Thus, I state that this video broadens the coverage of my samples to not only include the more obvious and fitting piece of data, which would be the object/materia-based videos in the context of the theory. One more criterion for my pick is that this video is a generally accepted archetype of an ASMR triggering content. Therefore, I find it to be a fruitful starting point when wanting to understand the ASMR phenomenon together with the ontological concepts of Barad.

Bob Ross’ Entanglement with ASMR

“A frequently-cited example of existing ASMR culture is the TV show made by American landscape painter Bob Ross; over 400 episodes of *The Joy of Painting* were filmed before his death in 1995, and they have since become an ASMR staple.”⁴⁹

The name Bob Ross has come up in personal communication with several friends who experience ASMR tingles. Investigating further, it came clear that Bob Ross’ involvement in the ASMR phenomenon is evident, despite the fact

that they themselves were not alive long enough to take part of this discourse. Bob Ross’s entanglement with the ASMR phenomenon is vastly represented in online discourses.⁵⁰

“— the mystery is what exactly it is that’s so undeniably appealing about watching this man paint trees and birds and cabins.”⁵¹

An article titled ‘How Bob Ross Became an ASMR YouTube Star’ by CAITLIN SCHNEIDER⁵² states, that most of those watching ‘The Joy of Painting’ TV show never actually had an intention of picking up the brush, but were looking for something else; maybe comfort, or perhaps some relaxing tingles⁵³. Schneider writes on the ASMR thread on Reddit, “Bob Ross” is listed as a common trigger for ASMR, and one specific mountain painting video has an astonishing 7,6 million views, while others too are typically watched as many as two to four million times. Schneider adds, that naturally, not all of the people are watching Ross painting for the purpose of ASMR, but an increasing online presence indicates that the trigger seeking spectators would be included in the numbers. According to the article, Ross has had an important role as a central character in the evolution of the ASMR online phenomena:

“In the last five years or so, the experience—often described as a tingling that starts in the scalp, trickles down the spine, and relaxes the whole body—has become well-known, with Bob Ross as an unexpected point

of consensus. In an entirely subjective realm of experience, he is a commonly agreed upon father, godfather, king and classic example of what an ASMR trigger looks and sounds like.”⁵⁴

2) An Object-Based ASMR Video

GentleWhispering (2016, June 16).
•. Intoxicating Sounds •. ASMR.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WY0JWpKsdWQ>.
See Transcriptions.

The second piece of data I get entangled with and through my theory, is an object and materia-based ASMR video (type 2, see above). The video is called ‘•. *Intoxicating Sounds* •. ASMR’ and it’s made by the Gentle Whispering ASMR. ‘Gentle Whispering ASMR’ is globally the most subscribed ASMR channel on YouTube. I’ve chosen this video because it’s a widespread and vastly consumed example, and it matches the description of a typical ASMR video. Moreover, it’s a representative of an object/materia-based video, which is particularly interesting for me in terms of agential realism.

51. Kloc, J. (2014, October 10). The Soothing Sounds of Bob Ross; Long after His Death, a Gentle Man Who Painted Kitsch Landscapes on Public Television Still Gives Millions of Fans the Tingles. *Newsweek*. Retrieved 27 Mar 2018, from: http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-387235919.html?refid=easy_hf

52. Schneider, C. (2015, July 05). How Bob Ross Became an ASMR YouTube Star. *Mental floss*. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65661/how-bob-ross-became-asmr-youtube-star>

53. Indeed, an article 'The Soothing Sounds Of Bob Ross' by Joe Kloc on newsweek.com claims that Ross himself said that most people do not watch their show to learn how to paint: "Instead, they watch it for relaxation," the reclusive painter told the *Sentinel* in a rare interview in 1990. – "We've gotten letters from people who say they sleep better when the show is on." Retrieved 28 Mar 2018 from: <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/10/soothing-sounds-bob-ross-274466.html>

54. Schneider, C. (2015, July 05). How Bob Ross Became an ASMR YouTube Star. *Mental floss*. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65661/how-bob-ross-became-asmr-youtube-star>

55. See the chapter 'Touching Soundscape', where I contemplate the materiality of sound.

56. If there is a human participant in an ASMR video, they are usually treated rather similarly to that of "inanimate" (nonhuman) material (type 2 videos). That is, human hair is approached with same kind of "care taking" and attentive touch when it is being brushed, like a plastic beauty bag is when it is being tapped in an ASMR video. Verbal communication between a human participant and an ASMRtist is usually diminished, and often this "voluntary human material" has a passive role in the video. See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpxUn3LH3Io> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pRZaEP8pTo>

57. Accordingly, Barad notes that: "Electrons, molecules, brittlestars, jellyfish, coral reefs, dogs, rocks, icebergs, plants, asteroids, snowflakes, and bees stray from all calculable paths, making leaps here and there, or rather, making here and there from leaps, shifting familiarly patterned practices, testing the waters of what might yet be/have been/could still have been, doing thought experiments with their very being" (2012, 1).

58. Barad (2007, 198) follows Borh's resolution on the wave and particle duality paradox, whose "translation" was causing inconsistencies within quantum theory. The wave and particle duality paradox entails a condition that it is impossible to observe particle and wave behaviors simultaneously, because exclusive experimental set-ups are demanded. The solution here is to reframe "wave" and "particle," which are classic, descriptive concepts of physics. Through understanding that "wave" and "particle" refer to two mutually exclusive phenomena, instead of observation-independent objects, the referentiality is reconceptualized. The outcome of this epistemic shift is that "a condition for objective knowledge is that the referent is a phenomenon" (Barad 2007, 198).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I inquire how intra-active entanglements and shifting agency of human and nonhuman part-takers materialize and manifest in ASMR phenomenon. That is, I'm not only interested in *what is* produced in these entangled practices, but *how* it is produced. What type of becomings (materializations) does ASMR generate as a material-discursive phenomenon? How does intra-action work in the context of ASMR phenomenon?

For Barad, matter is rather a doing than a noun. According to the theory of agential realism, space, time and matter are one but not singular phenomena. Aiming to grasp this statement, I must look at ASMR from a perspective which questions my preliminary assumptions of what it is and how it functions. The primary questions that begin my analysis are following:

Can online ASMR truly present an intimate presence while it holds a "virtual distance"? How does the spatial dimension come to matter in terms of intimacy and the digital when contemplating online ASMR? Is there energy transmitted?⁵⁵ What is the significance of attentive (and seemingly uncanny) material engagements so often proposed in ASMR videos?⁵⁶

METHOD

Diffraction Reading – Thinking with & Plugging in

Barad's conception of "knowing in being," asserts that the world is not to be grasped by counting on representations, but rather we should be attentive to and accountable for the entanglements of which we are a part. Theorizing, thinking, observing, and experimenting are not about intervening from a distance, but about intra-acting from within. Knowledge practices play a constitutive role in the production of objects and subjects and matter and meaning (Barad 2007, 56).

The practices of 'plugging in' and 'reading/thinking/seeing diffractively' describe my methodological approach in this thesis. "A **diffraction reading** is not about what is told, or experienced – it is about the ways in which what is experienced is formed in the intra-action between the material and discursive" (Jackson&Mazzei 2012, 130. Bolding mine). Diffraction is a term that Barad uses to indicate both a phenomenon of physics and the theoretical counterpoint to 'reflection', following Donna Haraway's conception of diffraction as marking specific patterns and effects of differences (Barad 2007, 71). As applied in agential realism, a diffractive method is a non-representationalist approach, especially suitable for critical examinations of social/natural practices (Barad 2007, 88). Diffraction reading and theorizing is attuned to material-discursive

entanglements. It is “reading insights through another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter” (Barad 2007, 71).

Plugging in is a phrase originally introduced by Deleuze&Guattari. Jackson&Mazzei apply the phrase in their textbook ‘Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research’ to signify the to and fro process of organizing, arraigining and fitting together theory and data (2012). **The method of plugging in is an attentive involvement, which could also be called “reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory”,** although I would rather like to call it **engaging-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory**. Plugging in is a disruption of the theory/practice binary in that the very process they constitute and also makes one another (Jackson&Mazzei 2012, 1, 4-5). Following Jackson&Mazzei’s guidance, I aim to broaden theoretical thinking beyond the customary qualitative methods, such as creating themes or codings (2012). Plugging in is a process of creating new unpredictable knowledge from chaos; from matters that are seemingly discrete.

[4:39>] “If you haven’t painted with us before (*soft voice of brushing, framing back to the close-up, heads of cloud-like shapes appear on the canvas*), one of the things that we try to do here, we try not to teach you just to copy, all we’re trying to do is teach you a technique and turn you loose on the world, we use no patterns, no tracings, all we do

is just sort of have an idea in our mind and we just sort of let it, let it happen, and if you’ll practice this a little bit, very soon you can enjoy the freedom creating a painting right on the canvas.” (Bob Ross on Mystic Mountain episode1).

Researcher – Knowledge Practices as Material, Entangled Methods

“ – knowing is a matter of differential responsiveness (as performatively articulated and accountable) to what matters” (Barad 2007, 149).

As noted earlier, my challenge is to think of ASMR phenomenon as something more than a mere example of human culture’s production, a bunch of YouTube videos, or a human-centric physical-emotional experience. To do that, I have to pay close attention to the diffractions and constitutive exclusions, and note the agential cuts through which my analysis is possible.

In the process of contemplating, talking, writing, and engaging with ASMR phenomenon, I’m also a part of its continuous constitution (and You, when reading this, might be as well). In Baradian thinking, this does not mean that my knowledge or understanding of the phenomenon is purely *subjective* (which, from a traditional perspective, means that my position as “objective” researcher is contaminated), as this perception would follow the representationalist idea which presumes a fixed distinc-

tion between the subject and the object. That is, agential realist theory does not approve the knowing subject to be that of humanist or anti-humanist contemplations, nor transhumanism’s prosthetically enhanced human, but rather, knowing is “an ongoing performance of the world” which materializes within human and nonhuman configurations, and entails responsiveness and accountability (Barad 2007, 149-50). **Knowledge practices** are not exclusively human doings (as “an intellectual agent”), nor has thinking ever been disembodied, like the traditional humanist accounts of intelligibility would insist (Barad 2012, 1). A (rational human) “mind” is not necessarily concomitant with a brain nor a condition for knowing, but rather, “mind” is a specific configuration of material reality (Barad 2007, 379). Intelligibility is the world’s ontological performance: differential articulations of reality-in-making. Barad remarks that “brain cells are not the only ones that hold memories, respond to stimuli, or think thoughts” and that “electrons as phenomena carry the traces of their enfolded become within them, just like any other phenomena” (2007 379-472: n53). They assert that the world and all life forms including inanimate forms of liveliness theorize and experiment.⁵⁷ I want to add that while thinking this way it is obvious that there are differential ways that knowing takes forms. It is not only “cognitive” knowledge or a logical thesis about the trueness of an argument that matter, but other types of knowings too. One can know everything about swimming *in theory*, but still not know how to swim.

More over, Barad understands reality as constituting of phenomena, not of ontologically separate entities, and thus **the “object” of investigation should be also seen as a phenomenon**⁵⁸. Thinking with my theory, I stand with the statement that objectivity is not about trying to stay clear and declare undistorted representations of the things situated in the reality around us, but rather taking account of marks on bodies, being attentive to diffractions (specific materializations, differences that matter) and entanglements of which I am a part (Barad 2007, 49, 89, 91). Knowledge practices do not only *have* material consequences, but they *are* material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world (2007, 90). **In terms of agential realism, knowing is to become entangled** (Barad 2007).

59. It is crucial to remember that, thinking with agential realism, phenomena never sit still, but are in a continuous flux without absolute points of starting and ending. The local, agential separability allows causal structures to occur: the cuts create a temporal object and a temporal subject - but never for good, never once and for all. In my understanding, doing research is a material-discursive, entangled practice (including human and nonhuman participants), through which something comes to be and something else does not.

60. Importantly, the boundaries which mark the agential separability are not made once and for all, but remade over and over again.

61. \leftrightarrow designates intra-action.

62. Simply, the subject and the object are codependent on the relational order of the words in the sentence. E.g. interchanging two words in a following sentence turns around its comprehensible content: "The cat was eating when a girl walked in" / "the girl was eating when a cat walked in"

63. Importantly, the differences in productive practices produce differential matterings: the nature of a specific embodiment matters, and thus the embodied actions are differentially efficacious. Sound waves as material disturbances are different than of embodiments of language in bodily gestures. (Barad 2007, 210-11.)

64. Note: stating something does not simply make it so, like using whatever instrument in a lab does not produce whatever results are desired; intra-actions are not *causally deterministic* (Barad 2007, 211). How I understand Barad's take on the matter is that the signifier and signified are not the same thing, nor is the signifier a representation or the signified, but rather, they are entangled, existing intra-actively.

65. Agential cuts are at work in the material-discursive production of phenomena. How I see it is that the constitution of categories is a material-discursive iteration of practices through which agential cuts appear. That is, the usage of contradictions in meaning (and matter) making, e.g. by conceiving concepts 'nature' and 'culture' as oppositions, is a material-discursive act that has material-discursive consequences.

66. Carlile, Nicolini, et al, in the book 'How Matter Matters: Objects, Artifacts, and Materiality in Organization Studies' , state that, while the ethical dimension of materiality and accountability has been implicit in some of the new materialist discourses, it has not received enough of formal attention (2014). According to them, this dimension raises specific questions about the production of sociomaterial entanglements: inquiry about how those entanglements are conceptualized, and possibly detached. This segregation of the human and nonhuman actors is done by individuals through the process of reflecting experiences. The editors affirm that an insightful and critical reconsideration about material configurations could lead to number of practical implications for contemporary sociomaterial assemblages and arrangements (such as schools, hospitals, offices, cities, technologies (8-9). Carlile, Nicolini, et al., claim that "In the end, matter matters not only as an intellectual effort, but also in an ontological and practical sense, i.e., it generates consequences for how we experience and act in our world" (2014, 9). **Thinking with Barad, I could take this notion further, and say that matter does not only generate consequences on the social lives of human subjects, but matter is a consequential, social, natural, human and nonhuman process in iterative remaking.**

67. See my critique on prefix "post" in chapter Causality In ASMR.

ANALYSIS

Although the chosen videos and Barad's concepts form the basis for my contemplations, the borders between the theory, the data, and me as a researcher will appear as unstable as they actually are. Honoring the theoretical and methodological framework of mine, the intra-acting and emergent processes (analysis \leftrightarrow text \leftrightarrow matterings) are not following some pre-structured system, chronology, or categorial analysis. Instead, my analysis is an intra-woven, spontaneous synthesis (entanglement) of the data and theory. In other words, I plug in the exemplary videos and ASMR as a broader phenomenon with Baradian conceptions (e.g. agency, materiality, diffraction and intra-action) through notions that emerge in the process of "engaging-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory". The analysis is a hybrid of engagements, it is diffractions that would had not been occurred without the to and fro process described above. **My analysis is an attempt to understand the theory through practically applying it, and to understand the data through a theoretical approach.**

Apparatuses in Baradian Theory: Background for the Analysis to Understand the Constitution of Phenomena

For Barad, entities do not possess set boundaries. Similarly, phenomena do not start and end sharply, but rather they are overlapping, "intratwined", and in a continuous transforma-

tion. As far as I understand, for Barad, the reality is a multiplicity of entangled, constitutive relations (agential intra-actions). Indeed, the issues concerning the boundaries and agency are again inherently bonded. In addition to questioning the taken boundaries between the entities/nonhumans/humans/subjects/objects/phenomena, Barad disputes the role of apparatuses as apathetic measurements or mediating equipment (2007). Although from the instantaneous viewpoint of art education, the term 'apparatus' might seem arbitrary, it is a concept used by many philosophers, for example by Foucault and Deleuze. Barad has their own way of utilizing the term. First of all, they make visible our unquestioning, yet pragmatic, way of delimiting things by rethinking ordinary concepts: What if there is a wireless connection between the measuring instrument and a computer that collects the data? Does the apparatus in this case include the computer? Is a printer paired with a laptop part of the apparatus? What about the paper that is fed into the printer? Or the person who fills the paper in? The person who reads the text on the printed paper? (Barad 2007, 142-43.)

In agential realism, 'apparatuses' are not mere embodiments of human concepts, passive measuring equipment, or laboratory setups. Instead, apparatuses are specific material-discursive practices producing differences that matter. **Apparatuses are open-ended boundary-making practices; constructive of matter and**

meaning and productive of phenomena. Significantly, apparatuses are part of phenomena themselves, they are dynamic reconfigurings of the world in its intra-activity. Like nothing else, apparatuses do not possess inherent boundaries, nor are they located in the world or evolve in time: they are *of* the world, assiduously configuring and reconfiguring spatiality and temporality. (Barad 2007, 146.)

An apparatus enacts a local, **agential cut within the phenomenon**. The **agential cut is a causal structure through the measuring instrument (effect) and the measured object (cause)**. That is, as far as I understand, an **apparatus and a measuring instrument are not one and same thing**. An apparatus is a productive practice, of which a specific measuring instrument can be a constitutive part. If the apparatus is replaced with a different one, a corresponding change occurs in the agential cut: a different delineation of object and observing agencies is enacted, a different causal structure emerges by the cut. In short, **different agential cuts produce different phenomena**. Importantly, for Barad, the apparatus is both *causally* substantial and *the condition for the possibility of the objective description* of material phenomena. (Barad 2007, 173-75.)

Workings of the ASMR+Mystic Mountain -apparatus

Yet An(other) Apparatus:

I start my analysis with the “unintentional” ASMR video: Bob Ross’ painting episode called ‘Mystic Mountain’ on YouTube. Obviously, ASMR as a phenomenon is much more than a singular video. Moreover, the Mystic Mountain episode is also a part of other phenomena in addition to ASMR, and thus I **preemptively use an appellation ‘ASMR+MysticMountain’ to refer to the video and its intra-actions as an apparatus**. The composition of this apparatus principally includes the spectator/experiencer and the Mystic Mountain -episode on YouTube. Hypothetically, the phrase *ASMR+MysticMountain* thus also describes a general occasion of someone consuming Bob Ross’ painting videos for the purpose of ASMR. Moreover, in the context of this thesis, the ASMR+MysticMountain -apparatus necessarily also involves me. Wanting to understand Barad’s notion of objectivity in research practices, **I must acknowledge my position within the phenomenon: I have a double role as both the spectator, and the researcher**. My analysis, then, is the speculation of intra-actions and matterings with and within the ASMR+MysticMountain -apparatus as parts of the ASMR phenomenon.⁵⁹ Having said that, the definitions above are to clarify the starting point of the analysis. In what follows, I’ll rethink many of the constitutive components of the ASMR+

MysticMountain -apparatus while plugging it in with some pertinent concepts of agential realism.

First of all, to understand *how* the ASMR+MysticMountain -apparatus constitutes, I go back to Barad’s notion of apparatuses as open-ended, boundary-making practices that are constructive of matter and meaning and productive of phenomena (2007,146). **Then what does the productive apparatus comprise in the case of ASMR+MysticMountain?** The configuration of the material-discursive systems at work in the ASMR+MysticMountain changes iteratively, but as delineated for this analysis, **it includes the spectator, the screen, the headphones, the Internet, YouTube, and the Mystic Mountain episode uploaded online. This composition works as a generative apparatus within the agential phenomenon of ASMR**. All of the components involved in the composition are already intra-acting with and within other apparatuses. That means that there is not one, but a multitude of apparatuses working in the ASMR+MysticMountain. The countless other entrances to the material-discursive apparatuses that the ASMR+MysticMountain is entangled with are, for example, other YouTube videos (including the intentional ASMR videos), the production of technology and electronics (including laptops and headphones), debate forums around ASMR (including news sites, blogs, research of the topic), other phenomena of visual and popular culture (other tv-series, other American cultural phenomena tracing back to 80’ and 90’), and so forth.

Agential Separability - The Making of Matter And Meaning

To recap: the configuration of the material-discursive systems (the spectator, the screen, the headphones, the internet, YouTube, and the Mystic Mountain episode uploaded online) works like an apparatus within the ASMR -phenomenon. The apparatus of ASMR+MysticMountain does not possess inherent boundaries - it *makes* the boundaries within and for the phenomenon. As a boundary-making practice, the apparatus of ASMR+MysticMountain is also responsive to the agential cuts. The agential cuts are ceaselessly reconfigured. Agential cuts produce the agential subject and the agential object and, with that, create a possibility for agential separability⁶⁰. Agential cuts enable the local causal structures that construct specific diffraction patterns through which the matter and meaning come to be in their peculiar ways.

“Last But Least”

An apparatus is not a phenomenon per se, but these two exist within each other. Phenomena are basic units of reality, “the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components” (Barad 2007, 33). The components and their relations reconfigure through agential practices: apparatuses. It is essential to remember that in terms of the chosen theory, an apparatus is not the same as an instrument. Thinking with the example of laboratory settings, an apparatus is not merely a piece

of scientific equipment (like microscope), but rather *the material-discursive, productive practices at work* within the composition of the researcher<>instrument<>measured object⁶¹. To put simply, in the case of online-ASMR, productive practices (the apparatus) is conducted by the spectator<>screen<>video. Or, when turning tables in the spirit of agential realism, I might also say that the apparatus is the screen<>video<>spectator, or spectator<>video<>screen, or video<>screen<>spectator. Changing the order or the words changes my understanding of it, and that is an important cognition when critically considering the workings of material-discursive practices. For a reader familiar with the Western writing system, where the text is arranged, written and read from left to right, the order of the words does make a difference. It is the material-discursive production of differences that matters here. A different *value*, a different *agentic potential*, is embedded in the order of words. This is true in the very construction of sentences⁶², and it also applies in the construction of ingredient lists, for example. All industrially produced goods have their ingredients listed from the most dominant towards the least. The appellation video<>screen<>spectator is a weird combination of words, and when read from left to right, it translates a bit like a list, although the 'equal to' marks (which indicate intra-action) obscure this impression. The role of the video in the workings of the apparatus feels more meaningful when the word 'video' starts the phrase. **What changes is my understanding**

about this specific phenomenon - every insight that comes to be, all theorizing, is a shaping of dynamics, and importantly, all material-discursive practices always also entail constitutive exclusions.⁶³ That is, "last but not least", what ever the context, is more or less a lie: sometimes the last is not the least, but it is never the same as the first. According to Barad, there are no separate materialities, and thus there is nothing cryptic in the relation of the materiality of language and materiality of the body (Barad 2007, 211). The agential causal structures emerge in entangled, intra-active practices (apparatuses composed of language, bodies, materials, objects, events, momentums etc.), through which the reality comes to be.

Apparatuses ≠ Passive Material Arrangements Between Discrete Human Actors

Changing the order of the words is to create another hypothetical apparatus: another productive practice of matter and meaning.⁶⁴ And this is indeed how the agency shifts within phenomena: through agential cuts. An agential cut is a causal structure through the measuring instrument (effect) and the measured object (cause) (Barad 2007, 146). If the apparatus is replaced with a different one, a corresponding change occurs in the agential cut: a different delineation of object and observing agencies is enacted, a different causal structure emerges by the cut. In short, different agential cuts produce different phenomena.⁶⁵ (Barad 2007, 173-75.)

The apparatus within the phenomenon is a co-constitutive part of the very emergence of the phenomenon. That is, *the configuration of material-discursive systems of the ASMR+MysticMountain is an open-ended apparatus reproducing agential intra-actions*. This means that depending on the situation, the seemingly separated, differentially materializing elements/entities/actors/parts within the phenomenon (e.g. the spectator, the screen, YouTube etc.), as well as their attributes, such as human/nonhuman/animate/inanimate, are enacted by agential cuts. The agential cuts do not, however, change the condition of intra-activity: none of the entangled components (video, screen, spectator) precede each other as ontologically distinctive entities, no matter how they are arranged in these appellations.

Let's make a thought experiment about the workings of video<>screen<>spectator. In the ASMR+MysticMountain -apparatus the agential cut marks the spectator as agentially separated, allowing a local causal structure to emerge. This happens, for example, when the energy of the sound waves (agential subject) vibrates the spectator/experiencer's eardrums (agential object). Or, when the photons of light (agential subject) reach the eyes (agential object) as one's gaze is directed towards the screen of a laptop. That is, there is a direction in the transmission of energy, a local causal effect, within the phenomenon. However, the spectator/experiencer does not preexist the event of listening, they do not preexist the headphones, the screen or the video, and thus their whole becoming

is intra-active. Similarly, YouTube does not preexist the ASMR sensation, the ASMRist does not preexist the spectator, and I, as much involved in the matter when writing this, do not preexist the ASMR phenomenon, and so forth and so forth. None of these actors emerge as separate of each other. **Rather, they constitute each other, and thus an absolute object and an absolute subject outside of intra-action is an impossibility.** Even when emerging in intra-action, the object and the subject are not absolute or ontologically distinctive, but agentially separable (Barad 2007, 208).

I want to make examples to demonstrate the workings of agential realist apparatuses in a way that I understand the concept. When "a person" is writing with "a pencil", the temporal agential subject might configure as the pencil-person, making the paper as an agential object, so that the agency is not always in accordance with the seeming "borders" of the "entities": The agential subject within an apparatus might as well constitute seemingly dissimilar elements, for example in a phenomenon where the material-discursively producing institutional arrangement "classroom-chair-surveillance" is a temporal agential subject, intra-acting with a "person" who enters the space and becomes an agential object. The agential subject of a "classroom-chair-surveillance" is acting on the agential object ("person"): their behavior is effected and controlled by the cameras, their bodily production is reconfigured in intra-action with the material-discursive conditions of the classroom (unwritten expectations of

demeanor, furniture arranged the space and the shaping the possible movement, one differentially set table that materially establishes power relations between the students and teacher etc.) not to mention the chair, which concretely demands the body to take a certain position and thus also a certain relation to the other human and nonhuman elements in the room. This is an example of materialization of power within material-discursive regulatory practices (apparatuses), which, importantly, are not end-to-end “human” practices, but material reconfigurations of reality within which the human and nonhuman elements are repeatedly reconstructed and emerging in intra-action.⁶⁶

Getting Post-Personal⁶⁷

“—phenomena are differential patterns of mattering (“diffraction patterns”) produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production where *apparatuses are not mere observing instruments but boundary drawing practice - specific material (re)configurings of the world - which come to matter.*” (Barad 2007, 140).

As noted earlier, there are correlative causal structures emergent within phenomena. My project here is to analyze ASMR with and through a theory that problematizes the anthropocentric worldview. Anthropocentrism is based on the ethos of humans as the most

agential participants in the shaping of reality – metaphysically discrete agents, swaggering around on top of a pyramid in an ethical and intellectual hierarchy. Assuming this, everything else except the spectator in the ASMR+Mystic Mountain -apparatus would be agentially compromised: indeed, everything else is not only “less conscious”, but “inanimate”. So, what is the agential importance of the screen of a laptop? Mystic Mountain episode, in turn, seems even more complex in its intangibility: it is bits of data somehow existing on a genius invention called the Internet. And Bob Ross? Is Bob, while mixing paints on their palette and talking softly, just an inert representation⁶⁸ of himself, captured on a tape decades ago?

