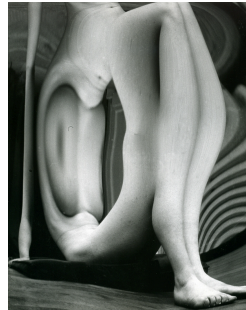


ii. Diffracting and re-defining

Diffract – dif-frange're – to break apart, in different directions (as in classical optics)

Diffraction/intra-action – cutting together-apart (one move) in the
(re)configuring of space-time-mattering; differencing/differing/ diffe' rancing

(Barad, *Diffraction*)



André Kertész, *Distortion No. 48*, 1933

Photographer André Kertész (1894-1985). Idiosyncratic. His *Distortions*¹ and deformations result from mirror reflections, destabilizing play of shadow, amorphous matter, and focused detail ... isolated. The realistic, articulated world falls apart. Spectator remains involved with the motif. The female human body (re)configured, affects perception from altering photographic conventions. Reflections of bodies caught in deconstructed, fragmented landscapes turn and twists, and like a handwritten letter, the balance between the obscured and the demarked is created by the spectator.

¹ Although Kertész had long been interested in mirrors, reflections, and the idea of distorting the human figure, he did not seriously investigate their photographic possibilities until 1933, when the risqué French magazine *Le Sourire* commissioned him to make a series of figure studies. Using a funhouse mirror from a Parisian amusement park, Kertész, who had never photographed nudes before, spent four weeks making about two hundred negatives. A handful of these *Distortions*, including this one, are compellingly surreal and unnerving--not unlike Munch's famous painting *The Scream* of 1893 (National Gallery, Oslo).



André Kertész *Distortion No. 51*, 1933

Diffractional reading -and theorizing - as discussed by Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, means to dialogically read expressions and traditions from a *woven structure* thus discarding methodical hierarchy. It is an attempt to engender creative, and unexpected outcomes (30) while remaining appreciative towards their contextual and conceptual heterogeneity: existing substructures re-used, appropriated -not discarded- to *think new patterns*. Barad believes everything is entangled with everything else in a complicated way meaning all observation creates a "cut" between the included and excluded of the considered. No inherently separate exists. However, separations temporarily enacted provide a space to examine the object long enough to unravel it thus providing a framework for thought regarding culture and habits of thought that can illuminate some and obscure other things.

It might seem a bit odd to enlist an organic metaphor to talk about diffraction,
an optical phenomenon that might seem lifeless.

Diffraction is not only a lively affair, but one that troubles dichotomies,
including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries,
such as organic/ inorganic and animate/inanimate.

Indeed, the quantum understanding of diffraction troubles the very notion of dichotomy
– cutting into two – as a singular act of absolute differentiation,
fracturing this from that, now from then.

Critique operates in a mode of disclosure, exposure and demystification (Barad, *Diffraction*) as Michel Foucault in *What is Critique?* points out, critique is not one thing, but 'seems to be condemned to dispersion, dependency and pure heteronomy' (Sedgwick). Diffractive reading tries to transcend critique articulated in identity politics (Self versus Other), to be accepted as a boundary-crossing, trans-disciplinary methodology through "respectful engagements with different disciplinary practices" (Barad, *Diffraction* 93) based on constructive and deconstructive movements and is never destructive. Disciplinary boundaries obfuscate allowing provocative concepts and theories to emerge. It is a methodology that offers us tools to examine *how* and *why* peripheral edges between disciplines and fibrils of perceptions articulated and *how* they can be (re)formed in intra-action, toward inclusion. An iterative practice, embracing uncertainty and changeability. An *intra-active* reworking and "being reworked" *by* patterns of mattering always in constructive and deconstructive fashion - never destructive. A movement in making emergent patterns of understanding-becoming: "without taking these distinctions to be foundational or holding them in place" (Barad, *Nature's Queer* 124), as a means to continual reformation, catalysts of possible encounters. There are no final answers: everything is indeterminate.