[0:29>] “If this is your first time with us (*gentle, melodious voice, shrugging shoulders at the same time*), let me extend a personal invitation for you to drag out your brushes (*raising their brush*), paints and, and paint along with us each show, I think you’ll enjoy it.” (Bob Ross in the beginning of the Mystic Mountain episode¹, facing the camera)

The phrase “personal attention” is commonly used in the context of ASMR. On YouTube “personal attention” is a code for a typical set-up in the nurturing type of ASMR videos where the atmosphere is that of an intimate⁶⁹ encounter. In these videos the focus is in the spectator/experiencer, and there might be elements of role-play involved, such as

imitating a scene from a doctoral appointment or playing a facial masseur in a spa. Personal attention, as understood in the context of ASMR, is an obvious factor in the amiability of Bob Ross’ painting show. An ASMR enthusiast sums up why The Joy of Painting works for many in ASMR purposes in a writing titled ‘Bob Ross videos for ASMR’. On top of Ross’ soft, calm voice tone and their incredible concentration on the painting, the aspect of personal attention is mentioned: “Next we have personal attention, he acts almost as if he is just standing in your living room giving a one-on-one class about painting directly to you.”⁷⁰ In Barratt & Davis’s study, *personal attention* was the second most common ASMR trigger participants reported (2015, Table2). **Then what exactly is personal attention - or more importantly, how does it function?** In the case of the Mystic Mountain episode, the spectator (the experiencer/the ASMR tingle seeker) and Bob Ross are not even alive⁷¹ at the same time. “Being live” is a phrase often used to indicate the situation of streaming a video online “in real time” – that is, “without delay”. **Being alive or being live are not necessities for the “personal attention” in the case of ASMR.** In all online ASMR⁷², personal attention does not entail two humans being simultaneously aware of such an encounter, and regardless, the phenomenon called “personal attention” works. In other words, in the Mystic Mountain episode, likewise in the case of any YouTube video or tv-show where the host/performer is acting towards the camera and “taking contact”, personal attention does not

mean a face-to-face encounter with “another human subject” (often referred as intersubjectivity in theories that do not question the existence of ontologically individual entities). **That is, a concurrent, reciprocal “human” encounter is not necessary for the experience of personal attention.**

Thus, I argue that as the assumed “persons” (Bob Ross, the spectator) and all the other elements (the screen, the headphones, YouTube etc.) are material-discursively constitutive of each other, and as they do not possess inherent boundaries nor is their mattering (as humans or as parts of the apparatus) tied in time (in a linear sense⁷³). The concept of personal attention, in this context, should be extended towards something like *post-personal*⁷⁴ attention. Indeed, the ASMR+Mystic Mountain -apparatus has mostly “nonhuman” elements at work, as the spectator is the only “human” at play.

Not Representations, but Diffractions

Agential realism is a non-representationalist theory. Representationalism assumes that matter and meaning are produced and understood through reflection and that representations represent social and natural reality. Reflection is about mirroring, mimicking, and, ultimately a chase for the “authentic”. Diffraction, on the other hand, is about patterns of differences and relationalities - matter and meaning are thoroughly entangled, and their mutual production

68. See the critical diagnosis of representationalism and how it juxtaposes with Barad's 'diffraction', in chapters Workings of the ASMR+Mystic Mountain -apparatus and Intimacy Is a More-Than-Human Matter.

69. How intimacy works in the context of ASMR is a perplexing yet relevant question. Intimacy as a term indicates close emotional or physical proximity, affection and familiarity. See chapter ASMR as An Intimate Engagement

70. Why is Bob Ross Such a Common ASMR Trigger? (n.d.). Bob Ross Videos For ASMR. ASMR LAB. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <http://www.asmr-lab.com/asmr-videos/bob-ross-videos/>

71. What is to be alive? Take a "dead artist", for example: Vincent Van Gogh is not "a human", but a phenomenon fueling a lot of agential performances that have to do with money, politics, art, culture, theory, museums, oil paints, heritage, narratives etc., even when "they" are not "alive" anymore (or, perhaps in many ways, because of that). Indeed, as sci-fi as it sounds there are already companies that have productized the phenomenal nature of human: BBC online media writes with a title "How your digital self could 'live' on after you die", that "Your digital ghost could jump onto Facebook and join in a light-hearted argument about Friends, or post Instagram updates reminiscing about that Italian road trip you took with an ex-lover. Living a digital afterlife might sound strange -

a possible episode of satirical TV show *Black Mirror* perhaps - but some startups are investing serious time and money in the concept. *Eternime, for example, plans to combine your online footprint - made up of everything you've ever posted on social media, your thoughts, smartphone pictures and so on - with artificial intelligence to create a digital version of yourself.*" (Bearne, S. (2017, August 22). How

your digital self could live on after you die - BBC News. Retrieved 6 Apr 2018, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-40935790>

According to Barad, the distinction between animate and inanimate materia is so hard-wired in Western philosophy that the issue remains in many serious attempts to unravel the nature-culture dichotomy (2007, 419). I realized how discordant this separation actually is when accounting that some generally acknowledged, constitutive phenomena of reality, like atoms, are easily concerned as inanimate. This distinction itself comes to a dead end when given a second thought: how does the "liveliness" of "animate entities" then occur when "they" too "are" of this "dead materia"?

In 1973 Carl Edward Sagan delineated five different definitions of life from the perspective of physiology, biochemistry, genetics, metabolism and thermodynamics. All of these anchored their referent to carbon-based organisms. Ever since the definition of life or "aliveness" has become even more complex. (Barad 2008, 171.) The genetic modification producing forms

of "translife" by combining flora and fauna, achievements of computer science such as research on artificial intelligence (potentially leading to technological singularity), as well as the inventions of cellular agriculture (like cultured meat) do not only challenge the definition of life, but also make the ever-perplexing problem of consciousness more topical than ever (Barad 2008, 171).

72. "Live ASMR" is done, but naturally it requires the subscriber to be actively updated in order to be online at the moment when the video is streamed. For those adventurous tingle seekers, who are not too devoted to their favorite channels, live ASMR can be found on YouTube by filtering the video search to only show channels that are currently live streaming. VR ASMR is yet awaited, but undoubtedly coming (one example being a haptic glove, with which it is already possible to interact (intra-act) with virtual objects in manners that resemble "offline" physical experiences, like grasping: Retrieved 4 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK2y4Z5lkZ0&feature=youtu.be>

73. More about the nature of time in agential realist understanding in chapter Causality in ASMR.

happens in intra-action. (Barad 2007, 71, 89.) As far as I understand, reality is about contingencies that come to matter, real material differences, and an iteration of practices which entail inclusions and exclusions. **Thinking this way, Bob Ross on the Mystic Mountain is not a "representation"⁷⁵ of the "real" person. That is, this Ross is a *diffraction* of the phenomenon of which the "person / human" that once "lived" is of too - their existence is inherently entangled with one another - they are one, but not a singular phenomenon.** The "animate Bob Ross" is (was) not, by any means, *more real* than the Ross on the tape. This is interesting also from the spectator's point of view: it seems that they are the only "animate human being" in the situation of the ASMR+MysticMountain -apparatus. Everything else is something else: not representations of the studio, person, canvas and paints, nor "dead"⁷⁶ material arrangements of headphones, laptop and the screen, but *differential materializations of lively reality.*

Thinking with agential realism, the ASMR+MysticMountain -apparatus cannot be considered as a mere instrumental composition of the screen, headphones, YouTube, and the video, between those who are easily understood as the 'persons' (assumably the spectator and Bob Ross) in the situation of personal attention. The production of human and nonhuman is intra-active, and the ever-changing boundary that builds these categorizations is never casted in concrete. The elements (relata) entangled in a certain phenomenon do not preexist as separate from each other - their positions

materialize as such *exactly because of the intra-action*. Every single diffraction is a marking on the reality's body, every materialization matters in its own peculiar way and volume.

for me
there is no other.
because there is no default.
everyone
is
a variation of life.

Nayyriah Waheed (2013, 243)

74. Interestingly, Rosi Braidotti has used the term “post-personal” to describe the style of working against the writer/reader binary while doing qualitative research. See more: Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 139.

75. “Images or representations are not snapshots or depictions of what awaits us but rather traces of multiple practices of engagement” (Barad 2007, 53).

76. “Dead” is a fascinating term in a sense that to be dead, one has to have lived. When did the materia(lity) of the world die?

77. Barad’s frame of reference on touch and touching formulates in conversation with quantum physics and multiple theorists such as JL Nancy, Derrida, Haraway and Levinas. See: Barad (2012): ‘On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am’.

78. Many projects taking part of these theorizations aim to critically examine their oppressive structures, which are often entangled with touch and its workings. Interestingly, touch(ing) became extremely topical in everyday conversation and global politics from October 2017 onwards (in the West) as the normalization of sexual harassment and daily violations of personal integrity was brought into public discussion and judgement. The game changing avalanche started online from the campaign named #metoo by an American actress Alyssa Jayne Milano. Conversation on the matter is extensive. See for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cql0269k80xt/metoo-campaign> ; <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/metoo-sexual-assault-harassment-gender-equality-john-worboys-law-justice-a8170546.html>

79. Retrieved 20 Mar 2018 from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/touch?q=to+touch>

80. Retrieved 20 Mar 2018 from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/touch?s=t>

81. Electrons are particles on the “outskirts” of the atom, and atoms are composed of empty space mostly. Electromagnetic repulsion is what negatively charged particles are about when they “push each other away”. (Barad 2012, 3.)

82. Retrieved 20 Mar 2018 from: Dictionary.com

83. Retrieved 20 Mar 2018 from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>

84. BDI: “Beck Depression Inventory” (Barratt & Davis 2015, Section 1—demographics)

85. Nickname ‘rattterby88698’ citing their ASMR experiencing friend on Internet conversation thread about ASMR, when the phenomenon was still unnamed and very much undiscovered as a coherent sensation. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.steadyhealth.com/topics/weird-sensation-feels-good?page=2>

Touching(s)

“A common explanation for the physics of touching is that one thing it does not involve is ... well, touching” (Barad 2012, 3).

Touching touches the ASMR phenomenon in multiple manners. The ASMR videos are about touching, and the ASMR sensation in itself is touching, in both meanings of the word. *But what is to touch?* Barad⁷⁷ comments that there’s a long history of trying to enunciate what touch, as an essential issue of physics, actually entails (2012, 2, 11: n2). Indeed, touch as an object of study was taken up already by Aristotle, and it is today just as timely topic, not least amongst postcolonial and feminist scholars⁷⁸. The topical puzzles in contemporary quantum theories submit perplexing questions deeply related to touch, like those concerning quantum entanglements (Barad 2012, 2). Touching, in an immediate understanding, refers to two things. *Firstly*, ‘to touch’, from the instant of understanding, signifies the physical act related with the carnal knowledge and sensory tactile experience; touch is the palpable and tangible sense of being. Cambridge Dictionary⁷⁹ online delineates one meaning of ‘touch’ with the definition “of two or more things to be so close together that there is no space between; to be in contact”. The world’s largest digital dictionary⁸⁰ defines ‘touch’ in corresponding ways: it means “to come into or be in contact with”, and “the act or state of touching; state or fact of

being touched”, as well as “that sense by which anything material is perceived by means of physical contact”. Ironically, from the perspective of physics, touching is not a very concrete contact after all. Indeed, touching is an electromagnetic interaction: “a repulsion between electron clouds that do not so much “touch” in the sense of encountering each other’s boundaries through physical contact as sense one another’s electron clouds” (Barad 2007, 411: n25). The more the distance is reduced, the stronger the repulsion: two electrons⁸¹ cannot directly be touching each other. *Secondly*, ‘touching’, is also used to qualify something emotionally “moving” and “affecting”⁸², it is “to influence someone or something emotionally, or cause feelings of sympathy in someone”⁸³. Barad would probably say that the mentioned “mental” and “physical” formats of touch are diffractive materializations of the phenomenon. That is, to touch and be touched in a mental or emotional way is also a material doing, a configuration of bodily being (becoming). Mika Elo explicates that the forms of touch are multiple, and thus “touch needs to be understood in a wide sense as a set of processes taking place in regard to both the physical and mental senses of touch” (2012a, 4). According to Elo, we should acknowledge the intratwined processes of touch that are “technological”, “conceptual”, “affective” and “sensuous” (2012a, 4).

Elo compares touch and vision with an example of seeing a stone versus touching it (2012a). They state that the tangibility and **immediateness** of touch gives it a certain

trustworthiness and reliability. A sense of distance remains when seeing a stone “out there”, but when the stone is touched, it is “right here” and touching back (Elo 2012a, 2). A stone, which is only seen, can be an artful illusion: stone-looking props might be realized to be plastic only when touching reveals the materiality. “It is due to this fullness of touching that the **tactile metaphor of “grasping” can stand for “fully understanding something”** (Elo 2012a, 2, bolding mine). The conceptions of *touching as entanglement* and *touching as knowledge* are finely tuned by María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, 118) as they adduce that

“– engagements do not so much entail that knowing will be enhanced, more given, or immediate through touch than through seeing, rather, they call attention to the dimension of knowing, which is not elucidating, but about affecting, touching and being touched, for better or for worse. **About involved knowing, knowledge that cares**” (bolding mine).

However, touch is also very ambivalent in a sense that it does not always entail something good: connected bodily experience does not necessarily *improve* caring, nor does the reduced distance assure that predominant oppressive configurations are questioned, or even resisted (Bellacasa 2017, 112). According to Barad (2012, 2) knowledge practices, like theorizing, observing, and experimenting, are about being in touch. Touching, like observing as a

research practice, is to “become entangled”: this is what makes both touching and knowing deeply ethical matters (Barad 2007, 453). A pivotal point to remember here is that the objective referent can never be a seeming individual object, but a **phenomenon** (Barad 2007, 244). When I contemplate touch and touching through and with these notions it means that even as a “direct material engagement with the world”, similar to knowing, **to touch something is not an ultimate discovery or exposure of an authentic essence of the real, as if the real itself was existing outside of the touch, waiting to be found** (Barad 2007, 49). **Instead, touching *per se* should be thought of as a phenomenon, a reworking of boundaries, an intra-active, entangled practice – (re)configuring of the relations, through which markings are left on the (human and nonhuman) bodies-in-production.**

“Toucher” is not an autonomous agent, “a person” in conventional sense, and “touched” is not a passive, discrete receiving object. The “toucher” and “touched” are not even *roles* someone or something has. Instead, they are materializations of the shifting agency within a phenomenon. Agential separability provides a possibility for a temporal agential subject and a temporal agential object. **“Touching” is the phenomenon within which the “toucher” and “touched” are produced and re-produced in their intra-action.** On the Intoxicating Sounds video, this means that the objects (tea box, sleeping mask, comb etc.) and fingers are

in an agential play (the play is the workings of the apparatus), where the reconfiguring of agential object and subject iteratively changes their positions as touchers and touched within their mutual constitution of the phenomenon of touching. Importantly, agency is not distributed evenly to “entities”: sometimes fingers and some of the household items form a temporal agential object (toucher), and that which is touched by this phenomenal unity becomes the agential object (like a part of the velvety fabric underneath).

Let’s Get Tingly

“Tingling is a bodily sensation experienced under a variety of conditions from everyday experiences to experimental and therapeutic situations” (Tihanyi, Ferentzi et al., 2017, Abstract).

A special kind of pleasurable tingly sensation is always mentioned in the definitions of ASMR. Indisputably, the tingles are a very important diffraction in the materialization of the phenomenon. According to Barratt & Davis’ study, 80% of the studied reported that ASMR has a positive effect on their mood (2015). **Half of the participants in the study said that engaging with ASMR improved their mood, even when they did not experience tingles**, whereas 30% proclaimed that the tingles were pivotal to mood improvement. The study looked into the relation of the status of depression (high, medium, or low as defined by the BDI⁸⁴)

and time factors (before, during, immediately following, and three hours after engaging with ASMR). The results showed that participants felt best while engaging with ASMR media, and the mood then steadily decreased within several hours afterwards. Participants with more severe depression felt their mood declining more rapidly. **However, the correlation between BDI scores and the change in mood score immediately after the ASMR experience suggest that people struggling with depression get the greatest benefit from engaging in ASMR.** 69% of those who scored moderate or severe depression said that they use ASMR to ease their symptoms. (Barratt&Davis, 2015, Figure 2: BDI graph.)

“I theorize that certain people have developed to be very empathic and therefore psychologically programmed to get an endorphin high when someone else is paying loving, tender attention to something.” – ratterby88698⁸⁵

Another recent study⁸⁶ looked into the workings of default mode network (DMN: a large scale brain network of interacting brain regions) in the case of ASMR (2017). The study revealed significant functional differences in the DMN between the control group and the individuals experiencing ASMR (Smith, Fredborg et al. 2017, Abstract). The results indicate that the DMN of those who experience ASMR showed significantly less functional connectivity than that of the con-

86. Smith, S. D., Fredborg, B. K., & Kornelsen, J. (2017). An examination of the default mode network in individuals with autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR). *Social Neuroscience*, 12(4), 361-365. doi:10.1080/17470919.2016.1188851. Accessed 12 Mar 2018 from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470919.2016.1188851>

87. Occipital lobe: "The posterior portion of each cerebral hemisphere, concerned with the interpretation of visual sensory impulses" (Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014. Retrieved 13 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/occipital+lobe>)
Frontal lobe: "The frontal lobes constitute two thirds of the human brain, yet the functions performed by them remained mysterious for a long time. – Recent advances have uncovered important roles for the frontal lobes in a multitude of cognitive processes, such as executive function, attention, memory, and language. The importance of the frontal lobes in processes underlying affect, mood, personality, self-awareness, as well as social and moral reasoning, is also a renewed area for research." (Chayer & Freedman, 2001, 1: 547. Accessed online 12 Mar 2018 from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11910-001-0060-4>)
Temporal lobe: "This lobe is the location of the primary auditory cortex, which is important for interpreting the sounds and language we hear. The temporal lobes are involved with memory and hearing, and process information from our senses of smell, taste, and sound. The primary function of the temporal lobes is to process auditory sounds." (Abhang, Gawali & Mehrotra 2016, 1.3.3. Accessed online 12 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/temporal-lobe>)

88. I put quotations to remark that "activity" and "passivity" are completely relational matters, which depend on what type of being is set as a default for the comparison. Here, the spectrum appears to be built on the bases of doings (beings) of "a human subject", so that passivity is towards the other end of the spectrum as a state of "not doing much at all", whereas on the other end there are some "high intense activities" or "peak performances".

89. Comment on an online thread concerning ASMR, when it was still unnamed and unexamined sensation. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.steadyhealth.com/topics/weird-sensation-feels-good>

90. "Afferent" means sensations or neurological occurrences that are moving inwards towards the central nerve system; "peripheral" refers to external stimulation or peripheral pathology (peripheral means "outermost", "borderline" or "outskirts" - "near the surface or outside of it") and "cognitive" / "central" factors mean those that are postulated to origin from within, for example, the experiencer's attention and expectation. Sources: Tihanyi, Ferentzi, Beissner, Köteles (2017, Introduction) & <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/afferent?s=t>; <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/peripheral> Retrieved: 28 Mar 2018.

trols. More over, the DMN of individuals with ASMR demonstrated *increased connectivity between regions in the occipital, frontal, and temporal cortices*⁸⁷. **This atypical functional connectivity** suggests that **the unique sensory-emotional ASMR experience is associated with "a blending of multiple resting-state networks"** (Smith, Fredborg et al., 2017, abstract. Bolding mine). Barratt & Davis present the **similarities between the experiences of ASMR and flow (defined as "a deeply immersive sense of relaxation and engagement") are the "sense of deep relaxation" and "well-being", as well as the experience of time "passing at an altered rate"** (2017 Introduction). The most notable dissimilarity then is that flow state characteristically occurs during an "active" performance, whereas ASMR requires the experiencer to be in a "passive" position (Barratt & Davis 2017, Introduction).⁸⁸

The researchers remark that where ASMR experiencers' DMN seems to function atypically (statistically), they would not categorize ASMR condition to belong to psychopathology (scientific study of mental disorders). Indeed, ASMR media is mostly used to relax and cope with stress and depression in a mental health supportive manner (Smith, Fredborg et al., 2017, 364).

"It is like this tingling in my scalp. The only way I can describe it is like a silvery sparkle through my head and brain... almost like a sort of head orgasm, but there is nothing sexual about it." – bean487⁸⁹

Tihanyi, Ferentzi, Beissner & Köteles' paper "The neuropsychophysiology of tingling" summarizes the most recent scientific knowledge on the tingling sensation and its concomitants from the perspective of neurophysiology and psychology (2017). The article illuminates the psychophysiological background of tingling phenomena and **the complexity of the interaction** between the "afferent", "peripheral" and higher "cognitive" or "central" factors involved (2017).⁹⁰ Tihanyi, Ferentzi et al., (2017) state, that while skin related sensations, including pain, are traditionally put into the exteroception category ("relating to stimuli that are external to an organism"⁹¹), the contemporary neuroanatomical research has testified the matter to be more complex. Indeed, the modern understanding counts pain and certain skin related modalities, e.g. affective touch and thermoreception, to be more interoceptive ("relating to stimuli produced within an organism"⁹²), than exteroceptive. Nonetheless of this categorial shift, the study presents that the **"exteroceptive tactile information is tightly integrated with interoceptive modalities"** (e.g., proprioception), and that one's perception is not always in accordance with the intensity or presence of an external stimulation (2017, Introduction, bolding mine). **That is, the susceptibility of skin-related sensations is sensitive to expectations**⁹³ (Tihanyi, Ferentzi et al., 2017).

To sum up, the results of these studies on ASMR propose that engaging in ASMR has positive effects on mood, especially for

those who experience tingles, and for those suffering from depression. The tingly ASMR sensation seems to have to do with many sensorial and affective functionalities in brain. Tingling phenomenon is a captivating object of investigation from the Baradian prospect as well. **Like other sensorial experiences, tingling can be seen as an example of intra-action.**

As intra-action, the tingling sensation is about co-constitutive relationship between the “body” and “the stimuli” (let it be “internal” or “external”⁹⁴). The *causal structures* between exteroceptive and interoceptive factors, as well as the intra-relationality of the “mental”, “bodily”, “internal” or “external” aspects are perplexing also for neuroscientists. However, it seems evident that the very **entanglement** of the mentioned factors is imperative for the emergence of tingling sensations. Causal intra-actions entail marks left on bodies; “bodies differentially materialize as particular patterns of the world as a result of the specific cuts and reconfigurings that are enacted” (Barad 2007, 176). As an example of intra-action, the tingling sensation questions the constitution of a “human body” as a seemingly discrete organism that operates in an “external” reality. **Moreover, the tingles are characteristically skin-related sensations, which means that they happen on the conceived “borders” of the body. The production of borders is one of interesting issues in agential realism.**

Interiors and Exteriors in Making

“Human bodies and human subjects do not exist as such; nor are they mere end products. Humans are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming” (Barad 2007, 149-150).

Barad pronounces that while scientific realists and social constructionists have different beliefs about the ways they think knowledge is produced, both parties share the representationalist understanding that is grounded on an atomistic worldview (2007, 48). Democritus’s theory of atoms and the void paved the way for an idea which has become deeply established in thinking within Western cultures: the idea that there is a gap between the representation and the represented. That then raised the question of which representation is “real”. Citing Rouse, Barad notes that the Cartesian distinction between “internal” and “external” - their insistence that we have a direct access to our thoughts which we lack towards the world outside of us - has also played a prominent role in the constitution of representationalism (1996). According to Barad, the problems of representationalism are a) the metaphysical supposition that the world constitutes individually existing entities with separately determinate properties b) that it fails to account for the practices through which the representations are produced (Barad 2007, 48-55).

“There is no geometrical relation of absolute exteriority between a “causal apparatus” and a “body effected,” nor an idealistic collapse of the two, but rather an ongoing topological dynamics that enfolds the spacetime manifold upon itself, a result of the fact that the apparatuses of bodily production (which are themselves phenomena) are (also) part of the phenomena they produce.” (Barad 2003, 826.)

Barad’s conception of causal structures, as well as interiors and exteriors, differ significantly from some commonly recognized formulations in cultural and social constructionism, which, according to Barad, rely on a geometrical understanding of an absolute exteriority (2007). In such theorizations culture is concerned as an external force producing or acting on passive nature. In some more delicate rhetoric contemplations nature is thought as being shaped or inscribed by culture. Barad brings front that the problem is whether nature exists in any pre-discursive form (2007). If yes, then its anterior existence is outside of constructionism, and thus it marks the limitations of the theory (which sounds like a paradox). If nature does not preexist, and is produced by culture, how could it become ontologically distinctive if the culture is the very condition for its existence? The geometry of an absolute interiority is not more attractive for Barad either, thus it is just another form of idealism in the reduction of the effect to its cause, nature to culture, or matter to language. (Barad 2007, 176-77.) Rather,

Barad proposes an alternative option for an absolute exterior and interior: a dynamic, reiteratively changing topology⁹⁵. According to Barad, “*agential separability* is a matter of *exteriority within phenomena*” (Barad 2007, 176-77). The concept of ‘**exteriority-within**’ offers an intriguing perspective on ASMR tingles.

First of all, for Barad, an absolute metaphysical “outside” is unreal. Agential separability is not ontological separability, as Einstein would have it (they believed that there is a possibility for an absolute exteriority, and that is what would ensure the objectivity of science), but the making of agency within phenomena (Barad 2007, 340). Apparatuses are responsible for the agential cuts that create agential separability. Reality comes to be through agential separability; real material differences emerge within phenomena. The distinctions are never absolute, thus there is no absolute exteriority, but an exterior-within: local, temporal interiors and exteriors. A simplified example of an agential cut could be a situation where the triggers on an ASMR video are the “cause” and the tingles are the “effect” (situational causal structure). In this situation the agential subject is the video and the triggers, and the agential object is the body (subject and object made by an agential cut). However, acknowledging the proposals on paper about the neuropsychophysiology of tingling⁹⁶, the interoceptive stimuli, such as the experiencer’s expectations⁹⁷, are at least as important than the “external” stimuli in the productions of tingly sensations if not more. Barad’s term ‘**exteriority-within-phenomena**’

91. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018 from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/exteroceptive>

92. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018 from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/interoceptive>

93. For example, the so called ‘illusory touch’ (creating a visual illusion of touch) is broadly used as a model to understand medically obscure symptoms in somatoform disorders, in which the person experiences physical symptoms which are unexplained by any neurological or medical condition. (Tihanyi, Ferentzi et al. 2017, Introduction.)

94. Importantly, “internal” and “external” here are understood from the “perceptual scale” of “human.” Go “smaller” and you can investigate the assumed inside and outside of a cell within a “human”; or go “bigger” and investigate the unstable, yet material-discursively constitutive delineation of a city the “human” lives in: where, what and how the border crops out the regions that are concerned as the outskirts. Or, lets use more imagination and consider the internal and external from a more topological, material-discursive perspective with an example of ASMR. In this example, the “human” would be a part of an online ASMR community as an ASMRtist with lots of subscribers. One day they upload a video where they say that they have decided to get into the process of fixing their body to match

their inner identity (which is not inner in a sense of being exclusively “their business”, but always reconfiguring in intra-action), and will pursue a sex re-assignment surgery. This causes some of their subscribers to get upset and unsubscribe to their channel, whilst on the other hand many new subscribers come along and show support. The material-discursive constitution of the communities the ASMRtist is a part of has now changed, and the announcement has caused the ASMRtist, and their body, to be “internal” (included) in some discourses (like those concerning trans rights, for example; more over, there is a big subculture of people going through their transition on YouTube) and “externalized” (excluded) from some groups (like the non-determined group of ASMR subscribers with intolerant or strictly heteronormative attitude to sex or gender). This is a material-discursive reconfiguring of a particular “human” (body-in-production) - a reconfiguring of their entanglements and their constitution in intra-action with other “humans” and “nonhumans”, apparatuses and phenomena.

95. Topology, in contrast to geometry, thinks spatiality as a manifold of connectivity and boundaries. Geometry, which is especially concerned with enclosures, such as shapes and sizes, could not fully contemplate cosmological phenomena like wormholes, which are an example of two points geometrically located far apart, but when thought topologically, the points are actually in a proximate relation to one another. (Barad 2007, 451.)

96. Tihanyi, Ferentzi, Beissner & Köteles (2017)

97. Here, “expectation” is not thought as a mere human psychological matter, but as a material-discursive phenomenon which emerges in intra-action. Expectation is one example of the ways that the ever-changing and reconfiguring “human” body is produced in entanglement with other (human and nonhuman) bodies-in-production.

98. As mentioned earlier, this perception is radically different from the more familiar Cartesian understanding, which grounds on the distinction between a discrete object and subject.

is the **reworking of an agential boundary, the making-of an inside and an outside**. Agency does not belong to separate or preexisting entities but is emergent and functioning only through and within the co-productive relations⁹⁸ (Barad 2007, 140).

*“When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer. And if the **two hands belong to one person**, might this not enliven the uncanny **sense of otherness of the self**, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation of contact, the greeting of the stranger within? So much happens in a touch: an infinity of others - other beings, other spaces, other times - are aroused.”* (Barad 2012, 1. Bolding and italics mine).

So, what if ASMR tingles are not understood as simply a physical-emotional reaction to outside stimuli? Aiming to understand the ‘exteriority-within’ in terms of ASMR, I must concern that ASMR tingles are not only about the intra-active relation of *the body* (agential object) and *the triggers on the video* (agential subject), but also about **the exteriorities within the body**. When contemplating the “human body-in-production”, the boundary-questioning “extensions”, like mobile phones and tools, are somehow more easily concerned than the boundary-questioning practices that “push

inwards” the bodily boundaries, or, more accurately, question the “solidness of a person” to begin with. For me, the most intelligible way to understand the exteriorities-within in terms of a “human” body is to acknowledge that “our” body is approximately 65% water, composed as much of bacteria as of “human” cells, and “our” lungs need to be filled with air if “we” ought to stay “alive” - and more over, “we” change redundantly. So what is a human after all? **“Human” is not a closed system or an independent entity – “human” is not even permeable, but intra-actively co-constituted as of the world in its very becoming as a phenomenon**. To understand the workings of the exteriority-within in our ASMR example, lets note that in the tingly sensations, the interoceptive aspects play a fundamental role. *The ASMR experienter’s expectations matter and make a difference* in 1) their decision to engage in the ASMR video, and 2) when their expectations to partake in the emergence of the ASMR tingles. That is, the expectations towards ASMR are already an example of intra-action which has left a marking on the body and thus *reconfigured* (changed) the body (as far as I understand, the exterior-within is not a static feature, but a functional condition which changes according the intra-actions). The expectations result from engaging with something (e.g. a conversation with a friend who explains watching an ASMR video), which is at the same a reconfiguring of the person / the body (now their material-discursive configuration is marked by an experience which is internalized as expectation - a diffraction that

matters). I must revise the given example about the intra-active production of the ASMR tingles: The body (agential object) <> the conversation about ASMR (agential subject) <> the body+expectation (exteriority-within) <> the body (agential subject) <> ASMR video online (agential object > agential subject) <> the body+tingles (agential object). **In other words, sensorial experiences are about causal, intra-active entanglements *within the body* (exteriority within) and with other bodies in production.**

Thinking with agential realism, ASMR tingles are co-constitutive with all the other becomings of ASMR as a material-discursive phenomenon: **the bodily experience cannot be ontologically separated from the triggers, the situation, or other material-discursive elements working in the arrangements of apparatuses** (including the screen, the computer, the headphones, YouTube and so on). Boundaries, meanings, properties, and marks on bodies are produced by agential cuts in intra-actions. “The entanglements we are a part of reconfigure our beings, our psyches, our imaginations, our institutions, out societies” (Barad 2007, 383).

Not All The Bodies Produced Are Human Bodies

“— causal intra-actions need not involve humans. Indeed, it is through such practices that the differential boundaries between humans and nonhumans, culture and nature, science and the social, are constituted” (Barad 2007, 140).

Why is “human” in quotations? Thinking alongside agential realism, the constitution of “human” is not to be taken for granted. In an immediate understanding the borders of the body seem clear and indisputable – people end at their skins, right? Reliance on the visual clues⁹⁹, however, is misleading. Barad notes that the bodily boundaries, “including their seeming visual self-evidence, is a result of repetition of culturally and historically specific bodily performance” (2007, 155). Barad writes that a wide range of disciplines¹⁰⁰ have called into question the taken-for-granted nature of the boundaries of bodies (especially those of humans), and along with that, criticized the mechanistic comprehension of embodiment¹⁰¹ (2007, 155).

“Touch is sentience at the limits, and thus an exemplary figure of reconfiguration” (Elo 2012a, 2).

Talking of the human body, skin *seems* (based on visual clues that form the basis for everyday empirical evidence), as a perceptual organ, and also *feels* in order to cut “individuals” out of their “surroundings”. The relationship between the “cause/stimuli/trigger” and “effect/reaction” in many skin-related perceptual sensations is not easy to define, nor does the actual experience (such as phantom pain) always locate “inside” one’s assumable “outlines”; *within the taken-for-granted bodily borders*¹⁰². Nobel laureate physicist Richard Feynman, who studied the

physical mechanisms of sight, questioned the accurateness of the seeming borders of objects previously in the 60’s. The enhancement of contours in the workings of visual systems of some animals, e.g. humans, has caused humans to stress the outlines: “In order to draw an object, we have only to draw its outline. How used we are to looking at pictures that have only the outline!” (Feynman 1964, as cited in Barad 2007, 156).

But what is an outline? There is no actual line around objects, but the notion of outline arises from visual contrast between light and dark, or the seeming edge between one color and another. Nevertheless that everyday vision has deluded us, physics has affirmed that the conceived borders are not determinate; neither ontologically, nor visually, when examining attentively enough. (Barad 2007, 154.) When an ASMRtist’s fingers touch a tea box¹⁰³, on the “interface” between the box and hand, there is not sharply determinate number of atoms belonging to the hand, nor an obvious number of atoms constituting the box. Moreover, the diffraction pattern visible in physical optics has shown that there actually is not a sharp edge surrounding objects, but a series of light and dark bands¹⁰⁴ (Barad 2007, 156). Interestingly, Bohr explained the theory of complementarity through a layman metaphor of a person navigating in a dark room with a stick. Through this metaphor they also address the issue of boundaries of bodies. When a stick is held loosely the sense of touch expounds it as an object. However, when the stick is held firmly a sensation

of the stick as a foreign body is lost and the impression of touch is localized at the point where the stick meets something in the room. That is, the stick cannot be simultaneously used as an instrument of observation and be observed itself (complementarity; the mutual exclusivity of two different practices). Also, the perceived bodily boundaries are extended when the interface migrates from the hand to the tip of the stick. As mentioned earlier, Barad states, that the conceived boundaries of bodies are also produced and promoted through specific, cultural and historical bodily performances (2007, 155). Barad explicates the notions further with phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ideas, who proposed that the successful performance of everyday bodily tasks (such as getting used to wearing glasses, driving a car, or using the stick) is to incorporate instruments, extend the scope of touch and to be transplanted into objects¹⁰⁵. Barad sees this figurative example not as a mere example of human experience, distinct from the “nature of external reality”; but as being about the differential configurations of material embodiments (“humans” and “other than humans”) - a reworking of ontological bodies and boundaries. (Barad 2007, 154-59.)

“Direct material engagement” is not only happening in cases like the hand holding the stick. *Touching* is also involved in the disturbance coming from the headphones and trembling the ear drums, following the scene of fingers pressing against the sticky plastic front of a sleeping mask on an ASMR video. Indeed, I cannot think of a situation of *not being in touch*

99. I briefly note the problematics of “visual” in the Introduction.

100. Barad (2007) mentions neuro-physiology, anthropology, feminism, physics, phenomenology, psycho-analysis, as well as queer, science, postcolonial and disability studies scholars (155).

101. These contemplations are very fascinating especially for cyborg theorists (Barad 2007, 155). The classical thought experiment “Ship of Theseus” is an interesting one, when mooting the constitution of “a human”: consider a technologically “enhanced” human (where more and more biological body parts would be replaced with prosthesis), or just the fact that a majority of human cells recur during a lifetime.

102. See the See the chapter Interiors and Exteriors in Making.

103. Intoxicating Sounds: [2:52 >] Haptic examination: opening the tea box, tapping around the edges with tips of the nails and fingering the tea packages in glossy wrappings. See: Transcriptions.

104. Barad exemplifies the diffraction wave pattern with a photograph of a razor blade illuminated by a monochromatic light source. Diffraction fringes appear as light lines in dark regions, where there should not be any shadows. That is, the indeterminate outline makes the delineation of the “real” boundary of the object very tricky. (Barad 2007, 156, 75-76.)

105. This conversation could be taken all the way to the issues concerning “normal embodiment” vs. differently abled bodies and their embodiment with objects, prosthesis and technology. See Barad 2007, 157-59.

106. Barad (2007, 76-77) ; Sound is a Pressure Wave. (n.d.) Retrieved June 11th, 2017, from <http://www.physics-classroom.com/class/sound/Lesson-1/Sound-is-a-Pressure-Wave> ; Elert, G. The Nature of Sound. Retrieved June 11th, 2017, from <http://physics.info/sound/>

107. *Color*, as a basic issue in art and also in art education, would be a similarly interesting matter to inquire in regards to agential realist intrarelational ontology: the colors of objects (local colors), color as light (electromagnetic radiation) and the perception of color in the eyes and in the brain are phenomena producing in intra-action. The “human experience” of seeing colors, similar to hearing or tingly sensations, again, emerges in intra-action of the “exteroceptive” and “interoceptive” factors.

108. “– life, whether organic, or inorganic, animate or inanimate, is not an unfolding algorithm” (Barad 2012, 2). The human animal as an isolated entity is also questioned in other fields of natural sciences, for example in contemporary studies of genomics. John Dupré is a philosopher of biology who revises conventional accounts of evolution by stating that in the light of contemporary research, genes are not a code that just actualizes, but genomics work in a non-deterministic manner. See more: John Dupré on Genomics / philosophy bites. (2014, September 29). Accessed online 28 Mar 2018 from: https://secure-hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/3/a/7/3a7f7c040758d666/John_Dupre_on_Genomics.mp3?c_id=7672293&expiration=1522240808&hwt=c88eaf1d2e649233a4bd4ec65aee0495

in one way or another. There is *always* a part of “me” in touch with “*something*”: floor, bed, mug, cat, friend, or the clothes on me. Unless, you might think, in a very unlikely situation where I am *floating* in a space where there is no gravity. Well, there is still *something*. Even mysterious dark matter can be contemplated as some uncanny sort of matter. The air I breathe is a medium as well, and it is trespassing through me, *touching me, making me* in intra-action, at this very moment. And, when there is air in my lungs, what am I? I am of the air, the air is of me, “my” borders are unstable, my being is an exteriority-within. There is no “me” outside of intra-action. There is no other way of *being* than *touching* - touching is intra-action.

“Reality is a process of intra-active touch. Interdependency is intrarelational. As it undermines the grounds of the invulnerable, untouched position of the master-subject agent that appropriates inanimate worlds, this ontology carries ethical resonance. –This is thinking touch as world-making” (Bellacasa 2017, 114-15).

Touching Matters Are Bodies-In-Production

As noted earlier, *apparatuses* are the ultimate boundary-making practices; constructive of matter and meaning and productive of phenomena (Barad 2007, 146). Thinking of touching and agential realism through one another, I suggest that touch (hand-stick) is a part of the

workings of apparatuses within the phenomenon (person-room-stick-navigation). An apparatus enacts a local causal structure within the phenomenon (person-room-stick-navigation) and this causes a renegotiation of the borders of bodies in production (hand / stick > personstick / room). Agential cuts create the agential separability within a specific intra-action, like in touching, for instance. When the hand holds the stick loosely, the contact, the becoming-with, creates the parties (hand / stick) as separate *within* the phenomenon of touching. Bellacasa, following Barad’s harvest from the epistemic of quantum physics, states that in the encounter, in the *meeting* that is being, the physical universe is as much the agent as the knower, there is no separation between *observing* and *touching* (2017, 114). That is, when holding the stick firmly, the personstick (observer) becomes as an agential subject, and the agential object is the now the floor (observed) that the personstick meets. That is, agential cuts do not “respect” assumed bodily boundaries, but remake them as the “bodies” are themselves produced in the material-discursive practices of intra-actions. Consider an example of a “person”, a “stick” and a “dog”. “They” can form a functional, sensing phenomenon, within which there is an repeated remaking of agential boundaries, sometimes so that the temporal agential subject can be the unity of a dogstickperson.

Lets think of the situation of engaging with the MysticMountain episode. In this case, the apparatus we’d like to contemplate involves

you, the screen, the headphones, and the Mystic Mountain episode uploaded online, all being part of ASMR as an open-ended, material-discursive phenomenon. When you get curious and push the play button on YouTube you become the spectator (agential subject). Bob Ross natters to your ears as the brush is doing its thing on the canvas [10:40>] “So just a little white. Little circles, tiny little circles (*brushing*). Shoot, maybe there’s one right here, I don’t know. I don’t know (*with singsongy tone of voice, the brush goes whoosh whoosh on the canvas*)”. The apparatus at work enacts an agential cut again and again. The headphones and the energy coming to your ears (agential subject) changes your position within the apparatus, and as the tingles go down your spine (local causal effect) you become the agential object. In agential realism, as far as I’m concerned,

the “agential subject” does not mean “an entity” which is “conscious” (in a traditional humanist sense) of its agential position, but the agential subject and agential object are the workings of agency in its materiality, and as such they are temporal compositions of “human” and “nonhuman” as well as “animate” and “inanimate” materia. That is, the productive, agential, temporal borders emerge within causal intra-actions. **Touching matters are bodies in production. Agency is produced in the remaking of boundaries of bodies within material-discursive practices, of which touch is an ubiquitous example. Touch and borders, the sense of self and self’s separation from another, are profoundly entangled. Touching as knowing and knowing as material engagement within the world are sisters - not the same as such, but diffracting practices of becoming in intra-action.**



Touching Soundscape

Sound Is a Material Matter

[0:15>] “So today I’d like to do a relaxing sounds video ...(*swoosh - stroking the fabric slowly*)... to help us be more present; focused not on the words but on the sounds... so there will be very little speech.” (Intoxicating Sounds ASMR)

As the title of the video ‘ASMR: intoxicating sounds’, and the name of the channel ‘Gentle-Whispering’ imply, the specific soundscape, the act and sense of hearing, and the emotive aspect of ASMR are all features of the phenomenon. Object/materia -based videos (type2) are often conducted with limited or indistinguishable narration, or completely without it. In these cases, the triggering sounds and visuals are created merely by playing very attentively with different materials and articles. Likewise in the case of most of the ASMR videos, the viewer/spectator/experiencer is advised to use headphones for binaural audio sensations, and the sounds are created using a 3D-microphone for omnidirectional sounds. The soundscape of the Intoxicating Sounds video is composed of a manifold of elements intra-acting: humming background noise (“white noise”), swooshing sound emerging from hands encountering the velvety canvas, the differential tones configuring from the differential ways of touching different objects and materials, occasional whispered comments and breaths,

air moving in and out of the body. From my own experience I can say that the binaural channelling of sounds through headphones to the ears increases immersive ambience, the sense of *immediateness*. Especially with one’s eyes closed, it is not hard to imagine that the source is physically present and extremely close, right next to me. Indeed, sometimes the binaural effect is so powerful that it is more like the crinkles and whispers were emerging *inside* my head. **Where and how are the sounds emerging actually?**

Let’s tackle the *how* first. To put it simply, sound is waves that travel through MATERIA. Sound is often described as a longitudinal (in some exceptions also transverse), mechanical wave. Sound can be also defined as a variation in pressure; a disturbance that travels through the medium, transporting energy from one location to another. The medium through which the disturbance is moving, can be thought of as a series of interacting particles. Sound can travel through any medium (=material), let it be in a solid, liquid, plasma or gas state. Accordingly, sound cannot travel through a vacuum (regions of space that are void of particles), and thus there is no sound in outer space. The speed of sound is dependent on the qualities and direction of the movement of the material its traveling through (for example, sound waves going a certain direction in the air: sound waves move slower if it’s blowing in the opposite direction in contrast to the situation when the air is more still).¹⁰⁶ Barad explains that waves can interfere with each other, meaning that two or

more wave disturbances can be simultaneously at a given point in space, causing a resulting disturbance to be a sum of the amplitudes of the component waves (disturbances) (2007). That is, waves can form *superpositions*. (Barad 2007, 266.) Thinking with agential realism, sound is a relational phenomenon: it is intra-action. In its very existence, 'sound' is entangled with other phenomena, other apparatuses, like ASMR, for example. Or rather, sound and other phenomena are of each other: there is no ASMR without the phenomenon of sound, sound is not without the phenomena that it is of, like ASMR. **Touch, sound, and the materiality of the world are intra-twined: they do not exist as separate phenomena independently of each other. Rather, they are constitutive of each other, they come to matter through the process of intra-activity.** Plugging in the Intoxicating Sounds ASMR video with Baradian notions leads me to realize how captivating the example of an entangled phenomenon the production of the audio triggers is indeed.

There is a specific transition of energy involved in the event of consuming ASMR online. That is, sound waves coming to the headphones are transmitting energy and making the spectator/experiencer's ear drums tremble. This is a local, causal structure - but the causality; the agential cause and agential effect - is conditional for intra-action: the object and subject become *due to, and within their entanglement*. Let's consider the moment of engagement involving the orange plastic beauty bag [8:16>]. The ASMRtist does not produce the sounds, nor

is the bag the origin of the sounds (despite the narration, which politely gives the credits of the auditorial deliciousness to the bag). **Thinking with Barad, the bag, or "anything" or "anyone", does not exclusively have a sound of their own.** This is a fascinating notion, concerning that *voice*, for instance, is in everyday understanding *assigned to human individuals as if it was their property, self-governed capacity or personal feature* ("Madonna's voice"), no matter that the voice simply *could not be* without the *intra-action* of the air and the vocal organs. That is: Madonna is 'Madonna' because of their voice, which is not exclusively theirs, but which is an intra-active, beautifully resonating phenomenon and one diffraction in the material-discursive configuration of Madonna-in-production. **Similarly, in the case of the orange¹⁰⁷ beauty bag, the sound emerges in the intra-action between the fingers, the air, the cloth underneath, AND the bag. Maybe the most excluded, yet very essential operator here is the air.**

Air, then, is an interesting concept when further elaborated with Baradian thinking. In everyday life, air is rarely given much thought, but it is a metaphysically fascinating substance. Take breathing, for example: for humans and for the majority of other animals, breathing is the most pivotal act of staying *alive*¹⁰⁸. "We" simply *are not* without the air, exactly as "we" are not without the water, without the bacteria in us, without the particles of which the world constitutes. Similarly, the world and everything it iteratively becomes, would not be or become

as it does without us, it would not reconfigure in the same ways.

Thinking with agential realism, we are not in the world, but *of* the world, and I dare to continue: the world is of to us too. Accounting this simple fact, the idea of intra-action becomes much more concrete: the ecosystem in total, without any fundamental division to nature and culture, is intrinsically intra-action.

So, *sound* from an agential realist perspective, is as *an entangled phenomenon*. Thinking with and through agential realism and the Intoxicating sounds video, I already covered the question of *how* the sounds emerge. The other of my preliminary inquiries was *where* the sound emerges. It has become clear that is impossible to pin down a punctual *location* of a phenomenon. The attempt to chase a location easily leads to comprehending the world as a container, where separately existing entities are positioned and things happen like episodes proceeding in a liner timeline. Sound, as a material-discursive, entangled phenomenon (beauty bag-fingers-air-cloth-whispers-video-headphones-air-ears-brain), is materializing in multiple manners, and as such it does not have one spot that it would occupy in space. Specific sound phenomenon is a part of the iterative reconfiguration of spacetime mattering. Also my bodily experiences are specific reconfigurations: they are the body-in-production. I note with exception the particular binaural sensations, also sometimes referred as "three dimensional sounds"¹⁰⁹ or "surrounding sounds"; from my own experience in the transcription of

the Intoxicating Sounds video: [15:42>] "This sound is...great, hypnotic...so relaxing" (*Hands moving around a pink plastic comb wrapped in see-through plastic film. The comb is first brought close to the left ear and then to the right [that is, alternately close to the two recorders of the 3D microphone]. When moving the comb across the scene, the crinkly sound sincerely seems to appear inside my own head: the sound is not located in the earphones but in me. When the comb touches the fabric, a wind-like rasping hum is produced*). As a matter of fact, **sounds do appear (also) inside my head** (in the intra-action between the auditory triggers, my ears and brain) – that is what hearing is, by definition. Thus hearing as a phenomenon is again a reworking of the bodily boundaries. **The soundscape is touching indeed, both metaphorically and metaphysically.**

Not Only Words, But the Sounds Can Be Touching Too

Juhani Pallasmaa compares hearing to seeing as they write about the **intimacy of acoustics**: "Sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates; vision is directional, sound is omni-directional. The sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority" (2005, 49). Barratt & Davis describe that "many qualitative contributions throughout the survey echo the sentiment that **sounds created by objects in ASMR media should be realistic**" (2017, Results: Realistic content, bolding mine). Even though participants reported an unexpected noise

109. Listening to a binaural recording through headphones simulates the binaural hearing by which people listen to live sounds. For the listener, this experience is characterised by two perceptions. Firstly, the listener perceives being in close proximity to the performers and location of the sound source. Secondly, the listener perceives what is often reported as a three dimensional sound." ('Autonomous sensory meridian response'.

Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_sensory_meridian_response#Scientific_commentary)

110. See the chapter Getting Post-Personal.

111. See for example this ASMR video, which utilizes green screen technique, more professional camerawork and enhanced visual effects: 'ASMR | Don't forget, it's okay to remember! Memory Restoration Roleplay for Sleep': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pd6Bf5C-smw>

112. For example, the most popular ASMR channel, Gentle Whispering ASMR, started with very straightforward and unedited type2 (object-based) videos (see the very first video from 2011: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAxyAxXiOoc>), developing towards more groomed upshot: better microphones, meticulous lightning and more "artistic" props solutions (see one of the very latest videos from 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1ucBSGR2Do>).

113. Approx. 5 830 000 videos when retrieved on YouTube with search "asmr no talking" 4 Apr 2018: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=asmr+no+talking

114. Meg Whisper on Spotify: Paper Cutting Part1.

Retrieved 24 Mar 2018 from: <https://open.spotify.com/track/3WKhkiL-0WLIeXZPNFijRfQ?si=nBcXdWksSmC-U8aevLclbBA>

115. .•. Tingle Club Members Appointment | ASMR Roleplay.♦.

Retrieved 2 Feb 2018 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq9HgH4x_jo

116. Imagination: "the faculty of imagining, or of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses" / In psychology: "the power of reproducing images stored in the memory under the suggestion of associated images (**reproductive imagination**) or of recombining former experiences in the creation of new images directed at a specific goal or aiding in the solution of problems (**creative imagination**). Retrieved 28 Mar 2018 from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/imagination>

117. That is, they reveal that the situation is not happening in shared spacetime in the sense that two people have when they sit opposite to each other in a cafeteria, for example.

118. The so called 'onomatopoetic' or 'echomimetic' sounds are interesting reminders that language, as itself a material, has never existed outside of the material reality it "refers to". Onomatopoeia: "The formation of a word, as cuckoo, meow, honk, or boom, by imitation of a sound made by or associated with its referent." Retrieved 2 Mar 2018 from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/onomatopoetic>

occasionally to foster a notably strong tingling, a majority agreed that the preferable soundscape should mostly formulate around sounds that they could somehow *expect* in terms of the introduced objects and environments (Barratt & Davis 2017). Interestingly, both my friends, Maria and Jani **downplay the significance of visuals** when seeking ASMR tingles. Instead, they stress the importance of certain auditory stimuli and the feeling of another person's presence. This is very intriguing, because when the visuals are taken away, (post-)personal attention cannot function in an assumed manner – through gaze and mimicked touch reaching towards the spectator.¹¹⁰ **Then how does it work in the case of when the visuals are shut off? Soundscape is what matters here. How does the soundscape of an ASMR video enable (post-)personal attention?**

Maria describes their preferences when engaging with ASMR: *"I turn the volume all the way up and listen very closely (focus intently on the speaker). The binaural effect is important because the headphones are loudest when someone whispers close to their microphone, and it causes one side of the headphones to be louder. So I guess my trigger is loud whispering on one side of my head as it causes the headphone to buzz. It can really feel like that person is in the room. Especially when they blow on the microphone. This is relaxing for some reason and triggers the ASMR. The calmer the speaker, the better the effect. I am not very interested in watching the video as much as listening. The image in the*

video can actually be a distraction, so your right, I tend to keep my eyes closed." (Personal communication, 28 Nov 2015)

Jani notes, almost identically, that the sounds and the feeling of intimate attendance are essential elements for them: *"Visuals are less important. They do play a part in the experience, but plain sound also works, if you can feel the presence of the ASMR actor through sounds like breathing, binaural sound and/or if the person is explaining what they are doing with their hands and so on. I mostly watch videos where I get personal attention, have a haircut, doctor's appointment, or I'm in an office or library situation or a massage. Best triggers are whispering, when the person moves towards and further from the recorder so that I can hear them move closer or away. They can be asking me questions and typing them on a computer, or if I'm having a haircut, they might be explaining what they are doing, while doing it."* (Personal communication, 30 Nov 2015)

It seems that the role play aspect of ASMR is most important in terms of successfully creating an intimate atmosphere. The visual settings, such as costumes and the interior (there are ASMR videos where the visual aspect is highly developed, and a lot of effort is put to the costumes, backdrop, and special effects¹¹¹, where as the first ASMR videos were visually less intricate¹¹²) are utilized to enhance that sensation. As Jani mentioned, the performer often asks questions and addresses the viewer. Typically, the tone of the actor is very empathic

and unconditional, which emphasizes a comforting atmosphere. As the creator of ‘Gentle-Whispering’ puts it in Washington Post’s interview: “Most of the time, when I look at the camera, I try to think that this is my friend . . . my family” (Gibson, 2014).

Importantly, in case of ASMR as a material-discursive phenomenon, not only are the meanings of the words are meaningful, but what also matters is the ways that the words materialize. As Barratt&Davis conclude: “Lower-pitched, complex sounds were found to be especially effective triggers, as were slow-paced, detail-focused videos. Conversely, background music inhibited the sensation for many respondents.” (2017, Abstract). There is also a vast amount of ASMR¹¹³ which does not involve spoken words, **one common ASMR tag being “no talking”.**

“But I guess some people call it art (*deep and chuckling whispering, paper and scissor sounds*) ummm, I think that I could... maybe it’s a dinosaur that I cut out (*hums on the microphone*) I don’t know. I’m gonna cut out something else in a way so (*breathy laughs*) doesn’t really matter, it’s the sssound that matters (*whispers appearing on the left ear*) its all about the sound” (*robust scissoring and sound of cutting thick paper*).¹¹⁴

Delicious Sounds

Intoxicating Sounds ASMR [20:48>]: A pearl filled pink sleeping mask with transparent plastic front is introduced. “This sleeping mask... (*glutinous pressing, sticky squeezing and tapping sounds*) is both relaxing visually and auditorially [sic]...if that is a word” (*fast whisper*).

“And it is in this sense that *matter matters* to us: our “seeing” things, “hearing” things, “making sense”, and “talking of” things, are all material practices, involving the intra-twining, or the entanglement, of certain of our material bodily processes with those of the material world. To repeat, we are not separate agents, but “participant parts” within and of an indivisible, continually unfolding, stranded, flowing whole, able to set the boundaries that matter to us within it one way at the moment and another way at the next.” (John Shotter 2013, 35-36 in *How Matter Matters*)

My attention was caught by some words I heard on an ASMR video that I came across accidentally (I often had ASMR playing in the background while writing this thesis). The video is called “Tingle Club Members Appointment | ASMR Roleplay” on a channel “WhispersRed ASMR”¹¹⁵. This video falls in between the two categorizations of typical ASMR videos (type1 and type2), as the ASMRtist’s face is visible

and they are giving their attention to both the spectator and to the objects they handle. The motif of the video is outlined in the description: “ASMR Tingle Club: You can sit comfortably in headphones listening and watching your favourite [sic] triggers whilst smelling the scent and feeling the items around you”. Basically, the ASMRtist is introducing an idea of a house with themed rooms, where the spectator could engage with different triggers. However, this scenario is then left in the spectator’s **imagination**¹¹⁶, as in the actual ASMRtist sits still throughout the entire video. Imagination is also at stake when the ASMRtist zigzags across the thin border of playing along with their role, and on the other hand being honest about the situation which does not entail a traditional face-to-face encounter¹¹⁷. That is, in the meta-narration they are both acknowledging that the spectator knows that they “sit by themselves” engaging with an ASMR video, and at same time they make this fact to be OK. The narration in the video exposes the multifaceted nature of the ASMR experience, which is not only about sensorial sensations, but also about imagination that brings together the senses.

While twiddling a jar of lotion, unscrewing and screwing its lid very gently (the clatter of this action blurring with the rustling of their jacket and forming a surprisingly pleasant soundscape), the ASMRtist notes [16:50>]: “When we first opened the room, we just used the sounds. After a few days we realized (*swish of the jacket touching the microphone*) that along with the visuals of the sounds of

the lids... you could almost smell the scent from the bottless, or the containers, that were making the sounds. For instance, this one is (*glassy sound when nails are tapping the side of the lotion jar*) umm, a moisturizer and it had a rose scent (*palm of the hand stroking the jar*) so when you’re watching it, and hearing the sound (*unscrewing the jar*) you can imagine the smell of what’s inside the container”. That is, here the narration is used to fuel the imagination in order to “feel” the objects/ materials with more than two senses (seeing and hearing). The sensorial experiences seem rarely, if ever, to be strictly “visual”, “haptic” or “auditory”, but combinations of different sensory impressions. Moreover, I suggest that imagination and previous experiences, “marks on body”, are important too, when formulating a wholesome impression of the world within particular intra-actions. The Finnish term ‘*materiaalintuntu*’ is a useful word to grasp this idea. ‘*Materiaalintuntu*’; when directly translated, means something like ‘the feel or sense of material or texture’. ‘*Materiaalintuntu*’ is a haptic conception of a particular material; it is also a sense that *one imagines*, when given a description of it, or when seeing something but not touching it (in a literal sense). I state that the online ASMR incorporates this “haptic conception” (visual hapticity) a lot, including the Intoxicating sounds video: [19:20>] “That’s a very pleasant sound... (*ductile, resilient sounds of patting and dabbing*)...**it’s sounds polished, and heavy...and smooth**” (*voice turning very sleepy, almost drowsy*).

119. Partakers in effectively touching ASMR soundscape (<> signifies intra-action): meanings of human-entangled sounds <> qualities / manners the sounds emerge <> particular object-entangled sounds

120. Etchells, Pete. "ASMR and 'head orgasms': what's the science behind it?" The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 8 Jan. 2016.

Retrieved 2 Mar 2018 from: www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2016/jan/08/asmr-and-head-orgasms-whats-the-science-behind-it.

121. Retrieved 17 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/multisensory>

122. This question is also presented in terms of agential realist understanding, which demands a reconsideration of the idea of an "inert" materia. Against this notion, all configurations (phenomena) of liveliness (reality) should rather be taken as "sensing" – starting from particle phenomena, which indeed conflicts the passive role assigned to "inanimate materia".

123. Retrieved 17 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensual>

124. Definition for 'sensual' retrieved 17 Mar 2018 from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensual>

125. See the chapter Getting Post-Personal.

The intra-action of language and materia¹¹⁸ in the production of sensorial experiences is evident in the ASMR videos (both in type1 and type2) which contain "human"-entangled sounds like narration, vocalizations, speaking with accents, whispers and so on. In ASMR, the language and the sounds are all used in a manner that promote a positive ASMR response. Similarly functioning features are often at work in the unintentional, ASMR triggering content, like in the Mystic Mountain episode. That is, in many cases **the touchiness of the soundscape emerges in the intra-action of** 1) the **meanings of the words** or content of the sentences, if some actual language is incorporated 2) the **ways the words or vocals are pronounced** (I have an impression that the qualitative aspect is the most important in all sounds, and it is emphasized by the fact that "foreign language" ASMR [non-english ASMR] is one tag for ASMR content online) 3) the **object-based sounds** like taps, rustles, crinkly sounds, strokes, swipes and so forth, which are not 'sounds of the objects' per se, but are the outcome of the **intra-action that involves specific types of touching and specific type of materials.**¹¹⁹ For example, in this fragment of the Mystic Mountain episode¹, the soundscape is a combination of all the aforementioned:

[9:05>] "Now, then (*deep whisper, turning back to the canvas*), barely touch it, no pressure (*murmuring, fast whisper*). No pressure (*knife swishing white paint on top of dark strokes*). And I don't want

this to be very distinct. I want this to be very quiet, subdued, far-away, gentle, soft... think about those types of words and stuff, when you're painting, and it'll help, help your hand go much more gentle" (*hypnotizing narration, knife moving in front of canvas and applying more white; ridges of the mountains appear*).

Sensualities of Matters and Meanings

The majority of voices in the general discussion deny that eroticism would be an essential feature of ASMR, nevertheless there are cases where these two are brought together. Accordingly, 84% of the anonymous participants in Barratt & Davis' study deny that the ASMR sensation was sexual and only 5% reported to seek sexual stimulation from ASMR videos (2015). Evidently, the contemporary visual culture in the West is saturated with sexualized content, let the erotic vibe be related to the actual matter or not. ASMR is not an exception. "There are a lot of people who latch onto some ASMR videos involving attractive women and dismiss what we found to be a very nuanced activity as exclusively sexual. Our findings will hopefully dispel that idea" comments Barratt in the Guardian's article from 2016, which is ironically titled, 'ASMR and 'head orgasms': what's the science behind it?'¹²⁰.

Equally misleadingly is the Finnish title for The Guardian's short documentary 'ASMR Videos' named 'Aivo-orgasmit' (displayed on YLE Areena). 'Aivo-orgasmi' is a direct trans-

lation from the outdated English appellation ‘brain orgasm’ (also ‘braingasm’ or ‘head orgasm’). ‘Brain orgasm’ is not used much anymore, or extensively replaced with the abbreviation ‘ASMR’, at least in the context of the videos, most probably to distinguish the sensation from instant erotic connotations. The ASMRtist, who has vast subscribers on their YouTube channel named ‘WhispersRed ASMR’, notes on the documentary that “*Just recently there’s been just a small influx of channels starting up doing kind of an erotic ASMR. I think they are doing it to appeal to different people. Some people might say that it’s making them tingle, but I’m not sure how that can. There’s a massive difference between sexy and sex, and then just sensual and being in touch with one’s emotions and feelings and senses. And maybe ASMR is just another sense*”. Davis presents on The Guardian’s interview (Etchells 2016), that while whispering is the most popular trigger, but at the same only very few people reported sexual motivation for ASMR, this indicates that “*the sensation is related to being intimate with someone in a non-sexual way*”. They suggest that ASMR is rather “*about feeling relaxed or vulnerable with another person*”.

Whispers

The ASMR experience does not seem to profit from an absolute segregation of senses as their workings, thought with agential realism (and neuroscience), are inherently entangled

with each other. ‘Multisensory’ is defined as “*relating to or involving several physiological senses*”¹²¹. This term is perhaps most descriptive when talking of ASMR. Thinking further, even ‘multisensory’ is in many contexts is a rather daft expression: in which the situation of being-of-the-world (living) is *something else* than multisensory¹²²? ‘Sensory’, ‘sensuous’ and ‘sensual’ have much more in common, with an important difference that ‘sensual’ is more vividly crossing ‘sensible’ aspects of life as it is “*relating to or consisting in the gratification of the senses or the indulgence of appetite; fleshly; sensory; devoted to or preoccupied with the senses or appetites; voluptuous*”, and is also “*deficient in moral, spiritual, or intellectual interests: worldly, especially irreligious*.”¹²³

“ — the material is always already discursively produced and the discursive is always already materially produced” (Jackson&Mazzei 2012, 111).

I think that in many accounts, ASMR is also a sensual experience (phenomenon), because it has not only to do with the mere “physical” changes in terms of “sensorial” sensations in the body, but also with the intimate and emotional aspect (which is inherently material). What are the traces of diffraction patterns in material-discursive reality that have marked phenomena ‘that are sensual’ to carry a connotation as being ‘morally suspicious’ (as the dictionary suggests)?¹²⁴ The intra-action of linguistic and material (as co-productive, ontolog-

ically inseparable practices) is at stake when contemplating the relationships of matter(s) and meaning(s): it is especially fascinating in the case of associating ASMR with sexual pleasure/ pornography/ erotism. *Whispering* is an exciting example: it is a production of sound, a phenomenon in which the air and the vocal cords intra-act and the body is reconfigured. Whispering is a particular material-discursive way of being-of-the-world, like any other gesture is. Barad assures that language is not the same as discourse, and meanings are not semantic properties of words like it is easily thought from a representationalist perception (2007,149-51). Rather, meanings are differentially produced in phenomena in their open-ended becoming. According to agential realism’s posthumanist account, discursive practices are also causal intra-actions, within which the agential dynamics change and a part of the world makes itself intelligible to another part. This agential becoming is the *performance of the world*. Importantly, discursive practices are not run by entities – indeed, they do not even need to involve humans. There are no human bodies and human subjects outside of the constitutive, reconfiguring material-discursive intra-actions within which the very distinctions between “humans” and “nonhumans” are made. (Barad 2007, 149-51.) The issues related to representations, our “access” to them or the reality, as well as and the ways reality is constituted or produced, have been taken up by many philosophers and scholars (e.g. Foucault, Deleuze and Butler amongst others). Barad suggests how to supersede the

entrenched and misleading notions of representationalism, formulating their own understanding in conversation with various science studies scholars and social and political theorizations, i.e. with Bohr’s interpretation of quantum physics and with Butler’s contemplations of performativity (2007, 48-49). **A performative understanding of naturalcultural practices invalidates the idea that there are representations and ontologically separate entities ready to be represented, and focuses instead on the productive practices: on the practices of representing, as well as on the effects and conditions of these practices. That is, the performative enactments are the point of interest and Barad accentuates that humans are not the only ones engaged in these practices. (Barad 2007, 49.)**

Matter is a matter of trans/materiality—a cutting together-apart differentiating-entanglements, agential relatings [sic] and differences across, among, and “between genders, species, spaces, knowledges, sexualities, subjectivities, and temporalities” (Barad 2014, 16).

In the temporality of the material-discursive reality which “I” am a part of when writing this, a “child” whispering is different from “an adult” doing so. There is a chance that a whispering “adult” is interpreted as being seductive: certain tones, voices and sounds are coupled with eroticism when they are pronounced by certain bodies (in this case

126. *Hands* seem to be the most common “human organs” that come to mind when touch is contemplated. Indeed, the cover picture of Bellacasa’s book ‘Matters of Care’ depicts a figure of green leaves in a shape of a human hand (having said that, I’m not fully certain about the aptness of this figurative illustration, concerning the speculative extensiveness of the book). Besides hands, skin is another human part that is associated with touch as a sensorial organ. See the chapter Let’s Get Tingly.

127. As noted in the chapter ASMR Videos in Short, Barratt & Davis (2015) sort out the most substantial types of triggers that stood out in their study. They found out that the most common triggers are whispering sounds (75%), personal attention (69%), crisp sounds (64%) and slow movements (53%). Watching repetitive tasks works as a trigger for 34% of participants. **Nevertheless this delineation of triggers come about simultaneously, that is, personal attention often entails whispers and repetitive motions, for example.**

128. 1. “An act or instance of exploring or investigating; examination.” 2. “The investigation of unknown regions.” Retrieved 12 Mar 2018, from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/exploration>

129. If there is a human participant in an ASMR video, they are usually treated rather similarly to that of “inanimate” (nonhuman) materia (type2 videos). That is, human hair is approached with same kind of “care taking” and attentive touch when it is being brushed as a plastic beauty bag when it is being tapped on in an ASMR video. Verbal communication between a human participant and an ASMRtist is usually diminished, and many times this “voluntary human materia” has a passive role on the video. See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpxUn3LH3lo> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pRZaEP8pTo>

130. Hosie, R. (2017, August 11). ASMR: What is this curious new relaxation phenomenon? Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/asmr-what-is-it-autonomous-sensory-meridian-response-ikea-advert-relaxation-video-a7887881.html>

131. See: Transcriptions.

132. In case there is speech in an object-based video (type2), it is typically a general explanation of what is happening, like commenting on the specificities of the object while it’s being handled (the sounds that occur, the weight, the texture etc.) or narration of the type of touch which is applied (like tapping), or description of what is about to come next.

those that are material-discursively configured as “adults”). Whispered things are often private, secret, sacred or are taboo. Whispers and secrets go together, sexual matters are matters of intimacy, and intimacy is very personal: it concerns something that is *not be pronounced out loud, at least not in public*. This indeed is the co-constitution of matter and meaning: the “bodily” performances are construed and produced, but also dominated and controlled by “culture”, and at the same time “culture” is indivisibly composed of these material enactments. The causal, productive intra-actions are not happening in different realms of material and discourse (Barad 2007, 210-11). In other words, discursive practices are of the world do not exist outside of material reality and, in turn, palpable reality reconfigures through and with discursive practices:

“Discursive practices are not speech acts, linguistic representations, or even linguistic performances, bearing some unspecified relationship to material practices. – Matter is not a linguistic construction but a discursive production in the posthumanist sense that discursive practices are themselves material (re) configurings of the world though which the determination of boundaries, properties and meanings is differentially enacted” (Barad 2007, 149, 151).

ASMR As An Intimate Engagement

Hands On Objects

I already stated that personal attention is more accurately *post-personal attention*, because a simultaneous, reciprocal “human encounter” is not necessary for personal attention to work.¹²⁵ To recap, post-personal attention in the case of online ASMR, especially in type1 videos, is a practice principally presented through bodily gestures, most notably through gaze (Bob Ross talking to the camera), through hand movements¹²⁶ (the spectator positioned in the middle of the ASMRtist’s “touchy” care taking) and through sounds (like whispers coming to the spectator’s ears, as if the source of the voice was right next to them)¹²⁷.

In the object-based videos (type2), the attentive engagement and physical examination is directed towards articles, objects (human or nonhuman), and materia. Oftentimes the human-factor in these videos is diminished so that the ASMRtist is not visible except for their hands. These videos are shot in a point of view perspective, placing the spectator/experiencer in the “front row”. Basically, the spectator/experiencer is in a position of looking at/ hearing of/ sensing of stuff being touched/ explored¹²⁸ in peculiar ways in the video. I find this setting particularly fascinating to analyze as intra-action and in respect to “human” relationship with materia. When mapping the factors of effective online ASMR triggers, most

participants in Barratt & Davis' study submitted that the **“sounds that the object would make if manipulated” were either an extremely or very important stimulus where** only 1,6 % of the respondents felt that these sounds were meaningless in terms of ASMR sensations (Barratt & Davis 2017, Table1). Fascinatingly, the color of the ASMR triggering objects and materials was reported to be the most insignificant visual factor in inducing ASMR, but instead the **“focus on the material the object is made from” was “very important” or “moderately important” for the majority of the participants** (Barratt & Davis 2017, Table1). **What could be the significance of the attentive material engagements¹²⁹ so often proposed in ASMR videos, when thinking with agential realism?**

“Most of the videos feature people doing incredibly mundane things like folding towels or tapping a light, but they rack up hundreds of thousands of views.”¹³⁰

The Intoxicating Sounds video¹³¹ is a typical example of an object-based ASMR: the scene in the video is dominated by a gray cloth which fills the most of the screen's front. The ASMRtist's face is not visible in the video. In the beginning, the hands are alternately reaching towards the camera and swiping a cloth in a flowing, gliding manner. The video proceeds so that various objects (a wooden box with a selection of teas inside, a plastic purse, a comb in plastic, a sleeping mask filled with tiny pearls) are introduced to the camera and treated with dif-

ferent types of **explorational touch**: tapping, swiping, stroking, squeezing, dabbing. The materiality of the cloth is essential in the production of the desired sounds when the objects are moved around on the fabric surface. The camera is set on automatic sharpening, which follows the movements in front of the lens. The sharpening seeks and optically intensifies occasions and points where contact between the hands and objects is happening. The hands are also sweeping each other, and every now and then coming extremely close to the lens so that the spectator can imagine them almost to reach through the screen, which reinforces the sensation of **proximity and intimacy**. Indeed, the hands come so close to the lens that they go *over* the frame. This creates an effect of blurred vision on the outskirts of sight like when someone would stand in front of you and put their hands on your temples: the focus of the eyes cannot catch the hands sharply when they are so close as they exceed the edges of the field of vision. These “frame crossings” are typical in ASMR videos.

When looking at the type2 videos, where the orientation and nurturing is directed towards objects and materials¹³², **it seems that the hands at work in the videos give the same attention to objects and materials that the post-personal attention gives to the spectator. Lets call it object-based attention.** The framing and the sharpening orients the focus towards *contact* and the *relation between* the hands and the things being touched; that is, materials and objects (and, when reaching close to the lens, the spectator's position as an object

of touch is similar to the objects in the video). In terms of agential realism, it must be kept in mind that *attention* does not exclusively belong to, or start from no-one, but instead emerges through and within intra-action in which the partakers are constituted. In the case of the Intoxicating Sounds video, the object-based attention would not be (work) without the hands AND the objects. In the case of Mystic Mountain episode, the intimacy would not be (work) without Bob Ross in the video AND the spectator. In other words, the objects by themselves (as if they could exist independently), or the hands by themselves (as if they could exist independently), or the hands by themselves (as if they could exist independently), or the video by itself (as if it could exist independently) cannot produce intimacy, because it is about *relations: intra-action*, that is.

The word 'intimacy' is often mentioned in the context of ASMR. The online dictionary defines intimacy as a state of *being intimate*;¹³³ “a close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship; the quality of **being comfortable, warm, or familiar; a close association with or detailed knowledge or deep understanding of a place, subject, period of history etc.**”¹³⁴ My friend Jani describes a successful ASMR experience like this: “ – *if you can feel the presence of the ASMR actor through sounds like breathing, binaural sound and/or if the person is explaining what they are doing with their hands and so on. – I get tingling sensations on my scalp and neck, and a relaxed feeling*

on my chest, in addition to a general feeling of pleasure - similar to a feeling of physical closeness to a person I like” (Personal communication, 30 Nov 2015).

In the book 'Matters of Care – Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds' María Puig de la Bellacasa¹³⁵ takes on many questions that are compelling in terms of ASMR phenomenon. Bellacasa reconsiders the conventional understandings of care and touch, explores its ethical and political significance and workings within the world, which is constituted of both human and nonhuman forms¹³⁶. They refer to reality as a system of natureculture: their conception of the world is a mesh of entangled agencies, where technoscientific practices, **circulation of care**, and involvement of actors demand a radical questioning of the human privilege. I find Bellacasa's approach to care and touch very inspirational when thinking of ASMR. **ASMR is a phenomenon within which the other than human participants play a fundamentally constitutive role (technology, materials, objects, sounds, the Internet) and where care and touch seem to be elemental.** Bellacasa asserts that the world seen through care emphasizes the sense of interdependency (intra-action, in Barad's terms) and involvement (2017, 17).

“It is the work of Karen Barad, and others named as “new materialists” or “material feminists” to ask how our intra-action with other bodies (both human and nonhuman) produce subjectivities and performative enactments” (Jackson&Mazzei 2012, 111).

Intimacy Is a More-Than-Human Matter

Now one might ask, aren't intimacy, attention, and care just productions of human agency: behaviors of human consciousness, orienting its focus or care towards another, separately existing object? Max van Manen (2015) writes about the relationship of intimacy and digital in their book 'Pedagogical Tact – Knowing What To Do When You Don't Know What To Do'. They phrase intimacy as

“The occurrence of togetherness when the interiority of secrets or inner intimacies is exteriorized and brought into naked contact with the interiority of a trusted one. Relational tact means to touch or be touched by the other. Contact is intimate in-tactness, and intimacy is the relational ambience of exposing, disclosing, making known, revealing what is concealed. To be in intimate contact with the other is to touch the other's secret: his or her uniqueness or singularity” (Manen 2005, 178. Italics mine).

Interestingly, many words in this definition are the same as those also in Baradian theory: *interiority, exteriority, contact, relation, singularity*. However, the perception of the workings of intimacy is radically different when contemplated from a posthumanist perspective. Manen start their contemplations from *geometrical* elaborations: digital intimacy is “distant

intimacy”; thus there is no physical proximal closeness (2015, 177-78). They end up at the notion that because the person whose post one is reading is *not aware* of them reading it the intimacy is not so real: “It is possible for people on the Internet to think they are close, but in the sober light of the next morning the closeness was an illusion or perhaps a simulated intimacy” (176-77). For Manen, even more disturbing seems to be the fact that *digital intimacy is not personal*, but “polygamous”; thus *many others* might have, for example, read the same “personal” post and like wise imagined one-to-one closeness with the writer. Manen's perspective is phenomenological and thus they are very much attached to the idea that intimacy is an event between two unquestioned human subjects. Moreover, their account takes the digital arrangements “in between” the “people” to be mostly distancing and estranging, or in the best case somehow connecting, but not quite like a good old-fashioned live encounter can do:

“The point is that face-to-face contact through social media does not let me experience looking the other person straight into the black pupil of their eye” (Manen 2015,177).

I state that the question of intimacy needs to be presented differently. Take, for example, the workings of post-personal attention in the MysticMountain -apparatus: it is not that Bob Ross is “in the other end” to focus their attendance on the spectator, yet still it works.

I state that the post-personal / object-based attention, in an ASMR context, is an intimate enactment as it is happening within the intra-action of the materials and hands, or between the performer (ASMRtist, Bob Ross) and the spectator¹³⁷. The intra-action through which intimacy and post-personal attention are established, within which the spectator and Bob Ross as an inseparable part of the *video* (re)configure and become to be in their unsettled, material-discursive ways, are not dependent upon a face-to-face encounter of “two living human subjects”: Bob Ross on the Mystic Mountain episode is not the same as the one that “once lived”. This Bob Ross is one diffraction of the phenomenon called Bob Ross. This Bob Ross does not “belong to history¹³⁸” nor are they a “representation” of the “original person”. According to Barad, originals do not pre-exist as such, and mimesis is not some “reproduction” of what was before because **time itself is produced in the dynamics of intra-actions**, meaning that the past is not done and gone for good, but “remains open to material reconfigurings” (2007, 383).

That is, during the making of an ASMR video, the ASMRtist is exposing themselves for *the possibility of millions of “future gazes”* while doing intimate stuff. The ASMRtist *in the video* is *part of the same phenomenon* as the “person” – they are not a “human” per se, because there is no such separately existing fixed entity, not online or offline. Same applies to the spectator, “who” is in an intimate intra-active situation with themselves (the exte-

riority-within) and with the video when engaging in online ASMR. To engage in is to remake the “other” and to remake oneself at the same, to become entangled. The state of vulnerability, relaxation, and the potential ASMR tingles are intimate, embodied reconfigurations of the body-in-production. Contemplating with agential realism, intimacy and care are not some abstract forces produced by autonomous human minds, but examples of differentially materializing intra-actions potentially involving both “human” and “other-than-human” participants, and in some cases it is just either of these, or “parts” of these, because the aforementioned do not possess ontological, stable boundaries¹³⁹.

“Matter itself is always already open to, or rather entangled with the “Other”” (Barad 2007, 392-93).

‘Caring’ translates in Finnish as ‘välittäminen’. ‘Välittäminen’ has two meanings in the Finnish language: it is both ‘to take care’ / ‘to look after’ / ‘to mind’ and ‘to mediate’ / ‘to communicate’ / ‘to convey’. The double-meaning of ‘care’ in Finnish is apposite: it has to do with both with *responsibility* and *relations* - the inherent boundedness to and with other beings (“animate” and “inanimate”), which in a Baradian sense is the ontological circumstance of being. **Inspired by Bellacasa and Barad, I state that care is a material practice that comes to be in and through engagements, like those in ASMR.** Caring involves causal enactments:

133. Being intimate is described with words like *close, personal, private, sexual, familiar, friendly, cozy* and *warm*. Retrieved 15 Mar 2018, from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/intimate>

134. Bolding mine. Retrieved 15 Mar 2018, from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/intimacy?s=t>

135. Bellacasa's background is in science, technology and organization.

136. Bellacasa uses the phrase "more-than-human" to cover both human and other than human actors.

137. In many cases the videos feature attention directed both towards the spectator and towards the objects, and thus they fall somewhere in between the two categories (type1 and type2) as delineated by Barratt & Davis (2015).

138. History is not dead and gone, nor a production of culture, but material markings on bodies, traces of intra-actions which intra-act with the intra-actions that are, and those that might or might be not. "The historicity of phenomena is written in their materialization: phenomena are the enfolding of spacetime mattering, and the bodies in production hold the memories of the traces from that iterative process" (Barad 2007, 160, 170, 383). Consider a moment of engaging with an old painting. The time is there, it is material, but not frozen: your engagement with the painting remakes you and it remakes the painting. *The art happens within the intra-action of you and the painting*: you co-constitute each other, the traces of this encounter will remain and matter in various volumes. The painting (not as an individual entity, but as a phenomenon in-production) is old indeed because of the "memories" that are enfolded in its materialization - "old" is that which has reconfigured a lot; although "that" has actually never been, but only seemingly the same coherent individual object.

139. As explicated in chapters 'Not All The Bodies Produced Are Human Bodies' and 'Touching Matters Are Bodies-In-Production'.

140. Peltola & Heikkilä (2015, 711, following Haraway) sum up that "The notion of response-ability is based on theorizing human-nonhuman relations as corporeal and material. – Response-ability can be defined as the capacity to respond across species in an anticipatory manner." Barad uses this term occasionally in their magnum opus 'Meeting The Universe Halfway', but it is not defined there precisely.

141. "Humans" appear to have a sort of a Narcissus syndrome; an obsession with images that mirror. "The self" is supposedly found from the reflections: "we" even evaluate the intelligence of an "animal" based on whether they recognize themselves from the mirror or not*. Thinking with an agential realist posthumanism, which is critical toward representationalism, anthropocentrism, ontological individualism and has a strong reliance on representations are obviously entangled. How did "we" come to assume that "intelligence" (and therefore moral value as a "being") is analogous to interest towards representations?

*This classical test for animals was developed by an American psychologist Gordon Gallup in 1970, and it has been vastly used in studies on animal self-recognition (Telkänranta 2015, 66).

to look after someone, to take care of someone, appears as an agential doing that has a subject (care taker) and an object (that which is cared or taken care of). These agential subjects and objects are not necessarily "human" or even complete "entities" (or rather, the temporal "entity" is produced along with the agential cut) - the agential subjects and objects can partly incorporate parts and bits of "human-bodies-in-production" as well as all sorts of other-than-human partakers. Intimacy and care are *not only* matters that happen on human skins; rather, they are productive practices that are about the *making of* borders, connections, commitments, inclusions and exclusions. **In contrast to Manen's delineations, the technological arrangements are not inanimate instruments or virtual spaces between "distant humans", but material configurations within which the "humans" become to be as such, and within which the specific workings of intimacy, as matterings and meanings, are reconfigured (2015)**. Following Bellacasa's notion that "the reciprocity of care is rarely bilateral" (2017, 20), I state that care and intimacy are rarely equal counterparts of "two human subjects": "Humans" take part of the matters of care, "animals" take part of the matters of care, "inanimate" material takes part of the matters of care: care functions and materializes through agential cuts that constitute these all in intra-actions. Moreover, I claim that care is not an agential activity which would be *evenly distributed* to all sorts of material becomings, but there definitely are phenomena which seriously *lack*

care. Bellacasa turns this notion around by saying that care is there anyway: "even in its absence it is present" (2017, 1).

Perhaps "we" should not be so concerned about the ways intimacy is "changing" in digital environments compared to offline: that is a representationalist approach and a grasp for some "authentic" intimacy. Let's face it – it simply IS different because intimacy is not "one thing" but a phenomenon (or more accurately, multiplicity of phenomena). Rather, we should be concerned of *how intimacy should be, or how it could be, what is excluded from the material-discursive practices of intimate caring, and how the other-than-human configurations are inseparable partakers in existing as intimate*. A description covering all-inclusively the matterings that are intimate (if not just noting that they *all* are, in a way or another) is a bizarre (impossible) attempt. However, to configure some of its workings (amongst all the other possibilities, which are not possible to be pronounced here) while thinking with agential realism, I suggest that intimacy materializes in the following manners:

Intimacy with oneself is an intimacy of the exteriority-within: it is to touch the situated self-in-production. Intimacy is also to touch the temporal other, or to be touched by them, as a part of existence, which is intra-action. In other words: every engagement is also touching the other in intra-action, within which the "self" and the "other" (not just a "human" other, but any other) are co-constituted. Intimacy is not in any way an exclusively human matter. The

phrase “naked contact” would not even have a meaning if there weren’t clothes that *cover*, and with which *nakedness* is material-discursively constituted. It is not that materia is an inanimate substance “between” discrete human actors whose subjective minds desire an intimate connection, but those “humans” are materia too and the vulnerable liveliness of reality is all about intimate relationality, which is a call for responsibility along with the respons-ability¹⁴⁰ of the “self”:

The elements of *caring, taking care and caressing* are part of the ASMR phenomenon. Caring and caressing manifest a) within the intimate intra-action of the ASMRtist / the hands / the objects / the materials (object -based attention) and b) within the intimate intra-action of the video / technology / the spectator-experiencer (post-personal attention) c) within the ASMR sensation, as a positive intimate experience with oneself (and with the all the others that constitute the self in intra-action). **To be touched by care is to be cared for, it is a ma(r)king on the body which makes a difference.**

“Is touching not by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within?” (Barad 2012, 1).

The fact that intimacies are multiple and differential in their materialization, does not necessarily take out the significance of the “traditional” intimacies of “human” encounters.

Let me reconfigure the event of meeting the other eye-to-eye, thinking with agential realism:

The black pupils of the other’s eyes are indeed an opening to dis-continuous eternity, they are the reality-in-making exposed: an exteriority-within. The self, which only is along with the other, and the other which only is along with the self, are both in this gaze-on-gaze. The miniature image of the self looking back from the other’s eyes is not a reflection as a representation, but a pattern of diffraction, a marking on the other’s body, which is now remade. This co-constitutive gaze is an intra-active phenomenon: making-of-the-other and making-of-the-self. Vulnerability, the knowing that the self is configured only with and through all others (not just human others), is a condition of intrarelational existence. How could it be anything less than a thoroughly intimate matter? The (meta)physical performance of bodies-in-production congeals in the event of gazes – and it is an intense performance: it is intimacy materializing. Perhaps this is why representations and mirrors are so appealing¹⁴¹: they are about the same co-constitutive hide and seek, getting lost and being found, between the self and the other. *I am* is an ambivalent agential process, an alternate attempt to position myself as the objective seeker, and in turn coming back to the realization that I am actually hiding along with the others, as well as from myself. Thus there is no me without them, “*I*” needs “*the others*” (not only “human” others). I have not existed anywhere out of time and matter, I am of time and matter, and this gaze, is me looking at me, as the other which I am *of*.¹⁴²

who you are.
is not what you are doing.
what you are doing
is
being
someone else.

– architecture

Nayyirah Waheed (salt. 2013)

Take Care And Be Careful

Importantly, attention, intimacy, and care, working in intra-actions, are not free from intentionality or causal structures. As a matter of fact, causality within phenomena is the making of agency, and agency is the materializing force of reality. Coole&Frost write, that *corporeality*, which is emphasized in new materialisms, dislocates agency as

“the property of a discrete, self-knowing subject inasmuch as the corpus is now recognized as exhibiting capacities that have significant effects on social and political situations. Thus bodies communicate with other bodies through their gestures and conduct to arouse visceral responses and prompt forms of judgement that do not necessarily pass through conscious awareness” (2010, 20).

Agential realist perception about the ever-unsettled congealing of agency does not entail a dislocation of responsibility to some intangible forces in sense that the relata involved in intra-actions would be “innocent”. To be involved, to be entangled, to intra-act, are always already ethical matters. *Existing* is an inherently ethical matter: “physical matters, matters of fact, matters of concern, matters of care, matters of justice, are not separable” (Barad 2014 ,17).

Both Bellacasa (2017) and Barad (2007) follow Levinas’ idea that ethics precede being:

142. Importantly, Barad (2007) remarks that: “A humanist ethics won’t suffice when the “face” of the other that is “looking” back at me is all eyes, or has no eyes, or is otherwise unrecognizable in human terms. What we need is posthumanist ethics, ethics of worldling” (392).

In the essay ‘On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am’ (2012, v1.1) Barad uses the term “inhuman” to replace the “other.” For Barad, inhuman is not the same as nonhuman (which is co-constituted with the “human”), nor is the inhuman some “non-compassionated other,” but rather the impersonality of aliveness that the touching always entails, the infinite intimacy which is the stranger “threaded through and lived through us” (2012, 10). The inhuman within “human” and “nonhuman” is what enables touching and being touched, it is the possibility and call for compassion, justice, responsibility, and respons-ability. (Barad 2012, 10, 14: n21.)

143. E.g. feminist theories, political theory, disability studies, ethics of animal rights, food politics, economics, justice, politics of technoscience, to mention a few (Bellacasa 2017, 3).

144. Interestingly, this notion brings to mind the phrase “to bite the hand that feeds you.” Resisting oppressive material-discursive practices that also take forms of caring are especially troublesome, thus such oppressive dynamics seem to coproduce ambivalent, yet understandable “Stockholm syndrome” type of positionings.

145. I want to continue, incorporating agential realism, that basic income, for instance, would not be exclusively a human-matter, thus “human doings” are not isolated practices, happening and effecting only within the realm of “social” or within the “human communities,” like in “families” or “societies” or on “YouTube,” nor are they some external forces acting on “nature’s creatures,” like on polar-bears or bees. It is not that the social enacts and the discursive projects over and then autonomously awakens to life a blank biology or vacuous materia waiting to be marked with meanings. Nor is “nature” some authentic, separate realm to which “humans” should find their way back to. **“Humans” are only existing *within* the natureculture which is the world in its becoming.** The distinction between matter and meaning, human and nonhuman, nature and culture is produced within the entangled practices involving all the aforementioned - not as fixed, but in a repeated remaking. This is an intra-relational dependency: polar-bears, bees and people are of the world and of each other. Of course, everything does not matter in the same ways (actually

nothing, since there are no identical intra-actions); some entanglements are more efficacious than others (Barad 2007, 210-11). Take climate change, for example, which is a fast and furious world-making phenomenon. The possible extinction of bees and polar bears has most probably tremendous effects on everything that is, cannot, or could be, and it is evident how “human”-entangled practices have influenced intensively on the impending disappearance of the aforementioned (amongst all the unmentioned others). “We humans” are already looking for another planet to “conquer” – after a denial of the responsibility for the one that we are of. Unfortunately, “we” need water, “we” need an atmosphere, “we” need the sun – **“we” are of the entanglements. This fact cannot be changed with the achievements of science and technology: it just means that technology is what we need in our endeavor to overcome the need of those mentioned earlier. “We” can never exist by “ourselves”. “We” are in an insane flight to escape “our” thorough entanglement just to find out that it will not stop the amorphous limits of the Earth – it is the condition of the real and of being, “on the Earth”, as well as “outside” of it.**

responsibility is a condition of existence, not the other way around. Barad draws from Emmanuel Levinas’ thoughts about touch and responsibility, but takes their own contemplations even further towards a posthumanist approach. Levinas rejects the metaphysics of self as a traditional starting point for ethics. For Levinas, subjectivity does not mean individuality, but a relation of responsibility to the other, meaning that the ethical subject is not the disembodied rational subject of conventional ethics, but an embodied sensibility. This carnal sensibility responds to the proximal relationship to the other through “a mode of wonderment that is antecedent to consciousness” (Barad 2007, 391). The otherness of the Other is given in responsibility, and responsibility is the primary and fundamental mode of subjectivity: ethics grounds “human” experience, not vice versa. Barad cites feminist theorist Ewa Polonowska Ziarek, who explains that for Levinas, embodiment is neither purely the result of the carvings of culture, nor does it entail only the biological body. Embodiment is opposite to the transcendence of the body in self-reflection; an embodied self is rather oneself’s (fundamentally carnal), prelogical condition that Levinas refers as “being in one’s skin”. “Being in one’s skin” means being responsible to begin with. “Being-in-one’s skin” is followed by “having-the-other-in-one’s-skin”, and this is the responsibility, which is not a matter of choice, but a prior to every engagement, it is always already involved. Taking a posthumanist perspective to Levinas’ ideas,

Barad theorizes that **“the-other-in-one’s-skin”, does not cover just “human” others, but all others: a variety of possibilities of alterity. Moreover, when the ethical relations concern also the other-than-human, it would be a paradox to understand embodiment only as a “human doing” either.** (Barad 2007, 391-93) Both Bellacasa’s and Barad’s projects insist, that along with the re-evaluation of touch, care, causality and objectivity, the ontological and ethical issues cannot be separated from epistemologies. Conjointly, nor should science and politics be concerned with some distinctive realms. On top of fostering the understanding of knowledge and science as material-semiotic affairs which are also political and ethical, Bellacasa reminds us that the decentered perception of human agency “exposes relations with objects, things, and other than human animals, organisms, and forms as political in their very ontology” (2017, 16).

Bellacasa explicates that caring materializes as “a plane of “continuous experience”, involving a range of lived material elements in decentered and multilateral relationships, rather than as “a product of bounded subject” – “the affective potency of care is radically embedded on the relationality” (Stephenson & Papadopoulos 2006, as cited in Bellacasa 2017, 166). This thought necessitates that practices of care should thus neither be controlled by “individual subjects”, a singular power supply, or one regulatory hub (Bellacasa 2017, 166). In agential realism, power is the “materializing potential” of a specific

146. That is, the constitutive boundaries are material-theoretical and fluctuate in accordance with agential cuts within the entangled intra-actions. I would like to understand Barad's take on the conventionally dichotomized concepts (e.g. light/dark, mind/body, male/female, nature/culture, science/art) through a metaphor of ocean waves hitting the shore. The actual ending of a singular wave and the actual beginning of the shore is impossible to define, because these two are not separately existing. The sand is floating loosely in the water, and the water is infiltrated in the sand. The movement of waves is never monotonous, but diffractive. The wave negotiates its borders again and again, and the beach is never the same, as the sand is ceaselessly moving and mixed with other type of soil. More over, each shoreline (in its ontic open-endedness), materializes differentially in intra-action — there are no identical beach-meets-oceans. Yet still, a certain iteration occurs and that enables a certain conceived distinction to be made: a certain difference between that which is more water and that which is more sand. Beach-ocean is not a fixed pair, but a living, reconfiguring phenomenon without any definitive borderline or distinction a) between the constitutive elements within or b) to the other materializations of the world. This example is perhaps not the most apposite when thinking of hard-wired dichotomies, since beach and ocean are not commonly understood as complementary opposites. However, I

wanted to write it down to put words to how I understand the process of material-discursive iteration, through which the world reconfigures in terms of agential realism.

147. I might note here that the theory of agential realism, me writing this and you reading it, are also phenomena that are part of the same material-discursive production of reality. Having said that, important questions in terms of agential realism are: who determines what is what, how is that done and with the expense of whom? What is concerned as meaningful, and what is excluded from mattering? How does the constitutive practice of material-discursive differentiation work?

148. Barad (2007, 168-69) is critical towards a) the poststructuralist point of view, which prefers the social over material and focuses merely on the production of human bodies, excluding the constitution of nonhuman bodies (e.g. Foucault and Butler), b) Bohr's tendency to take for granted the prior existence of the human observer, while they are alertly considering the constitution nonhuman phenomena c) Bohr's critics who would cut out the human observer from the whole picture, again paradoxically positioning them as a prerequisite for the objective knowledge and thus fostering the ideology that humans would hold an unique position among physical systems. They write that "each of these formulations presumes human-nonhuman, nature-culture, social-scientific dichotomies" and "each stops short of understanding the human and non-human in their mutual constitution, as integral parts of the universe - not as beings in the universe" (Barad 2007, 168-69).

149. Some prominent openings to the issues concerning what is good and for whom in the 'more-than-human-worlds' (as Bellacasa, 2017, frames it), are done in the theorizations of intersectional feminisms, as well as within new materialist and posthumanist theories.

phenomenon (Barad 2007, 230). That is, power is not working only in or from the domain of the human and the realm of social. Barad understands discursive practices as a co-productive force to the with material forces (2007). **Power operates through the enactment of natural-social forces, and thus the productive regulatory practices are to be understood in terms of causal intra-actions.** The materiality of regulatory apparatuses is fundamental - it is indissociable and already included in the discursive dimension. (Barad 2007, 210-11.)

"Ethics is not a matter of applying moral principles by a subject to a senselessness, and soulless, "material" universe: ethicality in making resides in messy muddled concrete situations in which *an obligation of care* becomes at stake. Likewise, it makes it rather odd to think care as shaped by moral *control over* uncaring subjectivities." (Bellacasa 2017, 166).

Bellacasa brings to the fore the ambivalences and predicaments of care which, in its entangled mattering, can take a range of forms and recognitions; it can do good, but it can also serve forms of oppression (Bellacasa 2017,1). Continuing the scheme of researchers from a multiplicity of disciplines and domains¹⁴³, Bellacasa problematizes the notions, principles, and practices of care, and goes far beyond the old-fashioned assumptions of care as women's work, care as a mere positive affection, and care as explicitly a matter between humans or

from humans to other-than-humans (2017, 2). Bellacasa (2017) states that **caring, as well as not caring, are ethico-political problems that are multi-touching, asubjective and asymmetrical agential practices inherently entangled with human and other-than-human materialities and existences.** Care in naturecultures is hardly ever an innocent activity. Bellacasa makes an example of care practices that accommodate pastoral paternalism, which also, directly and indirectly, produces inequality and exploitation of the human and nonhuman¹⁴⁴. More over, they add that care is sometimes conjoined with killing: weeding a garden to nourish the growth of some plant is done at the expense of some other (Bellacasa 2017, 164). Thinking carefully, *pain*, in its multiplicity, like pleasure, care, and intimacy, seems to be an inseparable part of worlding: the event of *birth* is an extremely violent act, for "humans" and supposedly for many other animals too – but on the other hand it is also one of the most iconic, intimate phenomena where care materializes (not always, though). Care is multiple, care is dissimilar, care is intrarelatational, and a differentially mattering phenomenon. What is needed is a careful analysis of *how care matters, who / what it touches, and who / what is excluded from the practices of caring, and what could be possible if the world was actively reconfigured through and with care.*

You Don't Get What You Give – Or Maybe Later, And It Is Something Else

Bellacasa speculates that **vulnerability is a constitutional feature of being when thinking with relational ontologies, and touch and care are intimate examples of intra-active reversibility** (2017). They note that touch, as a blurring of boundaries of the self and the other, has a potential to turn into invasion or appropriation. Bellacasa states that “it *is* possible to touch without being touched. Appropriation abolishes significance” (2017,119-20). That is, Bellacasa affirms that the “living web of care” is not reciprocal in a way that giving care would ensure receiving it too: it can happen that care given to other “beings” is not answered with care. Is this well-felt fact conflicting with the ontology of intra-activity?

It is not, since **intra-action is not about sameness, uniformity, or reciprocity in a sense that the ontologically co-constitutive parts involved in intra-action would be exchanging something**. Rather, intra-action is the condition of reality which is agential, entangled, asymmetric, diffracting, heterogeneous and discontinuous. I suggest that unevenness, unfairness, and the unequal sharing of caring are matters that can be changed by changing the making-of-reality, by changing the intra-actions through which these matters get done. It should not be even presented like “we” need to start a “project” to invest in matters of care, thus *we are already, and are always inherently*

entangled with these matters. The point is to pay attention, to be accountable for, and in accordance, change *how we are a part* of the intra-actions that are matters of care. Therefore, the choice to care or not to care, as well as the ways to care, are present all the time: like Bellacasa remarks, care obliges the intrarelatational existence (2017,120). Bellacasa proposes that to change the structural reproduction of inequalities, the promotion of ethics of communal reciprocity, through basic income, for example, could be a **way to ensure better possibilities for care to circulate multilaterally: it is more likely to be caring, if it is taken care of** (2017, 121).¹⁴⁵

“The topological dynamics of space, time and matter are an agential matter and as such require an ethics of knowing and being: intra-actions have the potential to do more than participate in the constitution of the geometries of power; they open up possibilities for changes in its topology and dynamics, and as such, interventions in the manifold possibilities made available reconfigure both what will be and what will be possible.” (Barad 2007, 246).

Thinking with agential realism, the changing of the intra-actions does not mean that everything is possible at anytime: that “I” can stop the destruction of the rainforests now, just by wanting it to happen. Indeed, there is no static “I” that would pre-exist its actions, but a variety of possible actions (entanglements restricted and construed in intra-action with(in)

the material-discursive reality and its situated specificities), and every enactment takes part in the making-of-reality, every enactment is both a making-of the self, and the other, and every enactment is also an exclusion of other possibilities as well as the possible possibilities that would had been possible is choosing differently. **Every change is a change that matters, intra-actions are intra-acting with other intra-actions: the reality-in-making is a topological process**. As far as I am concerned, there is no such analogy that “small” is “insignificant” and “big” is “influential”: matters matter in extraordinary, unpredictable ways and volumes (just think of quantum phenomena!). Nevertheless, being overwhelmed by this is not very wise either, because justice is not any “ones” “personal” onus, but rather “everybody-in-production’s” matter of concern: responsibility is both inherently intimate and never a personal matter. *Being careful* and *caring* does not always ensure an equivalent response. Indeed, every giving, receiving and responding is an unrivaled mattering – there are no identical touchings or self-same materializations of care. However, every sincere enactment of care is a possible opening for more care, and every sincere enactment of care is already a making-of a more caring reality. **I propose that agential separability is the very condition for responsibility, responsibility and respect towards “the other” (not just a human other), thus it is only through agential cuts within the intra-actions that the other that the self (co-)constitute. As being a part of the co-constitutive intra-actions, the**

world-in-making, taking care well seems to be not just an obligation, but also a practice of self-love.

[4:39>] “Right on the canvas, listen to me, that’s where it really becomes fun, that’s when you can just literally create a painting right on the canvas as you’re working on it (*incessant brushing mixes with the words that drop and flow in a dulcet manner, like someone was telling a bed-time story*). You look at what you’re doing and you’ll see things. They will just sort of happen. And you learn to take advantage of whatever happens and use it to make your painting special. And you can do that.” (Bob Ross on the Mystic Mountain episode1).

Attentive Touch and Engagement with Objects

“Caring, or not caring, are ethico-political problems and agencies that we mostly think as they pass from humans towards others. But thinking care with things and objects exposes that the thick relational complexity of the intratouching circulation of care might be even more intense when we take into account that our worlds are more than human: the agencies at stake multiply.” (Bellacasa 2017, 122).

I find Barad’s (2007) and Bellacasa’s (2017) perspectives on co-constitutive existence, where touching, knowing, wonderment,

150. For example: HUSin sairaaloissa ei saa kätellä (2009, May 5).

Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-5247270>

151. History of drone warfare. (n.d.). Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/explorers/history-of-drone-warfare>

152. See for example: <https://www.hs.fi/paivanlehti/30112017/art-2000005469961.html> ; <https://www.aamulehti.fi/kotimaa/opettaja-ker-toi-tehneensa-virkavirheita-nain-ni-ista-sanoo-laki-23444388/> ; <https://www.helsinki.fi/fi/uutiset/koulutus/miten-koulussa-saa-koskettaa-tutkimus-kertoo-etta-koskettamin-en-lisaa-luottamusta-luokassa>

153. In terms of agential realism, knowing is to become entangled (Barad 2007). Thinking this way, it is obvious that there are differential ways in which knowing takes form. It is not only “cognitive” knowledge or a logical thesis about a trueness of an argument that matters, but other types of knowings too. One can know everything about swimming in theory, but still not know how to swim. In many ways, this applies to touch as well.

154. Uotinen, S. (2018, February 14). Miten koulussa saa koskettaa? Tutkimus kertoo, että koskettaminen lisää luottamusta luokassa.

Retrieved 27 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.helsinki.fi/fi/uutiset/koulutus/miten-koulussa-saa-koskettaa-tutkimus-kertoo-etta-koskettamin-en-lisaa-luottamusta-luokassa>

155. I suppose the expression “messy” (Ballacasa 2017, 10) can be juxtaposed with other feminist notions that resist neat categories, and make a wake-up-call from the dream of clean and uncontaminated, distinct objectivity in science making.

156. Marsden, R. (2012, July 20). ‘Maria spends 20 minutes folding towels’: Why millions are mesmerised by ASMR videos.

Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/maria-spends-20-minutes-folding-towels-why-millions-are-mesmerised-by-asmr-videos-7956866.html>

157. Strassler, Matt (2012): Mass and Energy.

Retrieved 15 Mar 2018 from: <https://profmattstrassler.com/articles-and-posts/particle-physics-basics/mass-energy-matter-etc/mass-and-energy/>

158. See the chapter Causality in ASMR.

159. Spacetime mattering is an intriguing concept when recounting that the assumed “age” of the universe is based on observations and calculations, one of them being cosmic microwave radiation, which is, according to the contemporary astrophysics, a trace of the Big Bang. That is, the theories of how the universe came to be are based on radiation that is “ancient” in a very astronomic scale: the radiation coming to us is almost 14 billion years “old”. One way of understanding this is that the radiation is not “old”, but that the “process” (importantly not as *evolving in time*, but as materialization that never sits still), which the universe is, inhabits time within it (Barad’s notion that being and becoming are the same makes perfect sense now). Thinking this way, the Big Bang is not an event that was, but it is a phenomenon that is still going on (like everything else), thus an absolute ending and beginning are only matters of *drawing borders*. One more clock starts ticking when a child is born: the birth marks “a moment” when they are considered a living “person”, the reproductive organs are the conceived border, a gate “between the mother’s body and the “outer world””, and the crossing that border is the event after which this person’s time starts. Seems legit?

and care are coincident parts of material and temporal becoming, extremely fascinating in terms of ASMR. I already stated that ASMR takes part in the practices of care and touch. But is ASMR, as a phenomenon of human and non-human partakers and becomings, a *good* way of caring, touching, being in touch and taking contact to “human” and “nonhuman” bodies-in-production? What is “to care right”, and in whose terms? What type of touching or caring is ethically endorsed? How can non-human and human productive practices and entangled matters be both examined critically and appreciated righteously, and how can “humans” make these decisions? How can “we” know what the “other-than-humans” approve as ethical to begin with? Unfortunately, for the delimitations and focus of this thesis, I cannot accommodate all of these urgent cogitations, but I will very briefly, yet gently touch on some of the these topics.

A justified remark here is that the important task of pointing out the production of human–nonhuman / subject–object binary without taking a perspective of an individual (ending up strengthening the assumption of an independent human subject) or without using these categorizations to study how they produce, seems like a paradox. Barad’s account on the human/nonhuman division is to point out that these categories need to be understood as inherently unstable (2007). That does not mean that such categorizations are completely *arbitrary*¹⁴⁶ - indeed the world is all about iterative enactments that are

materializations, constitutive exclusions and *differences that matter*. Thinking with agential realism, to use the terms that participate in iterative recreation of distinctions is indeed to participate in the material construction (or deconstruction) of these distinctions (indeed, as far as I am concerned, the terms are not pre-existing, ready-to-use abstract beings, the *terms only exist within their use*: the terms come to be [materialize] in a multiplicity of forms of writings, theories, thoughts, pictures, pronouncements, gestures, and so forth)¹⁴⁷. That is, like Barad assures, there is no essential ontological separation between discourse and materiality (2007, 151). Using the terms in exceptional ways, or questioning them, for example with quotations (like done here) is already an exception (not an exceptional exception, but an exception from the material-discursive norm), along with the other exceptions done elsewhere and in other ways: **differential ruptures that materialize instead of those materializations that stabilize the reconfiguring distinctions**.

Barad’s (2007) posthumanist perception¹⁴⁸ highlights the significance of other-than-humans in naturalcultural practices, including daily social and scientific practices, and practices that do not involve humans (2007, 32). Agential realism is a theory with which it is possible to account for phenomena producing human and nonhuman becomings without being stuck in an anthropomorphic worldview. Respons-ability is not delimited to human-human encounters. Indeed, there

is no such “thing” as a fixed human entity: it is the ongoing constitution of the “human” along with the “others” that “we” must acknowledge (Barad 2007, 392). Like Barad puts it: “agential separability is not individuation” (2007, 393). To repeat, ethics and caring are material-discursive matters that do not start from or end with “humans.” **ASMR is an apt example of caring which is obviously not symmetrical or reciprocal in a conventionally understood human-to-human manner, but a phenomenon within which the other-than-human materia and “inanimate” objects are of a fundamental importance. Fascinatingly, the online ASMR phenomenon is also a multilateral materialization of caring (from the “human” perspective), thus one video might reach hundreds of thousands of spectators.** Emphatically, all of the mentioned elements (materia, objects, spectators, video) become to be within their intra-actions as part of the ASMR phenomenon:

“differentiating, a practice in intra-action where matter and meaning is produced through agential cuts, is not about absolute exteriorities, othering, or separating for good, but rather entanglements that are “about making **connections and commitments**” (Barad 2007, 392-93, bolding mine).

you
are
my favorite kind.
nothing
that i can
name.

Nayyirah Waheed (salt. 2013)

It is hard for me to see obvious examples in which ASMR videos or the phenomenon would directly do harm to anyone or anything.

From the “human” perspective, there is a rather small possibility for online ASMR to be oppressive or intrusive since the engagement in ASMR is *voluntary* (of course I cannot say it is *impossible* that someone would be forced to engage with ASMR videos, although I see that being quite unlikely). The situation can be stopped, and thus the intimacy of the immediate engagement is also chosen. Moreover, the way of handling objects and materia (“nonhuman” and “human”) is more likely to be gentle, attuned, respectful and positively curious, than violating, aggressive, obtrusive or damaging, at least in an intuitive understanding.

Bellacasa says that what is needed to foster care in more-than-human-worlds is a *politics of care*: “**“intra-active” touch demands attentiveness to the response, or reaction, of the touched. It demands to question when and how we shall avoid touch, to remain open for our haptic speculations to be cut short by the resistance of an “other,”**

to be frustrated by the encounter of another way of touching/knowing” (2017, 119-20. Bolding mine). How can the response and reaction be understood in the terms of ASMR? Surely, it would be anthropomorphic to assume the tea box, for instance, would demonstrate whether or not they like the way they are being touched on the Intoxicating Sounds ASMR video (indeed, the tea-box cannot be understood as an ontologically discrete, inanimate entity). First of all, I suggest that respect materializes in tolerance, which is to account for a vast and iteratively reconfiguring multiplicity of the differential bodies-in-production: similar responses to care and caressing touch cannot be expected **from the tea-box-in-production and from the spectator-in-production.** More over, ASMR, as a specific phenomenon which involves caring, also involves performative *positionings* in a sense that there are temporal, causal agential workings that mark the parties involved as a caregiver (agential subject) and care-receivers (agential objects). Interesting here are the dynamics, shifting of these positions and the defining of the partakers, that I have already mooted in earlier chapters. The materialization of care does not exclusively belong to any of the partakers, nor is it *situated in-between* like some transcendental force propagating through the air. Instead, care is only possible within intra-action: the spectator watching and listening (experiencing) the objects being handled with curious, careful touch, the iteratively reconfigured agential separation of the subjects and the objects as sensing agency shifts from

the contact of the playfully examining fingers and objects to the intra-action of the object-hand-touch and air, which then takes touching to another dimension as the sounds are touching the ear and the spectator’s body-in-production is reconfigured with the workings of care, and so forth. **The dynamics of touching, caring, reconfiguring, and responding in intra-actions are complex and manifold, and the reality in-making is remade in uncountable ways all the time (more precisely, time is that remaking).**

Whose good it is then, that needs to be accounted for when thinking of respectful care and touch? It seems like “*good*” must be problematized before moving on. However, I think it is not efficient to take the project of definitions in such an exhausting extreme that would, at the end, cause one to become paralyzed in front of the issue¹⁴⁹. Here, unfortunately, I have no chance to extensively address these elementary questions. The issues of *what is good* and *whose good is what* are complex matters, not least because, from an agential realist perspective there are no individual entities existing ontologically separately from anything else: there is no absolute “who”. Barad uses an example of a physicist Freeman Dyson, who (some irony here), following the haunting questions of the poet S.T. Eliot, asks a (very rhetorical) question: “Do I dare disturb the universe?” (2007, 394-96). The summed answer is: you shall, and will, no matter what, thus you are *of* the universe, not outside of it (Barad 2007, 394-96). Perhaps it would be more practical to propose the question of good as concerning

phenomena. What type of phenomena involve good care? How can these phenomena be extended and entangled with other phenomena, so that the differential configurations of caring can take new forms?

Learning of Caring

Bellacasa speculates with an example of technohaptic robotic skin, that learning *how to touch precisely and carefully* could serve as “a skillful recognition of vulnerability” so that “implementing touching technologies could foster awareness that learning (to) touch is a process” (Bellacasa 2017, 113). Bellacasa states that **to know how to touch right is not immanent and given** (2017, 113). Reframing this notion with Baradian terms, one could say that **the body-in-production learns the right ways of touching in** intra-action. Moreover, *specificity* of contact, according to Bellacasa, is what indeed produces diversity, the multiplying effects of touch “extending the range of experiences rather than extending one mode of experience” (2017, 113). As Elo puts it, touching is not one type of doing or experiencing, but rather we should acknowledge the *multiple senses of touch* (2012a). Elo also summarizes that touch is a matter of meaningful depth: “something can be so touching that a human being or an animal is thoroughly moved. In regard to this depth, touch is inevitably ambivalent, since exactly the same kind of physical contact can strike one in different ways depending on the context” (2012a, 3). Touchings, as agential

entanglements, are always unique intra-actings: “In every context, care responds to a situated relationship” (Bellacasa 2017, 163).

“Human-human” touching seems to be a downward trend in some material-discursive practices that have traditionally involved human-human touch. For example, in many health care facilities in Finland, the doctors are instructed to avoid handshakes in order to prevent the spread of infections.¹⁵⁰ Surgeons have always used instruments, but with new technologies the conceived, relational distance between the patient and the doctor is growing, so that the future’s “telesurgeon” can be “physically absent” from the situation of “accessing distant flesh and bodies” (Bellacasa 2017, 108). Another example of the “tele-touching” is its materialization in drone warfare, which makes “distant” operations possible by using pilotless technology: “These satellite controlled hunter-killer drones allow pilots to control their aircraft from half a world away and it allows generals, spies and politicians to watch the war they are waging on the other side of the world, live on TV from anywhere in the world.”¹⁵¹ I will further examine the intriguing questions of distance and proximity in the next chapter.

Recent discourses in Finland (and elsewhere) have contemplated the role of touch in classrooms, and the topic has come up in context of principally negative incidents related to sexual harassment or events of misusing power.¹⁵² What is the right kind of situation, if any, when a teacher can touch a student? What is the right kind of touch in that situa-

tion? What are the rights of the teacher when it is the student who is touching, especially if it is done in an unacceptable or violent way? There was a heated conversation around this issue in Finland some years ago, and the *fear of touching wrong* has undoubtedly caused many teachers to avoid touching completely. Mooting Bellacasa’s idea that attentive, respectful and caring touch between humans, as well as between humans and nonhumans, could and should be learned, is an interesting idea from the perspective of (art) education (2017). The matter is not simple, because touch can embody very contradictory becomings, and the historicity of bodies-in-production demands extraordinary attentiveness to the marks-on-bodies, and scars-on-bodies (as more or less serious neglects of care) which are not past, but always affecting, timely. **Inspiringly, in 2017 a three-year research project started to investigate the possibilities of attentive touch in schools.** “Koskettava koulu” (translates as “Touching School”) project aims to delineate meanings, matterings, and guidelines for touching in schools and for touching as a pedagogical tool. Delightfully, the researchers realized that touch is best to be studied by methods that also involve touching¹⁵³, and thus there are artists and art-based researchers working in the project too. **I think that this is a brave opening to investigate how to touch better**, instead of avoiding the actual matter by no-touch policies: leaving complicated things untouched is not to eliminate the issue, but to neglect the multiplicity of possibilities of care to begin with. One

of the researchers, professor Liisa Tainio from University of Helsinki, says that the previous studies have shown that when a teacher touches a student so that the touch is perceived as encouraging, comforting and positive, the student is more likely calm, more actively engaged in learning and can even succeed better in their studies.¹⁵⁴ Thinking with agential realism, there is no reason to stop here.

How can we learn to touch others right (as well as strangers)? And not just “human” others, but all others? Could the future art / (visual) culture education (along with the acknowledgment that students are not disembodied minds, nor is art merely a doing of hands, and nor are hands cut off from the rest of the bodies-in-production, nor is a human an isolated system), promote this type of being-with, and literally practice touching; its formulations, matterings and meanings that concern both humans and nonhumans in-making? Could ASMR media serve as an example of a more empathic, permissive, tolerant, sensitive and respectful way of encountering/engaging/being in touch with (that is, intra-acting with) oneself and others, both human and nonhuman? Could some specific type of ASMR media be developed so that it could be used as a tool in restless classrooms?

Strange Matters

Distance and Proximity in Online ASMR

“– it is possible for entangled relationalities to make connections between entities that do not appear to be proximate in space and time” (Barad 2007, 76).

By means of agential realism, space, time and matter are one but not singular phenomena. This statement primes the analysis of this chapter. My project in this thesis was to inquire how shifting agency and intra-active entanglements of human and nonhuman partakers manifest in the ASMR phenomenon. At the same I want to problematize my own preconceptions and understandings of ASMR phenomenon and its workings. **I was originally curious about the ways the spatial dimension matters in terms of intimacy and the digital: can online ASMR truly present “intimate presence”, while there is a “time delay” and it holds “a virtual distance”? Is engaging in online ASMR an antithesis to a “real encounter” in “real time”?** It seems that in the era of the digital and the palpable emerging in fusion, worries about the role of touch and its formations, as well as the concerns of the “extinction” of face-to-face encounters “supplanted” by social media, prime the anxiety of what happens to “real”, “tangible” and “touchy” interactions. Finnish professor and researcher Mika Elo has contemplated touch and bodily existence, especially in

the context of digital media and technologies (2012a). Elo takes a perspective on how digital media transforms the sense of time and space, distance and proximity, and thus shakes up the conceived borders of the body:

“It would seem that digital media technology brings diverse media contents right to our fingertips: from day to day, we finger various media devices, and small movements of the finger have as good as limitless possibilities of creating a multitude of things – even “in real time,” that is, from a distance beyond the bodily horizon without any significant delay. These taps, pushes and sweeps challenge the familiar concretia of the world; virtually nothing seems to be beyond reach” (Elo 2012a, 5).

I very much like the way Bellacasa uses the term “messy”¹⁵⁵ to describe the making of reality in entangled practices that involve touch and care: there is nothing simple about the matter, nor is there an easy feel-good solution which would not entail any pitfalls, failures, or incapability to respond right (2017). My task here is not promote ASMR phenomenon, but rather to comprehend ASMR from a new materialist, posthumanist perspective. That is, I am not trying to obscure the multiform, polyphonic and perhaps ambivalent matterings and meanings of the phenomenon. A journalist who experiences the tingles, ended a story of ASMR by saying:

“This bizarre, burgeoning subculture may not be the greatest testament to the power of the internet – I’d probably agree that there’s something appalling about the idea of millions of people, myself included, sitting in an almost trance-like state, frittering away hours of our time watching incredibly soporific video content on laptops. But hey, – at least we have smiles on our faces.”¹⁵⁶

According to Barad **proximity, location, distance and scale** are too complex, heterogeneous, multidimensional matters to be considered through *geometrical analysis*, which is interested in sizes and shapes (2007). Geometrical consideration assumes, for example, that scale would entail such a nesting relationship as local<national<global; this notion arising in accordance to the seemingly preexisting physical “size” (Barad 2007, 244-45, 451). Maybe the reason why quantum entanglement feels so deeply perplexing is not the state of affairs that two particles form a unity (a phenomenon), but the *scope* that the phenomenon is about: two seemingly discrete particles can be entangled across long distances. I already noted that from the physical (physics’) account, *touching* is actually a touching of energies, not a touching of objects – touchings are matters of intra-actions, not matters of discrete entities. Somehow, it seems easier to endorse that two things that *proximate* each other can form a unity. However, reality is composed of *phenomena*, and the things-within-phenomena do not ask permission to

get entangled from any “human” who fancies to understand the world through geometrical relations (Barad 2007,140). Agential realism moves beyond geometries and opens up to a more spacious dimension of a *dynamic topology* in an ongoing flux: concerning scale through **topology, which is about boundaries and connectivity, would grant that the varying “scales” of bodies, homes, regions, communities, nations and the globe are intra-actively reproduced through one another** (Barad 2007, 76,176-77). As topological dynamics, these matters are “agential enfoldings that reconfigure the connectivity of the spacetime matter manifold” (Barad 2007, 245). Perhaps I should ask: *How does distance work? Distance between whom? And what is it to be present, then?* Presence and distance, like intimacy, imply *relations* between specific factors. How can these concepts be understood in the context of ASMR?

Maybe the relational workings of presence and distance can be approached through another kindred concept, like momentum (speed). In *classical physics* momentum (motion-energy or kinetic energy) is defined as a *property of an object*. This is how a theoretical physicist Matt Strassler explains it: “*The most common form of momentum is just that due to simple motion of objects, and it’s more or less what you might think intuitively: if an object is moving in a certain direction, then it has momentum in that direction, and the faster it moves, the more momentum it has. And a heavy object has more momentum than a light object if the two are traveling*

160. There are some channels that make live stream ASMR, like this one for example: '[ASMR Live Stream] Whispered Relaxing Chat' : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twKc_FkWYSc

161. I think that the dominant ethos of “manmade” objects being “artificial” in contrast to the “natural” beings, really crystalizes how deep-rooted the distinction between “culture” and “nature” is indeed.

162. According to Barad (2007, 134), metaphysical individualism, representationalism and humanist orbits are tied together, and still today these ideas become lived reality – the reality of anthropocentrism.

163. To repeat, “humans” are phenomenal; they do not end or begin from their skin, nor are they isolated systems but constituted material-discursively in intra-action with the other-than-humans (the exteriority-within is also a matter of fact biologically). See for example: Barad 2007, 149-150.

164. A random example of the topological workings of material-discursive “co-causality” could be international conflicts and the entanglements of “domestic” and “global” politics, geopolitics, production, and the trade of weapons, power relations, hegemonic masculinity, money, and human rights. Helsingin Sanomat wrote on the 21st of January in 2018 about Finnish weapons trade to countries which are involved in war in Yemen as well as to countries which are known to violate human rights. The article has a picture of a light brown tank with the name of a Finnish-owned company on the side of it. The cover of the magazine says: “Finnish Patria has sold troop carriers to Arab Emirates. In December one of them was seen in the War in Yemen.” An agential realist perspective to study the entanglements involving this particular tank might be a illuminative way to understand the topological makings-of-reality as material-discursive practices.

165. This is citation from a story of a curious columnist, who tried doing an ASMR video themself. It is noteworthy to mention that according to their story, they do not recognize to having experienced the actual ASMR tingles.

O’Connell, M. (2013, February 12). Why Has This Hourlong Video of Someone Pretending To Get a Haircut Been Viewed Nearly 1,000,000 Times?

Retrieved 27 Mar 2018, from: http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culture-box/2013/02/asmr_videos_autonomous_sensory_meridian_response_and_whispering_videos_on.html

166. Guest on an Internet conversation thread on ASMR, when the sensation was still unnamed: WEIRD SENSATION FEELS GOOD. (n.d.).

Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.steadyhealth.com/topics/weird-sensation-feels-good>

167. The “well-being phenomena” in the West seem to host an ulterior motive of “efficacious rest” ensuring more efficacious performance at work, which returns, ironically, to the idea of success being analogous with *productivity*.

*at the same speed.*¹⁵⁷ Barad remarks that both the special and the general theory of relativity by Einstein, belonging to classical physics, fail to challenge the Newtonian understanding of “matter as substances made up of discrete entities with inherent properties” (2007, 438). Thinking momentum with agential realism, it is ought to be understood as *a phenomenon* of reality (reality without an absolute exteriority or ontologically distinct “objects”). That is, momentum is not an absolute property of an individual object, because the object simply does not have momentum outside of the relation to something else. “An object” is understood to be moving, because the reality “around it” is understood to be still (which is actually not true either, since the earth is spinning around its axis: it is in constant motion in relation to space). Momentum is a phenomenon which exists only in a relational sense. There is temporal agential separability produced by an agential cut within the intra-action of the “space” and “object in motion”; and that is what produces the notion of an individual, moving entity, like a ball flying across the air. However, the participants entangled in a certain phenomenon do not preexist as separate from each other - their positions materialize as such exactly *because of intra-action*. For example, a phenomenon of “a ball flying in the air” is impossible without both temporarily separate agential attendants: the ball and the air.

Let’s get back to the issue of spatiality in online ASMR. *Presence*, thought with geometrical analysis, is an antonym of *absence*

and “spatial separateness,” that is, *distance*. The everyday perception of presence draws heavily upon the human experience. Something or someone is considered to be physically present when they are noticeable to our senses: visible, hearable, touchable etc (cf. citation from Elo 2012a above, where they use the telling phrase “bodily horizon”). The sensory horizon of a human is very limited: when standing in a small, soundproof room, one’s perception covers very little. The discovery of bacteria, atoms, quantum particles and so forth, has shown that humans are only able to sense and perceive fragments of reality (and assumably in a very different manner to some other forms of life); reality, which is actually “present” in all “scales” all the time(s). When talking on the phone with someone, are they present, or not? What is it to be “physically present”? That of which is understood to *not* be physically present “here”; can still be understood to be physically present *somewhere*. That is, the distinction seems to be made based on the assumed geographical distance between two or more things located in space. Barad notes that

“‘Distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements. Importantly, intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality”¹⁵⁸ (2014, 30: n4).

According to agential realism, phenomena are not *located in* time (now or then) and space (here or there), but are material entanglements that reach across different times and spaces. Indeed, material-discursive phenomena *make time and space*: reality is **spacetime-mattering**¹⁵⁹ (Barad 2007, 383). Intimacy, like post-personal attention, works in online ASMR no matter that in the situation there is no traditionally conceived “shared timing”¹⁶⁰ between two conventional “human subjects”: In Barad’s terms, apparatuses (like ASMR+ Mystic Mountain) do not take place in the world as if it was a container, nor do they evolve in time (2007, 170). Rather, apparatuses “are of the world, assiduously configuring and reconfiguring spatiality and temporality” (2007, 170). Similarly, bodies-in-production are not situated or located in specific environments, but rather “environments” and “bodies” are intra-actively co-constituted in dynamic reality (Barad 2007, 170). All materializations matter in peculiar ways: ASMR tingles can be experienced in multiple situations and encounters that do not involve YouTube, nonetheless ASMR is a vastly online-entangled phenomenon. Elo explains that “the prefix “tele-” in telescope, telephone, television, etc. implies that distance is conceived of as an obstacle that these media aim at eliminating;” but adds that what is happening is not that the new technologies would “eliminate” distance, but they rather displace the limits of experience “by enabling live transmission” and “digital media tend to go a step further by enabling **real time computation to yield**

accessibility here and now” (2012a, 5, bolding mine). Elo writes that the innovations and developments in technological media phenomena (web 2.0, touch screens, the omnipresence of media on mobile etc.) are once again changing the hierarchies of sensorium, and, in an unseen way, bringing together diverse sensations and faculties of sensing (2012a, 1-2). After noting that such shifts have happened before, Elo inquires whether new media *just transform* sensorial experiences, or if they *profoundly reconfigure* it (2012a, 1-2). **Thinking with agential realism, “new media” are not some man-made aliens that have come to reside in reality and change the sensorial experiences of human subjects.**¹⁶¹ Sensorial experiences are entangled matters; pencils, hands, sunlight, sounds, tastes, pains, pleasures, mobile phones, VR glasses, cold waters and smell of smoke are of *each other*. There has never been, and will not be a static, similar, normative type or parameter of sensorial experiences experienced by a discrete human subject outside of enfolding reality, to which we could “now” compare these “contemporary” experiences. Where (or when in time) can a line be drawn between “new experiences” and the “good old ones”? **The experiences are themselves reconfigurations of the bodies-in-production co-constituting in intra-actions.**¹⁶²

Thinking with agential realism, ASMR is also a material, time-making and space-making phenomenon. This means that the questions of whether the “presence” of an ASMRtist is placebo, or whether intimacy is

imagined, are barking up the wrong tree because they a) do not account for the posthumanist understanding of the phenomenal, material-discursive constitution of “human”¹⁶³, and b) they misconceive the *topological* nature of being when mooted from the Baradian ontological perspective. **The apprehensions of “illusory intimacy”, and “simulating a real encounter” on the Internet become irrelevant (and technophobic): taking a Baradian posthumanist perspective, I state that there simply is *nothing illusory or unnatural* in the materialization of intimacy in the online ASMR phenomenon in itself.** There is nothing fake, fictitious or counterfeit in the situation of engagement and ASMR: this “encounter” is a particular example of intra-action. Another interesting matter then, entangled with online ASMR is the performative, material-discursive practice *through which* the “offline” *becomes* as more “immediate” or “real” than the “digital”: the very production of this juxtaposition is what matters here. That is, the intra-active configurations of bodies (not only human bodies) in online ASMR *are* simply differential becomings, where the topological phenomena entangled online and offline are both-and rather than either-or – nonetheless parts, but not a singular reality. **There are no separate realities of “online” and that which is “outside of Internet” - these are not places, but enfoldings of spacetime-mattering. Nor are there separate timelines that would be distributed to these offline and online realities,** as if the offline was “live” now, and the online was always “catching up”, or in the best

case “successfully creating a sense of immediateness”: The “delay” after “one” touches their mobile screen and waits for reaction is a functional configuration, a material doing entangled with the device that “one” is intra-acting with. The material-discursively producing understanding of time as linear is what gives this materialization a meaning of “delay”. It is not that while “one” is waiting for their tap to perform a miracle and get them on YouTube, *time* starts acting like an irksome video in slow motion. Instead, the “delay” is *a material phenomenon*, it is a materialization of time - materiality which is time, time which is material. Barad utters that “one of matter’s most intimate doings” is the “materialization of time” (2014, 16). Juhani Palasmaa, beautifully describes the materiality of time with an example of holding a stone in ones’ hand:

“A pebble polished by waves is pleasurable to the hand, not only because of its soothing shape, but because it expresses the slow process of its formation; a perfect pebble on the palm materializes duration, it is time turned into shape” (2005, 30).

CAUSALITY IN ASMR

– dynamics of the spacetime manifold are iteratively reworked through the inexhaustible liveliness of the manifold’s material configuration, that is, the ongoing dance of agency immanent in its material configuration” (Barad 2007, 246).

In this thesis is wanted to question the preliminary assumptions that ASMR would be a) merely a product of human culture b) a mere sensory-emotional sensation of a human subject. In Baradian terms, the shifting agency makes one part of the world intelligible to another part of the world in a unique manner, and this all does not “take place” in time and space, but is the making of the spacetime *per se* (Barad 2007, 140). **Believe it or not, causality is an important issue here, because it touches both the production of (nature-)culture (and it also touches the “production” itself, as it is understood to be a causal enactment) and the sensorial experience (as it is understood to be a reaction to an internal or external stimuli).** Causality (also an issue of determinism/free will) is often thought to be a relation with certain orientation, happening between distinct objects (entities), where one (cause) modifies or leaves a mark on the other (effect) (Barad 2007, 175-76). I preliminary supposed that an obvious causal structure in ASMR phenomenon could work like this example:

the ASMR video is the *starting point* (triggers are the *cause*), the Internet (YouTube) and the technology (computer, screen, headphones) are the *mediators*, and the spectator (experiencer) is the *destination* (ASMR tingles being the most notable *effect*).

How does causality look in terms of ASMR if I am informed by an agential realist

framework? It seems that I have to review my chain of reasoning - but first, it is necessary to summarize what Barad has written about the matter. **Barad states, that it is a common mistake to mix the issues of determinacy and determinism (2008).** In terms of quantum physics (non-deterministic theorizations), the matters of determinism and determinacy are connected, but not the same *per se*. **Determinism** is the belief that events happen in a linear, unbroken causal chain in time, which is a succession of moments (this is incorporated in Newtonian physics). **Determinacy (and indeterminacy)**, in turn, is an ontological issue (*principle of complementarity*), and in some interpretations it is an epistemological issue (according to the *uncertainty principle*): it has to do with the definition of the basic units of reality (whether or not they are objects with inherent boundaries and properties) and with their relationship to the act of being measured. (Barad 2007, 180; 2008, 174-75: n3.) Barad explains that “there is no determinate fact of the matter about the values of both the position and the momentum of an object at the same moment of time” (2008, 174-75: n3). This means, that the future (of an object) is not evolving in a deterministic manner in time (Barad 2008, 175: n3).

Intra-actions are not causally deterministic (Barad 2007, 211). Agency is produced within phenomena through causal structures, agential cuts, that enable a temporal agential object and a temporal agential subject to emerge within the intra-action. What is, what can be, as well as

what can not be (the constitutive exclusions) are reconfigured in intra-actions: intra-action is the agential, never settling reconfiguring of “both the real and the possible” (Barad 2007, 177). Exclusions are important: they foreclose the possibility of determinism. In other words, the indeterminacy (complementarity / uncertainty) is what keeps the so called future pending, as well as the so called past (Barad 2007, 177). This does not mean that everything is possible at every given moment: not simply whatever measurement leading to whatever result (235). Drawing from the phenomenon of quantum discontinuity, Barad asserts that “– the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter’s iterative becoming” (2007, 234). Moreover, the causes are not singular (Barad 2007, 394). Each cause is a cause in intra-action, and each effect is an effect in intra-action. **Causality is not a pool game where balls just hit each other and the causes and effects escalate: the balls do not exist as such, only momentarily can they be agentially separate, yet inseparably part of the game. Every hit makes a difference, every intra-action is sedimented into the becomings: intra-actions intra-acting with possible possibilities. Reality is both causal and indeterminate.**

So let’s get back to the question of causality in ASMR. With all the aforementioned in mind, I first note that the causal structure I will exemplify is just one out of the multiple others that can be thought to be working in the ASMR phenomenon. More over, it is **extremely simplified and, without rupture:**

the spectator+expectation
(that is: agential subject with traces of exteriority-within)

the ASMR video<>the technology<>spectator (that is: all co-constituted in intra-action: <>)

the ASMR video+triggers+the technology (cause, agential subject)

</>the spectator+tingles (effect, agential object) (that is: intra-action+agential cut+-causal structure, signified as: </>)

{ signifies that the total production of the causal intra-action is not evolving in time, but is part of the iterative (re)constitution of material reality: the material-discursive (re)configuring of ASMR phenomenon

As far as I understand, causality, in Baradian terms, is not *ontologically* a one-way action, because it happens in intra-action. This does not mean that everything/ everyone involved is accountable in exactly the same ways, but that causality is about involving and involvement, and that fact indeed just deepens the datum that existence always entails an ethical concern.¹⁶⁴ Reality is a performance of causal structures and indeterminacy within phenomena that are of humans and nonhumans, material and discursive – phenomena within which these differentiations are produced. This is intriguing also in terms

168. It feels a bit tragic that the ultimate “well-being” in the West is grounded on a vicious circle of time being mostly about working in order to “make money”, followed by “leisure time”, which is not working and is material-discursively arranged so that the money made will be consumed. This goes on in a loop like a broken record, which we all know too well. A huge number of deprived people in Third World countries work around the clock for multinational companies which support and reconfigure this circle by mass producing stuff in sweatshops where the working conditions violate basic human rights. The stuff is, for example, oil-based items and ecologically unsustainable throwaway clothes (ironically, vast amounts of plastic end up in the oceans and the clothes made in cheap labor countries are sold in West and then returned to those countries through supposedly good-doing clothes donations, finally ending up to the ever-expanding landfills of the poorest countries). Then again, people in the West and in the developing countries work to be able to buy more of that cheap disposable stuff. Any detail in this complex system would be extremely fascinating to be analyzed with agential realism. For instance, the production of plastic items, one iconic example being the American Tupperware Brands Corporation, which, as a complex apparatus is entangled with a multiplicity of other material-discursive apparatuses. After the Tupperware brand was presented to the public in 1948 the plastic containers became en-

tangled, for example, with the configuration of gender roles in Tupperware parties domesticating female work and linking a female career with home-making, while the actual profit was collected by men; social marketing, drilling for oil and its ecological, social and cultural effects, and its shaping of the labor during the Texas oil boom in the 50’s; post-World War II politics in America profiling through conformity and conservative, materialistic values; differential cultural/material/social aspects of serving and preparing food; the reconfigurations of family-life and friendships; the production of “female” bodies in terms of the clothing codes in Tupperware parties, as well as in terms of the material co-constitution of the female-bodies-in-production with(in) homes and kitchens; popularizing plastic as an industrial material, especially in the manufacturing of everyday items, etc. The co-constitutive, material-discursive nature of materia and time is fascinating, what ever the example introduced. What matters are the material-discursive becomings of the intra-actions. Of course, the workings of apparatuses, like that involving Tupperware containers, are complicated; everything but mere chain-reactions, as Barad (2007) remarks: “matter is a dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still—an ongoing reconfiguring that exceeds any linear conception of dynamics in which effect follows cause end-on-end, and in which the global is a straightforward emanation outward of the local” (170).

Example formed around information retrieved from:

Williams, L. S., & Bemiller, M. (2011). *Women at Work : Tupperware, Passion Parties, and Beyond*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Accessed 3 Apr 2018 from: <https://helka.finna.fi/Record/helka.3113764> ;

Tupperware. (2018, February 24). Retrieved 3 Apr 2018, from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupperware#Product_lines ;

Wogan, D. (2013, September 26). *Throwback Thursday: Drilling for oil in 1950s Texas*. Retrieved 3 Apr 2018, from <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/plugged-in/throwback-thursday-drilling-for-oil-in-1950s-texas/>

169. David L, “Affordance Theory (Gibson),” in *Learning Theories*, 24 Jul 2014.

Retrieved 2 Apr 2018 from: <https://www.learning-theories.com/affordance-theory-gibson.html>.

of Barad’s thesis of constitutive exclusions: the reconfiguring reality is an ongoing play between favoring and neglecting, thus every becoming also excludes something else from being or becoming possible (2007, 246). In other words, the matters of inclusion and exclusion material-discursively co-constitute each other within their intra-action: ***exclusion can never mean an absolute externalization or extermination*** (like “vanishing” or “deleting” completely from existence, thus *reality does not forget*), but what ***it can mean is a closure of possible possibilities that might have been***.

Waste of Time, Leisure Pleasure, or Time Well Spent?

“There is obviously something about doing things quietly, slowly, and gently that is inherently calming and relaxing. I don’t want to compare my eating a packet of flame-grilled-steak-flavored snacks to, say, a Buddhist monk raking swirling patterns in the pebbles of a Zen garden, or to the formal protocol of a Japanese tea ceremony. But the combination of slow, deliberate physical movement and close attention to a mundane activity is one I probably don’t encounter frequently enough. Who’s to say eating salty potato-based snacks can’t be an occasion for transcendental experience?”¹⁶⁵

There is nothing uncanny in wrapping presents, but when a single present is wrapped,

unwrapped and rewrapped for an hour, it starts to appear slightly weird. Even more bizarre is that the person conducting such futile activity assumes that someone has an interest or time to engage in spectating it! What is the purpose of this “time-waisting” action? It leads to nothing! There are hundreds of videos depicting hours of unwrapping presents, tapping a miscellaneous selection of items, displaying a collection of soaps and whispering with an accent. One of my main cogitations in this thesis concerns the significance of the attentive material engagements proposed in ASMR videos, especially in type2 videos. It is fair to say that it *seems unusual* for someone to tap, stroke, and caress household items for an hour on purpose, and then share documentation of it on YouTube. Spontaneously, it feels strange to *use time* in the making of such videos, as well as to *use time in engaging with them*.

“For me the person must be acting “carefully”, with precision. The most unusual time I felt the sensation was when playing a 3D billiards game over the internet. I could watch the virtual cue as he lined up each shot, and as he made smaller and smaller movements to line up his shot, the sensation went crazy.”¹⁶⁶

The modern paradigm associates time with an idea of *progress*: the “progressivist” timelines sees the “advance” as an “ethico-political imperative” (Bellacasa 2017, 174; Sharder 2012 and Savransky 2012 as cited in Bellacasa 2017,

174). This perception of time as a chronological, linear orientation of *development* is also attuned to *history as a drag*: it is *gone, outdated* and *left behind*. The technoscientific timescape of futurity is exhausted with impatience and distressed speculations of future financial values (Ballacasa 2017, 173-74). The innovation-driven, political economies are of technoscientific *future anticipation*, a sort of anxiety in which the present is pending and counting on the unsure future to come: a utopia or dystopia, depending on the speed of reactions; an ability to predict and avoid ecological, economical and political crises and disasters, which seem to be inexorably lurking around the corner. The habitual, lived experience of time is that of urgency, hype and restlessness, followed by an exigency to manage, calculate and control time¹⁶⁷ (Ballacasa 2017, 173-74 in conversation with multiple theorists). Indeed, the “tracking” of time was one of the central projects in classical physics. Barad mocks Newton’s theory of time, which is based on an idea of a universal calculus defined by determinism, continuity and godly anthropocentrism:

“Prediction, retrodiction. Time reversal, time universal. Man’s for the asking. – Determinism rules. Nature is a clockwork, a machine, a windup toy the Omniscient One started up at time $t = 0$ and the even He lost interest in and abandoned, or perhaps remembers every now and again and drops in to do a little tuning up. The universe is a tidy affair.” (2014, 20)

The (trendy) prefix “post-” (also used in the thesis) all of a sudden appears as a constitutive partaker in the making of material-discursive reality, which is marked by a fear of regression and an anxiety to “already belong in the future.” When something is post- (posthumanism, post-Internet, post-digital), it is *newer, more-recent, subsequent* to something else that is understood as *preceding*. The prefix post- thus also holds on to a chronological understanding of time: events and phenomena *progressing in time*. On the other hand, as a prefix, it also incorporates a notable trace of material historicity of the phenomenon it talks about (of the phenomenon which it takes part to), and thus it does not try to resign the entanglements in a sense that the distinction between, let’s say humanism and posthumanism, would be about *an absolute separation*, but rather the prefix enables a very *meaningful reconfiguration*. Thought in terms of agential realism, the “human” relation with time and materia (or rather, the human becoming as of time and materia)¹⁶⁸ is an iterative, reconstructing process, that never reaches a standstill. As noted earlier, “this era” materializes as such that innovations, productivism and consumerism are notable phenomena. While sustainability is trending, the practice of repair and maintenance is not very sexy, especially when it comes to technology: what is new is already old tomorrow and to keep up with the swim you *have to have what is coming next* or you will be *left behind*. Bellacasa, citing Steve Jackson, whose point of interest is in technoscience, asks what would

happen if we decentered the reifying orientation and perception to objects and materia (2017, 211). **The common discourse draws from the fields of technology development and design, where the purpose of objects is in their “usability”, “affordances”, and “functionality”.** Jackson makes a pass by asking if it could it be possible to establish

“new and different forms of solidarity with objects (and they with us)? And what if, beneath the nose of scholarship, this is what we do everyday?” (2014, 232, as cited in Bellacasa 2017, 211).

J. J. Gibson’s Affordance Theory has greatly influenced how (human) perception and situational actions are understood. Affordance theory is based on an idea that the environment guides actions, so that *affordances*, clues and possibilities that objects serve for action are “immediately” perceived (with vision) before other type of sensorial processing. For example, buttons are accounted for pushing, handles for pulling, chairs for seating, etc.¹⁶⁹ Despite that this theory has continued to be reconfigured, the purpose-oriented attitude seems to still vastly describe the contemporary relation with the material world and objects. Now, you might wonder, isn’t ASMR just that? Harnessing and utilizing objects and materials in order to get pleasure! I think the matter is not quite that simple. I state that ASMR phenomenon have a different orientation to the materiality of the world.

Where as affordance-based orientation assumes that the material reality is there readily waiting to be taken and used, in ASMR phenomenon the objects and materials (human and nonhuman) are treated with curious exploration and sensitive touchings that are tuned for the embodied specificities entangled with the “other”: to the textures, sounds, materials, feels. These specificities are already forms of responding, they are a constitutive part of the materialization of a particular meeting, which, as intra-action, materializes differentially by also depending on how these specificities are *appreciated*. I suggest that responsiveness is the phenomenal, immanent ability of worlding; it is a part of, but not restricted, to the constitution of “humans”. **In other words, responsiveness, respons-ability, is not an ability of an individual human (e.g. ASMRtist’s as “a discrete subject”), nor some prominent “reactiveness” of any “separate entity”.** The “inanimate” objects and materials” are by the same token fundamental elements in phenomena that are “respons-able” – “human” and “nonhuman” to co-re-configure and co-re-constitute as phenomena within the same reality, within their intra-action. Respons-ability should be described as enactments that happen in these co-constitutive intra-actions. Sensitized respons-ability, then, would be a radically sensible “becoming-within-contact”; specific politeness towards the “other” that is materially co-constituted with the “self” within their very encounter. I state that instead of “using” the objects, ASMR is about getting in contact with and being sensibly responsive

170. See: GentleWhispering. (2016, June 16). ♫. Intoxicating Sounds ♫. ASMR. Retrieved 28 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WY0JWpKsdWQ>

Marsden, R. (2012, July 20). 'Maria spends 20 minutes folding towels': Why millions are mesmerised by ASMR videos. Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/maria-spends-20-minutes-folding-towels-why-millions-are-mesmerised-by-asmr-videos-7956866.html> Stafford, T. (2013, May 07). Future -The people who find pleasure in being bored. Retrieved 26 Mar 2018, from: <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20130507-does-boredom-give-you-pleasure>

171. Marsden, R. (2012, July 20). 'Maria spends 20 minutes folding towels': Why millions are mesmerised by ASMR videos.

For the link, see footnote 170.

172. Stafford, T. (2013, May 07). Future -The people who find pleasure in being bored.

For the link, see footnote 170.

173. Marsden, R. (2012, July 20). 'Maria spends 20 minutes folding towels': Why millions are mesmerised by ASMR videos. For the link, see footnote 170. See Barad 2007, 105 for illustrations of the two-slit devices.

174. Which-slit apparatus detects the photon that the atom emits during its passage through the slit(s).

175. Traditionally, waves and particles are understood as mutually exclusive kinds in their ontology: "waves are extended disturbances that can overlap and move through one another; particles are localized entities that singly occupy a given position in one moment at a time". Classical physics, owning this perspective, insisted that light cannot be both; it cannot be "extended and localized, disturbance and substance, a thing and a doing" (Barad 2014, 21.) Importantly, waves can produce interference patterns (diffraction patterns), whereas particles form mixtures (Barad 2007, 269).

176. The quantum entanglement was first contemplated by Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen, and thus its classical formation is called the EPR paradox. The EPR paradox took up an experiment where the measurement of another particle's undefined spin (up or down) simultaneously defines the other's as opposite to that of the one measured (up if the measured particle's spin was down, and vice versa). That is, the particle pair is in an entangled state. The contemporary

interpretation of this is that they are a phenomenon, instead of individual, separate entities "instantly communicating from a distance" (note how the co-constitution of discursive and material, also in science, is evident in this example). Quantum entanglements are not just correlations, but superpositions. Superpositions, then, are fundamental features of quantum phenomena, which contradict the classical metaphysical understanding of reality. Interference patterns (diffraction patterns) are always markings of superpositions (not all superpositions manifest as interference patterns), which are typical for wave behavior (Barad 2007, 266-73). That is, unlike particles, waves can superimpose one each other (note that waves are disturbances, not entities). "when two ocean waves overlap the aptitude of the resultant wave is the combined amplitudes of the component waves: the amplitude of one wave is added to the amplitude of the other wave and the result is a wave with their combined amplitude" (Barad 2007, 255). Kallio-Tamminen sums up that quantum waves are interpreted as vibration of possibilities (2008, 103).

177. Unfortunately, we still have to tune-up our superposition for this to happen.

with the objects. **ASMR is not about usability in a traditional sense: the objects are not used in "a proper way", in contrast, their conventional usability potential is oftentimes completely dismissed. A tea box is not used for storing tea bags, a beauty bag is not taken out for the sake of putting make-up on, nor is a comb introduced for a hairdo.**¹⁷⁰ This indeed must be one of the reasons why ASMR seems irrational and absurd for someone who is not familiar with the phenomenon (and who embodies the ethos of usability).

BBC Future made a little article about ASMR and the title of the story says a lot: 'The people who find pleasure in being bored'. The author says that they first heard of ASMR from the British journalist Rhodri Marsden, who wrote a rather personal article about it in the Independent¹⁷¹. BBC's story describes that "he [Marsden] had become mesmerised by intentionally boring videos he found on YouTube, things like people explaining how to fold towels, running hair dryers or role-playing interactions with dentists. Millions of people were watching the videos, reportedly for the pleasurable sensations they generated."¹⁷² Marsden, from their own behalf, writes that "This might all seem like just another preposterously niche activity begat by the internet, but the preeminent creators of ASMR-related videos rack up millions upon millions of channel views. In an online world characterised by immediacy, ubiquity, multitasking and everything turned up to 11, enormous numbers of people are finding intense pleasure in videos

where barely anything happens."¹⁷³

Interestingly, the concerns of "how to spend time", as well as the concerns of "human" relations with objects and materia, are closely bonded from an agential realist prospect. The phrases "to use time", "to waste time" and "to spend time" imply that *time is something consumable: a valuable resource in an unsettling limbo-like state of constantly running out, but never really ending*. As noted earlier, Barad takes a significantly different perspective to the nature of time. Barad states that space and time, as *phenomenal*, are intractively reconfigured in *materialization*:

"There is no conspiracy at work among individual particles separated in space or individual events separated in time. – Neither space nor time exist as determinate givens, as universals, outside of matter. Matter does not reside in space and move through time. Space and time are matter's agential performances" (Barad 2014, 28).

Spacetime Queerness and Absurdity of ASMR

Barad grounds their understanding of reality as a fluctuating, indeterminate, time-making materialization called "spacetimemattering" in quantum experiments. **I will briefly go through the most constitutive experiments and their interpretations so that the agential realist concept of spacetimemattering is not left hanging in the air.**

At the heart of “**quantum queerness**” is quantum dis-continuity, a state of being, which is not “fully discontinuous with continuity, nor even fully continuous with discontinuity, and in any case, surely not one with itself” (Barad 2014, 18, bolding mine). The nature of quantum phenomena troubles both the notion of time as continuous, and time as linear. An atom’s structure has been a central issue in physics ever since Democritus. Barad explains that the planetary model of the atom was reasoned to be dysfunctional, thus if the electrons were orbiting the atom’s nucleus like planets orbit the sun the electron would constantly give off its energy and radiate light before spiraling into the nucleus: the atoms would unstable (2014, 19). Bohr came up with an idea that instead of orbiting the nucleus, each electron “*resides* in one of a finite set of discrete/ quantized energy levels, and atoms only emit photons when their electrons “jump” or “leap” from one level to another. In particular, when an electron “jumps” from a higher energy state to a lower one it emits a photon whose color/frequency is determined by the size of the jump, i.e., the change in energy” (Barad 2014, 19). Thinking with this model, the atom seems stable, the problem of continuous outward radiation of energy is avoided, and the electron is not in a constant state of emitting light. *But what type of jump is the quantum “leap”?* (Barad 2014, 19). The quantum leap is not a typical jump, thus it is *discontinuous*: the electron swaps the energy level without *actually going* to another level— it is first there and then here “without

having been anywhere in between” (Barad 2014, 20). More over, a photon of a particular jump-size-correlating-color is emitted *during this leap* – and this is the weird part: how can something happen while it does not happen? That is, the photon’s color is defined by the energy difference between the starting point and arrival – the photon which is not emitted *before leaving, during the leap, when arriving, or after that*: it is “emitted at no determinate time at all – during the leap that is outside of time” (Barad 2014, 20). The most queer feature of this notion is that it is impossible to determine where and when these leaps happen. Quantum discontinuity is not so infinitesimal an issue as one might think (geometrically), because it simply impels one to recall the assumptions of “space, time, matter, causality and agency, and epistemology, ontology, and ethics” (Barad 2007, 182).

“Quantum dis/continuity troubles the very notion of dichotomy – the cutting into two— itself. All this quantum weirdness is actually “quantum *queerness*,” and I don’t mean simply strange. Q is for queer—the un/doing of identity. *Quantum dis/continuity* is at the crux of this im/possible, im/passible, trans/formation.” (Barad 2014, 21).

Quantum discontinuity is at stake in the two-slit experiment¹⁷⁴, which has shown that in the absence of which-slit detector¹⁷⁵ (“agencies of observation”) the atom’s identity (“object of observation”) is a wave (a diffraction pattern appears on the screen as the wave has passed

both slits simultaneously).¹⁷⁶ In turn, when the which-slit detector is at work the atom behaves like a particle and a scatter pattern appears (the particle has gone through only one of the two slits). That is, the nature of identity is indeed performative: it is not an inherent feature of separately existing entities (like being either a wave or a particle), but performed differentially under different circumstances. The two-slit experiment has even more to it to make one’s hair stand on end. When the information of which-slit the atom passed is erased, a diffraction pattern (indicating wavelike behavior) is shown again. As insane as it sounds, even if the information is eliminated *after* the atom has already gone through the entire apparatus as a particle or a wave, and made markings on the screen, the whole trip and identity of the atom reconfigures when the information of which-slit it travelled is erased. What this means is that not only has the “past behavior” of an entity been changed, but its very *nature* has been changed “in the past” (Barad 2007, 266-267; 2014, 26-29.) Barad sums up that what this **queer (quantum) identity work means, it is that “any entity’s past identity, its ontology, is never fixed, it is always open to the future reworkings!”** (2014, 27, bolding mine).

“Erased” is a misleading but commonly used term in the context of this specific experiment. According to Barad, the matter is not that *all traces* of the two-slit event are completely “erased” when the which-slit information is exterminated, and then the “original” pattern would return or “recover” (2014, 26-29). That

is, “unlike the “original,” the new diffraction pattern is not plainly evident without explicitly tracking the (extant) entanglements” (Barad 2014, 28). The *trace of all measurements* (entanglements) remains: materialization cannot be *undone* in a way that this experiment should be interpreted as changing the “past”; *thus the nature of “history” (and time in total) is exactly what this meta/physical experiment troubles*. Indeed, what is at stake is that the “past,” as well as “future,” is fluctuating, reconfiguring and enfolding in intra-actions: “There is no determinate relationship between past and future” (Barad 2014, 28). The “recovery” of the diffraction pattern is not about going back in “time” to erase a memory. Rather, according to agential realism, memory is a “pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity” – the world is of the traces that are memories, “the world is its memory (its enfolded materialization)” (Barad 2014, 29).

According to Barad, the so called quantum eraser experiment confirms Bohr’s central thesis that the objects and agencies of observation are inseparable parts of *the same phenomenon*. The results of the quantum eraser experiment is sometimes mistakenly interpreted from the classical physics’ perspective, which is grounded on the ontology of separately existing entities. This interpretation would place the human at the center of the universe by suggesting that *the observer* can change the past by changing the experimental arrangements in the quantum eraser experiment. However, this notion shoots itself in the foot, because it also

conflicts with the classical physics' thesis of objectivity, which places the observer in an external position in relation to the observed (Barad 2008, 175: n4). The contemporary quantum physics has proven such a wish for an uncontaminated external position to be *senseless*. Rather,

“The existence of quantum discontinuity means that the past is never left behind, never finished once and for all, and the future is not what will come to be in an unfolding of the present moment; rather the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter's iterative becoming. Becoming is not an unfolding in time, but an inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of mattering” (Barad, 2007, 234).

That is, the results of the quantum experiments are not “ghostly” in themselves, but their interpretations are. To understand how two particles far apart can be simultaneously aware of each others doings¹⁷⁷, it is necessary to change the way this finding is explained. The interpretations of quantum entanglement, which is often described as a “spooky action at a distance” (first announced by Albert Einstein), or as an instantaneous communication between far-away particles, arises from the incorrect belief in metaphysical individualism (Barad 2007, 315). Why exactly does the quantum “communication from a distance” sound as freaky as me saying that I have had a telepathic conversation with my far-away twin sister?¹⁷⁸

What if the matter is thought from an agential realist perspective, which does not profess entities, but *phenomena* as the constitutive units of reality? Quantum entanglement should be acknowledged as a phenomenon, of which the two far apart particles are constitutive participants: the particles are not separate actants, but entangled - their existence is one. Barad, notes that entanglements are highly specific configurations, and building an apparatus that could study them is a very complicated task *since the entanglements change accordingly with each intra-action* (2007, 76). **Or, more precisely, they do not just change in time and space, but rather, time, space and matter do not pre-exist the intra-actions that reconstitute the entanglements** (Barad 2007, 76).

After all this, I dare to say that when the ASMRtist pushes the record button of their camera and starts wrapping presents¹⁷⁹ in a spectacularly attentive and durational manner, they do not “spend” time: time is not a disposable matter. Rather, the ASMRtist as a “person”, the “presents” wrapped, as well as the “event of wrapping presents” are all materially entangled and co-constitutive of each other within their intra-action - they make “the moment”, which is not a separable fragment *in time*, but a materialization of reality with no *absolute* end, nor beginning (this is not at variance with agential cuts that are local causal structures within phenomena: they are likewise material enactments). More over, the situation of engaging with this exemplary present-wrapping ASMR video on YouTube is not a

situation of “spectating the past.” The recorded video is not a window to that which has already happened, nor is it a representation of history - “the present” and “history” are not separable or “progressing”, but enfolded through one another. The video *is not* outside of the materializations that happen, for example, in the making-of, editing, uploading and engaging with it: it is a phenomenon of spacetime mattering, and it is reconfigured with other phenomena (human/nonhuman/temporal/material/social/online/offline) through entanglements and agential cuts. Bellacasa explicates (in conversation with multiple others), that the lived experience of time and temporality is not some abstract atmosphere, nor a given that “we have or not”, but rather, *we make* time “through sociotechnical arrangements and everyday practices” (2017, 175). **Again, taking an agential realist, posthumanist perspective, I specify that “we” do not make time as segregated from anything else, but “we” are of time; time, that reconfigures “us” along with everything else in agential materializations of material-discursive arrangements and practices that are of humans and nonhumans.**

“Any meaningful act in the world of promissory capitalism involves taking risks and acting fast” (Bellacasa 2017, 174).

“Speediness”, “hurry”, “impatience” and “cutting corners” are material, embodying (body-configuring) matters and gestures, just like “slowness”, “carefulness”, “repetition” and

“attentiveness” are. Bellacasa brings forward that according to critical sociohistorical studies of temporality, different societies have fostered different paradigms and experiences of time (2017, 175). They introduce, along with a critique to linear and human-centric temporalities, an idea of different timescales (micro and macro) and a “diversity of eco-temporalities” that differ from the time-frames of “human lifespan and history”: the speed of processes and cycles is differential in many multispecies and more than human scales (Bellacasa 2017, 176). This is an interesting notion also from the technoscientific aspect: what might the temporality of a quantum computer be? What if this quantum computer is not an entity, but a phenomenon? Taking an agential realist perspective, **I state that time, as material reality, is not to be conceived even through a metaphor of cycles: neat circulations of carbon based life from the beginning to the end, no matter what their “timescale”, is not enough of an inclusive notion. Thus a circle is a line with its ends united, it has no depth, dis/jointed ruptures, dimensions, dynamics, nor topology.** Barad comments that there are no beginnings, thus the beginning has already started, and it will never arrive: “past, present, and future, not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded though one another in a non-linear enfolding of spacetime mattering, a topology that defies any suggestion of a smooth continuous manifold” (2014, 18). What about the prolonged *duration*¹⁸⁰ of the ASMR present-wrapping, when “barely anything happens”? Simply time passing slow-

ly? No, but more a matter of reconfiguring in manners that are contradicting the embodied comprehension of a “normal pace” assigned to “similar” material actions (wrapping a present, in this case): the assumed quantity (how can such calculation be made?) of “happenings” in a meticulously restricted “timeframe” is less than the contemporary ethos would approve of. **Duration is about manners of materializing (ways of behaving): the notion that there seems to be abnormally little happening on ASMR videos is linked to the notion that the way the things happen (materialize) is “weirdly” slow, repetitive, sensible, and attentive.**



Agential realism is about the responsibility of the entangled practices of which we are a part. The attentive and gentle conduction of a task or activity, the engagement with objects and materials through various ways of touching, is connecting and committing, it is what ASMR is about.

One thesis (Maslen&Roache 2013) on the absurdity of ASMR suggests that “Perhaps

absurdity is therefore at the center of the production and pleasure of ASMR: If someone can spend so much time and care so much about something so unimportant then, at least for those 25 minutes and 45 seconds, there can't be all the much to worry about after all. And therein lies the rush of relief.” I am not convinced that the conceived absurdity would be some kinky prerequisite for the ASMR experience, but that **the seeming absurdity¹⁸¹ of ASMR is embedded in the conflict between the hectic “spirit of the age” and in the materialization of ASMR sensations, which are about extended “duration”, repetition, touchings, sounds, becoming-with (habitually expressed as “spending” time with) objects and materials in an atypically intimate, prolonged and engaged way, which goes against the contemporary dominant ethos. At the same, if given a chance, I suggest that ASMR phenomenon, in its assumed absurdity, carries a potential to question the rationale of that ethos.**

“As odd as it is, there is a deeply human quality to this strange convergence of technology, alienation, and intimacy. The first instinctive reaction to ASMR is one of comic bemusement; but if you watch enough it, or if you think about it long enough, it eventually gives way to a kind of baffled reverence. It’s only weird, in other words, because we humans are weird, and because the reasons for our comforts and pleasures are so often obscure to us.”¹⁸²

CONCLUSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I looked into ASMR as a material-discursive phenomenon producing in a multiplicity of intra-actions. I applied Karen Barad’s agential realism, and included polyphonic sources that are entangled with ASMR phenomenon. I wanted to become curious with my theory and by my topic: to challenge and defamiliarize the obvious and foremost comprehension that ASMR is a (mere) “human” experience or just a fragment of visual “human” subculture on YouTube. As I analyzed ASMR with and through agential realism, new knowledge came out of that engagement – not only did I understand ASMR as a living, multifaceted, shape-shifting, time- and space-making, material-discursive phenomenon taking part in iterative negotiations of “human” and “nonhuman”, but I also apprehended agential realism in unpredictable ways in the context of ASMR. I wanted to make the theory *work* through intra-action with my insights instead of using it to justify my presuppositions or opinions about ASMR. I think that the theory and the data really started working as an apparatus: they co-constituted each other in the analysis. This thesis is based on my comprehension of agential realism, and of ASMR, and someone else getting entangled with these two would have ended up writing an entirely different story. All that has been stated in this thesis has been greatly informed and influenced by the entangled theories, of course most notably by

Barad’s agential realism. That is, I am assured that the lengthiness of the thorough explanations concerning the patterns of thought behind applied concepts has been necessary to genuinely grasp what they are about. In addition, I think that accessibility (which I do not see as the same as popularizing), as much as it is possible to be executed (without overriding the required expertise of the reader), should be taken as a default in theoretical writing.

A few words should be said about the constitutive *exclusions*. There are many paths of thought that I would had liked to write about in greater lengths. Indeed, I feel that almost every single subtitle could comprise a thesis topic in itself (at least when the thesis is assigned to be worth work that corresponds with as little as 30 Finnish ECTS credits). My attempt was to think differently and diffractively, and for that I took as many perspectives to the ASMR phenomenon as I could accommodate while trying to stick primarily with agential realism. If I had more pages to fill, I would have liked to involve more diffractive analysis with the contributions of related readings that I could not incorporate in this project. Some chapters got more attention than others. For example, the chapters touching on posthumanist ethics, touchings and caressing in terms of ASMR are just the first letters of sentences in possible writings which I had no chance to start here.

Another thing to mention is the format of this text. I truly believe that it makes a difference whether a text is read as columns of a PDF on a computer screen, arranged in (as) a

178. See for example this video: 'ASMR Wrapping Christmas Presents - No speaking (Binaural - 3D Sound)': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb-wJFGGrHPU>

179. Duration: 1. "the length of time something continues or exists". 2. "continuance in time". Retrieved: 2 Mar 4 2018 from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/duration>

180. Absurdity: "utterly or obviously senseless, illogical, or untrue; contrary to all reason or common sense; laughably foolish or false". Retrieved: 2 Mar 4 2018 from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/absurd>

Maslen&Roache (2013), citing Feinberg (1980) on different definitions of "absurd", write that "an absurd element can fall within five categories, none of which inspire hope for finding positive value: "It can be pointless, trivial (instrumentally disproportionate), futile, unrealistically pretentious, or otherwise incongruous or a 'poor fit', like actions that presuppose false or logically inconsistent beliefs". Retrieved 3 Apr 2018 from: <http://blog.practicaethics.ox.ac.uk/2015/07/asmr-and-absurdity/>

181. O'Connell, M. (2013, February 12). Why Has This Hourlong Video of Someone Pretending To Get a Haircut Been Viewed Nearly 1,000,000 Times? Retrieved 27 Mar 2018, from: http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culture-box/2013/02/asmr_videos_autonomous_sensory_meridian_response_and_whispering_videos_on.html

182. Durrani, H. A. (2015, September 21). Review: Karen Barad's "Meeting the Universe Halfway". Retrieved 10 Apr 2018, from <https://engspurdishabic.wordpress.com/2015/09/20/review-karen-barads-meeting-the-universe-halfway/>

183. Assumably is here to signify that my aim is not to gender label the ASMRtists, but to note that the phenomenon might accommodate sexist suppositions, for example such that practices of caring (which I state that the ASMR phenomenon takes part to) are "maternal" and thus they ought to be mainly established by the "female gender".

184. A transdisciplinary study project for future art education, might be, for example, such phenomenon as the "visual" capitalist culture materializing in the hyper located interactive outdoor advertisements. The outdoor advertisement is speculated to sooner or later be extensively based on a Cambridge Analytica type of collected and personalized data, meaning, that not only the advertisements on mobile devices, but on the streets too, will literally "look back at you". Thinking with intra-action, the advertisements are not only perceived by "individuals", but the "individuals" and the advertisements co-constitute one another: the advertisement reconfigures as remarkably private and intimate within public space thus its content is highly specified, whereas the targeted body-in-production embodies by principle as a "consumer" within this intra-action. Art finds imaginary ways to respond: take for example Jill Magid's 'Evidence Locker' which takes up the materialization of a body-in-production as a part of a system ("society") based on constant surveillance. I am assured that art education has an important role in remarking, questioning, and if necessary, resisting these types of constitutive configurations.

book, or if it is composed in some other form, like a mind map, for example. The overlapping patterns of thought, diffracting entanglements of the theory and the data, do not seem to esteem the limitations of any presentable format. My frustration about this has caused the multiplicity of exhortations in the footnotes and parenthesis within the text for you to see some other chapter in order to get more a multifaceted rendering of the matter. If there was to be a possibility to present a thought process in a (3D) environment where one could wander around instead of needing to scroll back and forth or jump from page to another, that might be something. Or maybe this thesis should had been conducted in a format of an ASMR video?

Indeed, one excluded practice is me trying to make ASMR videos as a part of the research. This would had been a fascinating option; another type of engagement and making-of. Indeed, in the beginning, this was my intention. However, due to the already mentioned restrictions on the length of the thesis, it soon became clear that I needed to drop that part. Another factor that could be read as an exclusion, is that I do not recognize experiencing ASMR tingles (nonetheless, I do find most ASMR videos soothing and very relaxing). Perhaps, if did recognize the tingles I would have recounted my own ASMR experiences instead of asking my two friends to describe theirs. Would experiencing the tingles have given me more credibility? Or would it have caused me to be so attached to the sensation that I would have chosen a whole different method, or decided to apply some

theorization from a field of phenomenology, instead of agential realism, for instance? This thesis would had been different if any of the mentioned cases were different - for better or for worse, there is no answer.

Also, while applying agential realism (as a very extensive theory covering not less than the Universe) for the first time here, I am conscious that I could not position myself critically towards it. Some critique has been presented towards the logic of the relationship between the ethics and ontology, for example, as well as towards the self-repeated language which might obscure the statement in agential realism¹⁸³. Certainly, it would be interesting to inspect agential realism with more critical eyes, and perhaps cross-read it with theses by other authors who have written about the intersections / entanglement of quantum physics and philosophy (also in Finnish, for example, Paavo Pylkkänen (2007) and Tarja Kallio-Tamminen (2008)). Nevertheless, I also find it justified to "try" the theory first (that is what I attempted to do here) before being in a persuasive enough position to take a critical prospect towards it (especially if it is not the most routinely applied theory within one's field). While a flawless (meta)physical "theory of everything" is still awaited, I think that Barad's project is definitely worth acknowledging.

These are constitutive exclusions, amongst all the others that I have no resources or wits to even mention here: exclusions that are excluded also from noting them as exclusions.

FURTHER ADAPTATIONS & SPECULATIONS

I think that ASMR is an interesting phenomenon in terms of “our” profound entanglement and intra-active dependency of and with other (“human”; “nonhuman”; “animate” and “inanimate”) (re)configurations of the world. Could ASMR phenomenon enhance posthumanist perception of reality, and thus stretch the responsive senses towards greater, and more constitutional understandings of intra-relational responsibility? Could ASMR phenomenon be an opening for more permissive, tolerant, empathic, sensitive and respectful ways of encountering/ engaging/ connecting/ touching/ being-with oneself and with others (*all others*)? Of course many other perspectives that are interesting in contemporary art education could be taken to study ASMR phenomenon. For example, one critical observation being that ASMR seems to be a gendered phenomenon: the majority of makers of the most subscribed ASMR channels are assumably (white) Western women¹⁸⁴.

The first research on ASMR (by Barratt & Davis in 2015) indicated similarities between the ASMR experience and the flow state, which is “thought to be helpful in domains such as sports or education” (Barratt & Davis 2017, Discussion). In their second study Barratt & Davis (2017) propose that the results of their research on ASMR would be “used to create lab and media content that is effective for the widest possible audience” (Discussion). I would like to speculate that some accurate applica-

tion of ASMR media could be employed as a pedagogical tool in (restless) classrooms. Could particularly developed ASMR media – for its potential to relax, sooth and uplift mood – help students to concentrate? Could ASMR serve as a complementary solution, or as a recognized alternative for medication for the increasing group of students with diagnosed ADHD, for example? These cogitations are obviously only hypothetical for now, thus many profound studies on ASMR are needed.

Kallio-Tavin (2016) delineates that contemporary Finnish art education, along with the schooling system in total, seems to be transforming towards phenomenon-based learning. Phenomenon-based learning grounds itself in the idea that the system of separately taught school subjects fails to account for the complexity of the world that these separated subjects ought to understand (Kallio-Tavin 2016, 41). Obviously, art and visual culture are thoroughly entangled with and inherently *of the same world* as the subject matters of physics, biology, physical education, and history. Creative thinking and experimenting are not properties of “creative fields” like arts, music or design (or merely “human” doings), but all testing, theorizing, and finding ways that deviate from the familiar path, are *creative*: take coding, for example. Kallio-Tavin (2016, 41) elaborates that school should accommodate social justice and critical thinking toward

arrangements of power and forms of oppression. Art / visual culture education could open up possibilities for *critical* creative thinking and experimenting which have a potential to question, and if needed, to resist, the material-discursive dynamisms of practices that are entangled with the ways of materializing as a “human” within and as of the natureculture and its manifold diffractions: subcultures, societies, genders, and so forth.

I suggest that Barad’s agential realism, as a *relational ethico-onto-epistem-ology* (accounting the intra-relation of ethics and knowing in being), is an intriguing reading for those (art) educators who seek reasoning or inspiration for the reconfiguration of the “subject-based” studies to “things-within-phenomena-based” studies. Phenomenon-based learning has a potential to involve students as active participants in knowledge practices instead of positioning them as “passive receivers” or discrete knowers. Thinking informed by agential realism almost obliges (art) education to be open for transdisciplinary engagements, in order be tuned and accountable for the topological, material-discursive processes within which the “human” and “nonhuman”, as well as “culture” and “nature,” are iteratively reconfigured¹⁸⁵.

[27:03>] “Shoot, I think we have a finished painting (*cut to the medium shot, a white frame appearing on top of the finished painting*). With that (*Bob turning to*

the camera), I’m gonna wish you happy painting, and God bless, my friend (*Bob smiling and doing a funny gesture towards the viewer with fingers wiggling in the air*), I’ll see you next show.” (*Cut to the canvas, camera running from top to down, instrumental music playing and credits rolling on the screen.*) (Mystic Mountain, end of the Episode1).

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TRANSCRIPTIONS

Both of the transcripts are following this logic: the comments of an ASMRtist and Bob Ross are written without formatting. My emphasis/ notions are in italics, and when in the middle of the text, also in parentheses (*like this*).

An “Unintentional” Video #ASMR #Bobross

BobRossInc. (2015, April 20).

Bob Ross - Mystic Mountain (Season 20 Episode 1, from the series *The Joy of Painting*). Duration: 27:40 mins. 4,24 million views (retrieved 9 Apr 2018). Originally aired on April 4th in 1990.

Retrieved 9 Apr 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlucWFTUo1A>.

Intro: The video starts with a very 90’s stylish opening where Bob Ross is effortlessly painting a wall-sized landscape with a massive brush, then leaving the scene with a bow. A text appears and disappears on the screen: “The Joy of Painting with BOB ROSS xx”. The scene is accompanied by a simple instrumental theme tune. The take is obviously shot on a blue screen, making the use of the time’s filming techniques.

[0:29>] (*A cut to the studio. The framing is tight medium shot of Bob and next to them on the right a plank canvas on an easel against a*

black background. A white frame appears and disappears on the screen on top of the canvas as Bob introduces himself:) Hello I’m Bob Ross (*sightly amused, as if the spectator would for sure know them already*) and I’d like to welcome you to the 20th Joy of Painting painting series (*pleasant, informal, warm, deep, soft tone*). Son of a gun it’s hard for me to believe this is the 20th series, but it, it is, and I’d like to thank you very much for inviting me back for another series of painting shows. If this is your first time with us (*gentle, melodious voice, shrugging shoulders at the same time*), let me extend a personal invitation for you to drag out your brushes (*raising their brush*), paints (*pointing to their palette*) and, and paint along with us each show, I think you’ll enjoy it (*all the time positioned towards the camera, as if every word was said directly to the spectator*). Tell you what, let’s starts out for today and have run all the colors across the screen (*yellow text appearing on bottom of the screen: TITANIUM WHITE*), that you need to paint along with me, and I think we’ll just do a happy little picture today (*more colors running on the screen*) so let me tell you what I’ve gotten done up here (*turning to the canvas*).

[1:00>] We have our standard old 18 by 24 inch canvas (*close-up of canvas*) but you use whatever size you want and we have it covered with a little bit of liquid white (*hand gesture mimicking application on the canvas*), just to thin,

even coat (*cut back to the medium shot*) just enough to make the canvas wet and with that we’ll just take off and we’ll have a super time start today, I’ll use a little one-inch brush and we’ll go into a very very (*close-up on brush stroking some deep blues on palette*) small amount of the phthalo blue just a little bit, don’t want much (*narration flows constantly, brush strokes softly and repeatedly on palette*) and let’s make some (*cut back to the medium shot*), let’s make some happy little clouds in our world, let’s come right up here and..*(reaching towards the right corner of the canvas)* ..and we just take this brush, we just bounce in some, some nice shapes (*close-up of the corner of the canvas and a hand applying blue color, whooshing sound*). Now when we’re doing this, we’re interested in the white area (*pointing with finger*) not the dark, so don’t worry about the dark area, we’re going to blend that aaall out (*continuous brushing horizontally across the canvas, whooshing*), all we’re doing is putting in some color for the shadows over our clouds and this is one of the nicest, easiest ways of making very effective, great big old clouds (*deeper tone of voice*), there (*whispering*). See (*quickly*), if we’re interested in this white area once again (*pointing the canvas*), maybe there’s another little cloud that lives in our world, right it on there..*wherever (emphasis on this word)* you think they should be then that’s exactly (*emphasis again*) where they should be. Just wherever (*light and carefree tone*). You just use the old

little one-inch brush and just, I’m making tiny little circles, just tiny little circles (*still brushing, whoosh whoosh whooshh*)..there we are..okay, maybe I’ll add a little color right in here too (*moving to the right edge of the canvas*) just so that there would be a little color at the base of this cloud, there (*whispering with deep voice*).

[2:26>] Now, then (*cut to the medium shot*). Let’s take our little brush (*picking another brush*), this is a two-inch brush (*sight to the camera*), and go right up in here (*reaching to the top of the canvas*) and very gently I’m using just the corner of the brush (*whoosh whoosh*), we’ll make little, round circle patterns here (*cut to canvas*), just sort of why end it up, just blend it together. Allow it to blend (*close-up of moving hand, circulating brush and canvas*) where the white is already on the canvas. And that’s the joy of this wet-on-wet painting technique, the fact that it’s wet allows you to blend color, right on the canvas, right on the canvas, yeah (*with higher, gentle tone while hand makes larger gestures and blends the blue to the white on canvas*). Now it’s begging to make little sense. See how those darker areas end up being the nice shadows and the white areas will end up being our clouds (*painting non-stop*). This is a great way to make clouds for seascape paintings. These great big, fluffy clouds works very nice..*(whooshh whooshhh)*..there we are (*speaking calmly, almost whispering*). Yeah, now that we have this old brush dirty, tell you

what, let's do, let's go back into a little more that phthalo blue (*cut to the medium shot, brushing more color from palette*), phthalo blue is a very nice color, it's very warm blue (*extreme close-up on the blue paint and brush stroking it*), I like that. Juuust a little color on the brush (*stroking fast and gently*), okay let's go back up here, let's have some water in this painting (*cut to the medium shot*).

[3:33>] If you painted with me before, you know I'm a fanatic for water (*with very tender voice, close up of the hand applying fast and soft horizontal strokes at the bottom of the canvas*), I love water (*long sweeps from left to right*) and it's one of the nicest and easiest things to paint in this technique. And today maybe this will be still water, so we want these lines to be basically straight across here, because as you know, still water is always flat, always level, there (*sigh*). Now, this very lightly, go all the way across (*sweep sweep*) and sort of bring it together and that light area here (*pointing the canvas*), it'll remain in there, there (*sigh*), umm, okay. Now (*little smirking in their voice*) the most fun part of this whole is washing the brush (*cut to the medium shot, sight to the camera*), so let's do that (*close-up of the brush stand and the hand tipping the brush to the thinner basin*) we're washing our brushes with odorless thinner, shake off the excess (*hitting the brush very fast first against the basin's edge, the against something outside of the frame, and finally against the easel - sounds remain the whisks hitting drums*). And just beat the devil

outta them (*enunciating in a laughing manner*). This is where you take out all your frustrations and hostilities and just (*turning to the camera with a new brush*) have a good time.

[4:39>] Let's go into a little titanium white (*close-up of the white paint*), you use your old fan brush, you make some little clouds (*stroking the paint*). I'll be right back (*removing the brush*), let me grab at least little touch of the bright red (*brush coming back with some red*) juuust enough, a little bit more, there (*getting more red, fast, mellow strokes mixing colors on palette*), just enough to put a little pinkish glow into our little clouds, they won't much, don't know much, okay let's go up here, now (*cut to the medium shot*) we got to make big decisions (*reaching towards the top of the canvas*). We'll just use this brush and decide where our little clouds live (*pointy brushing sounds, white paint applies on top of the blue*) aaand we just come along here and sort of drop 'em in (*brush rubbing the canvas*). This also works very with the little one-inch brush, very well. Either way that you wanna do it, eeeither way (*talking gently, cut to the medium shot*). If you haven't painted with us before (*soft voice of brushing, framing back to the close-up, heads of cloudlike shapes appear on the canvas*), one of the things that we try to do here, we try not to teach you just to copy, all we're trying to do is teach you a technique and turn you loose on the world, we use no patterns, no tracings, all we do is just sort of have an idea in our mind and we just sort of let it, let it happen, and if

you'll practice this a little bit, very soon you can enjoy the freedom creating a painting right on the canvas. Right on the canvas, listen to me, that's where it really becomes fun, that's when you can just literally create a painting right on the canvas as you're working on it (*incessant brushing mixes with the words that drop and flow in a dulcet manner, like someone was telling a bed-time story*). You look at what you're doing and you'll see things. The'll just sort of happen. And you learn to take advantage of whatever happens and use it to make your painting special. And you can do that.

[6:05>] Okay, let's go back (*bangs brush on easel*) get our old two-inch brush, and I just wanna now, blend all that together. Juuust blend it together (*circulating motion with a larger brush*). And I'm careful not to touch these top edges yet (*pointing the cloudy shapes*), I'm just blending the blue and the white down here together, very gently, still using little circular strokes. There we go. Just sort of let that mix together. I'm getting very close to the top, but I'm trying not to touch it at this point (*whoosh, whoosh*). Very close, but nooot touching. There. A little bit up in here. See? Just sorta blend it together. Mix it up, just like you are making a cake or something, just mix it up. A little bit in here, right there. Hmm, okay (*sigh, hum*). Good. But this is a beautiful way (*bangs the brush*). I just beat the brush like that to knock off the excess paint. It's a beautiful way to create a very effective, big, fluffy clouds. Now we're just sorta lifting it up. This will blend it all together, smooth it out.

(*Gentle, light strokes from down to up*) There (*whispering*). See there? And then, very lightly, two hairs and some air, you just gently, gently, gently blend the entire sky (*brushing horizontally, hardly touching the canvas, high, sweeping sounds*). And with that, dude, we have a pretty nice looking little sky. And there wasn't anything to it.

[7:29>] Now then, let's get crazy (*medium shot, Bob holding a palette and grabbing a palette knife*). Leeet's take, we'll use some midnight black, little Prussian blue (*close-up of the paints*). Now, Prussian blue is much darker than phthalo blue, it's strooong, whew (*low, resonating voice, knife ceaselessly mixing the two blues*), very strong color, we'll put some Van Dyke brown, and a little Alizarin crimson in there too. But we're looking for a very dark color, it should look black. Pull as flat as you can get it, and go straight down with the knife, and we'll just cut of a little roll of paint (*demonstrating with the knife*). There it is. It's right out at the edge of the knife. Let's go up here (*cut to a medium shot*).

[8:00>] Now, I want to make some tiny little mountains up in here, that are far away. I don't want these to be very big (*cut to an extreme close-up of a tip of the knife leaving a dark mark on the canvas*), because we wanna create the illusion of distance here (*sharp, scratching sound of the knife moving against the canvas*). Using a very firm pressure, just literally push this right into the fabric (*scratch, scratch*). And

I don't want, I don't want a lot of mountains today, that's about all we need. With a two-inch brush, I'm gonna to grab this and pull it. Juuust pull it (*light and gentle voice, carefully but purposively patting and spreading the paint with the head of the brush*). It does two things, removes excess paint, and it blends all this together. There we go. Now, when we're painting mountains, as you know, you always want the top of the mountain to be more distinct than the bottom of the mountain (*pointing with finger*). Because at the bottom, we have mist (*sweeping with the brush*) and now we have wonderful pollution, and we have all these things that break up and diffuse light, and it creates this softness at the base of the mountain (*medium cut, Bob explaining to the camera*). Let's go into a little titanium white, what the heck (*working the paint with the knife*). Very small amount. Get a very, very small amount of paint on the knife (*close-up of a knife and white paint*).

[9:05>] Now, then (*deep whisper, turning back to the canvas*), barely touch it, no pressure (*murmuring, fast whisper*). No pressure (*knife swishing white paint on top of dark strokes*). And I don't want this to be very distinct. I want this to be very quiet, subdued, far-away, gentle, soft..think about those types of words and stuff, when you're painting, and it'll help, help your hand go much more gentle (*hypnotizing narration, knife moving in front of canvas and applying more white; ridges of the mountains appear*). But very soft. I don't want a lot of detail in this. And we'll take a little bit of blue

and white (*whisking the palette with the knife*), and just the indication of some shadows; don't even want a lot of shadow back here. Too much detail will ruin that illusion of distance (*sharp strokes*). Just enough, just enough to give the feeling that there's a nice mountain living back in there. Now, with clean, dry brush (*bang-ing the brush dry*), following the angles, aal-ways following the angles, we're gonna very gently, very gently tap it, and then lift it upward. And that will help also create that illusion of mist at the base of the mountain. Shoot, lets get crazy. Find another one-inch brush. Or you could use your fan brush, whatever. Take a little bit more of the titanium white. Maybe in our world, maybe this old cloud right here.. it sort of drift right down in front of the mountain. So just a little white. Little circles, tiny little circles (*brushing*). Shoot, maybe there's one right here, I don't know. I don't know (*with singsongy tone of voice, whoosh whoosh from the brush on canvas*). Just sorta look at your painting and make a decision. Maybe it just sorta wraps this old mountain up. We'll take a two-inch brush and just blend it together. This is a super way of making mountains, that look like they're juts laying out here in the mist. I lived in Alaska for many, many years, and you see some of the most beautiful scenery there (*brush sweeping back and forth across the painting*). God was having a good day when he made Alaska. Uh, beautiful! Beautiful. There, see that old mountain just lays up there in the mist now, and floats around, has a good time all day.

[11:18>] Now, then (*medium shot, painting knife back in*), maybe we'll have some little foothills back here. I like to do little foothills. And we'll take some of that same mountain color (*cut to close-up of the palette and paints*), add at least a little touch of sap green to it. Little sap green, there we are (*mixing sounds on palette*). But it's predominantly blue. The one that's farthest away here, we'll make predominantly blue. Okay, let me wipe my knife off. And let's use, we'll use a one-inch brush, what the heck. You could use your fan brush, or two-inch brush, it doesn't matter. Load a little color in there (*close-up of the back and forth wiping brush, and the paint*). And let's go right up in here. Now, we have to make a big decision (*back to the medium shot, Bob facing the canvas and hand seeking a suitable spot on canvas*), where does our little foothills live. Maybe we'll have one coming right over here. We'll start this one out back here, just using the corner of the brush, and pulling straight down, gently. Maybe a little foothill comes right over here, like that (*short, tapping strokes*). Wherever. Once again, this is a very individual thing, painting is. So; just sorta a look at it and make up your mind how you want your painting to be.

[12:19>] (*Demonstrating and narrating how to paint the foothills*) So take the brush, two-inch brush (*soft but very resolute sound of stippling*), and just tap the base of it. And you can tap quite firmly (*tapping firmly*). You can probably hear how hard I'm hitting the canvas here.

And then, very lightly, just lift it upwards a little bit. (*Light sound of wiping while the brush sweeps the canvas*) There (*utterance made with deep, accepting tone*).

[13:45>] (*Painting two more layers of foothills with pointy treetops, and repeating the same steps and brush work as earlier. Everything is carried out with a flow of narration.*) But each layer, each layer needs to get darker in value. To keep that feeling of distance in the painting. I know I repeat that over and over, but it's so important. So important. (*Brushing sounds.*)

[15:43>] (*Close up of mixing colors on palette, then moving back to the canvas with a palette knife. Painting the waterline where the horizon unites the shore and its reflection.*) Now if you get one (waterline) that's maybe a little too strong or a little too bright, just go back and rub it (*rubbing the canvas with the sharp edge of the palette knife*). — And if you've painted with me before, you know, that we don't make mistakes here. We just have happy accidents (*with chuckling voice*).

[16:54>] (*Back to palette, mixing a decent amount of very dark color. Close-up of the knife and the sticky color paste blending together in a satisfying manner, accompanied with elastic sound and convivial commentary.*) Lets take a fan brush and go right into that color. (*Loading a fan brush with the color by wiping its both sides back and forth on it.*) See, the bristles are, there's a lot of paint in there.

(Close-up of the brush twiddling around to show the amount of paint.)

[17:44>] And we just use the corner of the brush (painting an “evergreen” tree with the fan brush, tender tapping). Just the corner, and as you go down the tree, add more and more pressure so the bristles bend downward much, much more. Look at there (fast, deep whisper). — Let’s give him a friend. You know me. I think everybody, everybody should have a friend. Friends are so important. There. Alright. — You can do ANYTHING here. On this canvas, you have total and absolute power (Bob turning to the viewer). Unlimited power here. (Laughs) When I go home, the only thing I can do is to take the garbage out. But here (pointing the canvas) I can do anything I wanna do. — Let’s put a little indication here and there of a little tree trunks that lives in these (painting the tree trunks with the sharp edge of the palette knife). There. Don’t want a great deal. Don’t want a great deal. Just enough to, just enough to indicate there’s something there. And you can just take the point of the knife, and just scrape through and make little lines and sticks and all those little things (soft narration repeating the same message multiple times, knife scratching the surface of the painting).

[20:03>] (Close-up of a yellow color on palette. The fan brush adds in a hint of green and a little yellow ochre while Bob is explaining what’s going on. The narration is fast but calm, a little bit of mouth sounds can be heard, a swallow,

for example. Bob goes back to the canvas and paints some bright highlights on the trees and ground.) If you put too much highlights on here, too many highlights, then it loses it’s effectiveness. We want these to be quite dark. Look at there (whisper). — And we’ll just put in a little waterline. (When painting the waterline, the palette knife zigzags and a rustling sound occurs. Bob’s shirt swishes when their hand is up on the painting.)

[21:37>] Ready to have some fun? If you painted with me before (laughs, sight to the camera), you know that I love to make big trees (close-up of the palette: wide, flexible brush sweeping dark color). So lets do that. — A lot of paint. Wiggle. Wiggle, wiggle. (Brush making quick waives on the color) Then sharpen it, just like you would a knife (long strokes on the paint from top to down), look how sharp this brush is (turning the brush sideways to show how the color-loaded bristles form a crisp tip). There you can see. It’s very sharp. (Cut to the canvas, Bob is painting more trees on the both edges of the frame. This brush makes muffled, mellow sounds when it meets the canvas and when it goes back to palette to get more paint.) Let’s just push in some, push in some nice leaf and branch shapes (adding large markings on the canvas). Look at there (whispering). — Tell you what, lets get crazy. Maybe. Maybe it just goes all the way across (tapping a lot of paint at the bottom of the canvas). In your world, you can do anything you want. If you want this shrubbery and bushes and trees to come all the

way across, then do it. Do it (deep whisper). Alright.

[24:34>] Okay, let’s go right up here (mixing more light green on the palette, brushing it gently, then jumping back to canvas). Now then (hearty, deep whisper), think about all your little leaves and stuff here, that would just shine, and (close-up of the brush adding highlights on the trees) oh, they would sparkle out here in the sun under this big mountain (swoosh, glutinous tap, tap, tap). And when you’re painting, make up little stories. Think about the scene that you’re painting, become part of it. Make friends with a tree (glutinous tap, tap, tap). Shoot, you can just drop all this stuff in. And let it go (with carefree tone). Darker, darker, darker as you work down toward the base of the tree though, darker, darker. (Painting the rest of the bushes same way, narrating gently at the same.)

[27:03>] Shoot, I think we have a finished painting (cut to the medium shot, a white frame appearing on top of the finished painting). With that (Bob turning to the camera), I’m gonna wish you happy painting, and God bless, my friend (Bob smiling and doing a funny gesture towards the viewer with fingers wiggling in the air), I’ll see you next show. (Cut to the canvas, camera running from top to down, instrumental music playing and credits rolling on the screen.)

An Object-Based ASMR Video

GentleWhispering. (2016, June 16).

•. Intoxicating Sounds •. ASMR. Duration 31:08 mins. 7, 51 million views (retrieved 9 Apr 2018)

Retrieved 9 Apr 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WY0JWpKsdWQ>.

Directory: [by the ASMRtist]

0-02:25 - intro, gliding hands

02:27-07:43 - tea box and tea packets tapping

07:44-15:12 - orange bag tapping

15:13-20:20 - comb in plastic... mmmmm...

20:21-25:35 - mask bubbles shifting, sticky sounds

25:37-end - swishing sounds.. waves like sounds

The video scene is a narrowly framed picture dominated by gray cloth which fills the most prominent part of the screen’s front. The cloth’s material looks soft and velvety, and brings to mind typical couch upholstery textile. The cloth cuts horizontally on the upper part of the screen and showing only the ASMRtist bust and arms. Their face is not visible. The camera stays still throughout the video. In the beginning of the video the arms and hands are alternately reaching towards the camera, swiping the cloth in a flowing, gliding manner. Hands are also sweeping each other and occasionally coming very close to the screen - so close that the spectator can imagine them almost to touch. The video proceeds so that various objects (a wood-

en box with wrapped selection of teas inside, a plastic purse, a comb in plastic, a sleeping mask filled with tiny pearls) are brought in front of the camera and treated with different types of touch: tapping, swiping, stroking, squeezing, dabbing. The materiality of the cloth is essential in the production of the desired sounds when the objects are moved around on the fabric surface. The video also starts and ends with a scene of the hands caressing the cloth by massaging and smoothing it out.

Intro: [0:15>] Good evening...This video is a combination of sounds...*(breaths)* especially sounds that are very often requested, but seem to not have enough time in the videos. These sounds to me are quite intoxicating - I think I could listen to them forever..*(breath)*.. and the reason for this video is.. that whenever I'm stressed out or nervous, I have noticed that I tend to start tapping and crinkling things *(simultaneously tapping the fabric with fingertips and then demonstrating the hand movement of scrunching or twiddling something)* and it tends to relax me immensely *(soothing the fabric with both hands)*. So today I'd like to do a relaxing sounds video ...*(swoosh - stroking the fabric slowly)*..to help us be more present; focused not on the words but on the sounds... so there will be very little speech. And we all need some relaxation time. So I hope that this would be *(leaning closer to the right ear edge of the binaural microphone)* relaxing for you. *(Breathing)* Let's start...

[2:52 >] *(Introducing the tea box by sliding it towards the camera on the velvety cloth:)* Many having to it..the part..of this tea box *[not sure if I caught correctly the beginning of the sentence]*...and the prepackaged teas..and it is my favorite as well...*(Haptic examination: opening the tea box, tapping around the edges with tips of the nails and fingering the tea packages in glossy wrappings. The box is occasionally brought closer to the left and right sides of the binaural microphone, and the sounds are heard stronger in other ear).*

[8:16 >] *(Bringing in front an orange, plastic beauty bag. The way the video maker speaks (whispers) about the material they handle is interesting: they sometimes extend the endings of the words, for example:)* this bag makessss... the most... delicious sound ever.

[8:36 >] And this is so relaxing..*(leaning forward closer to the camera)* thank you so much...for keeping me company and for doing this right now with me. This is so relaxing.

[10:07] I'm glad you cannot see my face right now because I am half-way drooling *(with soft and slightly amused tone)*.

[15:12] *(A pink plastic comb wrapped in see-through plastic film is introduced.)*

[15:42>] This sound is...great, hypnotic...so relaxing *(hands moving around a pink plastic comb wrapped in see-through plastic film.*

The comb is first brought close to the left ear and then to the right [that is, alternately close to the two recorders of the 3D microphone]. When moving the comb across the scene, the crinkly sound sincerely seems to appear inside my own head: the sound is not located in the earphones but in me. When the comb touches the fabric, a wind-like rasping hum is produced).

[19:20>] That's a very pleasant sound...*(ductile, resilient sounds of patting and dabbing)*...it's sounds polished, and heavy..and smooth" *(her voice sounds almost drowsy and very sleepy)*

[20:48>] *(A pearl filled pink sleeping mask with transparent plastic front is introduced.)* This sleeping mask...*(glutinous pressing, sticky squeezing and tapping sounds)* is both relaxing visually and auditorially [sic]...if that is a word" *(fast whisper)*.

[26:00>] *(Playing with the gray cloth:)* Going to stretch and smooth...stretch and smooth *(while stroking and smoothing down the velvety fabric in front of the camera)*.

[27:00>] *(Massaging the canvas with both hands, gestures are very similar to those when giving a back rub. It makes me weirdly sympathizing/imagining the feeling of my own back being touched.)*

[28:15>] And ocean waves *(the repeated circulating hand movement across the canvas,*

and the humming sound that occurs, indeed notably call to mind the rolling waves on an ocean shore).

