

# Intensive Morphologies: redistributing bodies via the haptic text

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## Abstract

This essay explores the milieu of expression in language as a way of redistributing the inhabited tendencies to sensation in everyday processes and techniques from two main perspectives. The first engages the dynamic relationship between the rhythms, refrains and qualities of the everyday with the movement of articulating thought, feeling and meaning. In the second, the felt materiality of spoken words as performative utterance come into tension with the semantic meaning of words, generating felt intensity in the phonetic materiality of language itself. In both cases, the tensions that are generated in negotiating meaning, thought and the felt qualities of immediate experience incite new, expressive distributions of the sensible. The time, space, qualities and intensities of reading, writing, remembering and voicing bodies conjoin in new, inhabitable sensory morphologies. I refer to poetic examples, including Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Quichua somatic poetry, and my own experimental engagements with activating haptic intensity in language. The essay also moves in relation with a conceptual milieu that includes reference to Whitehead's concept of the proposition and Erin Manning's analysis of the emergence of the event in language.

KEYWORDS: movement, proposition, haptic, language, technique, morphology

## Processual Movement

Virginia Woolf demonstrates a technique for generating movement in language with the tensions between inhabited tendencies of sensation and the immediate, micro qualities of emergent thought. Woolf tends to the crumbs on the table, the dust in the wind, and resonates these material qualities to articulate "inches of attention" and "grains of the self" as moments of fragile sensory adhesion that generate openings for thought. Derek Ryan calls this movement in language with materiality "the creative potential for locally determined arrangements" (2013, p.184). But the movement to expression in Woolf's writing tends with the felt continuity of the everyday, as well as with the multiple, fleeting and fragmentary dynamics of immediate experience. Woolf's term "appliances", which includes stationary objects such as tables, windowsills and tumbler rings, becomes synonymous with the continuity of routine and the qualities of smooth and hard material surfaces. In Woolf's words, such objects "disguise the fissures" of our attention so that our consciousness remains "comfortably continuous" (Woolf, 1931, n.pag.). The "smoothness" of material surfaces becomes a formal and affective contrast with the fleeting and immaterial ways in which attention moves and adheres in immediate experience. For Woolf, the contrasting movements between inhabiting the chaotic multiplicity as compared to glossing over the details become a poetically and theoretically volatile differential with which to activate expressive movement in language. Woolf develops ways of expressing the movement between these two extremes using transitive and progressive verb forms. Notice the following excerpts from *The Waves* (my italics):

"All palpable forms of life have failed me. Unless I can *stretch* and *touch* something hard, I shall be *blown* down the eternal corridors forever. What, then, can I *touch*? What brick, what stone? and so *draw myself* across the enormous gulf into my body safely?"

"I will assure myself, *touching* the rail, of something hard. Now I cannot *sink*; cannot altogether *fall through* the thin sheet now."

"I do not know myself sometimes, or how to *measure* and *name* and *count out* the grains that make me what I am."

"What shock can loosen my *laboriously gathered, relentlessly pressed down* life?"

In these passages "touching something hard", "naming and counting out", "gathering and pressing" become material/discursive procedures for both loosening and grounding movements between materiality and immateriality. Woolf's emphasis on the transitive movements with materiality privileges felt emergence or vital movement in expression itself. In this privileging of the immediate, Woolf's writing demonstrates a specific technicity for tending with materiality in thought and with thought in materiality as a multiple potential. Manning describes technicity as the technical "conditions for successive operations, each of which incorporates the implicit, creating an opening towards an ecology of experimentation" (2013, p. 35). How, then, can we develop propositions for iterating multiple expressive movements with such language techniques?

## The Movement of the Proposition

Whitehead calls the proposition a "feeling-in" the material and technical milieu with language (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 67-8). For Whitehead, the primary function of a proposition is to be "relevant as a lure for feeling" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 25). The willingness to dwell in the movements of thought that are activated in processual techniques with specific material qualities of the lived environment invites a tending with the immediacy of embodiment. The tending to (or with) felt immediacy is never merely a registration of the temporal present, but activates the inhabited tendencies to movement and thought that develop over time: "[t]his is a feeling of the world in the past; it is the inheritance of the world as a complex of feeling; namely, it is the feeling of derived feelings" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 81; De Brabandere, 2005, n.pag.).

The process of articulation with felt immediacy then always involves expressive movements with the textures of the inhabited body. This tending with sensory movement in and through language, or the emergent experience of articulation is characterized as a *concern* for the event of a singular expression. Manning insists that the event always has "a concern for how it comes to emergence" (Manning, 2013, p. 156). If we take the concern of the event as an invitation for engaging the expressive potential of language with felt experience, what possible techniques or strategies become available for developing events of redistributed sensation with language? Rancière explains that discreet domains of experience are not ultimately containable, as sense bleeds into

thought and vice-versa: "[w]hat occurs are processes of dissociation: a break in a relationship between sense and sense - between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt" (Rancière, 2009, p. 75). It is these breaks that "trigger new passions, which means new forms of balance—or imbalance—between an occupation and the sensory equipment appropriate to it ...[or] the aesthetic effect of sensory rupture within the continuity of the cause—effect schema" (Rancière, 2009, pp. 72-75). The critical potential of inhabiting fissured distributions or emergent breaks with habitual continuity thus lies in the openings that they produce towards new conceptual, affective and expressive concerns and potentials, or *events*.

Manning describes the process of expressive emergence in language as a sensing practice that "activates the associated milieu of words themselves" (2013, p.155). As such, there are no adequate verb tenses to express emergent thought (2013, p. 166). For Manning, language is never a substitute for the world but a way of navigating and feeling with or for the "more-than" of thought in expression (Manning, 2013, p. 156-66). In Manning's words: "expression makes felt the agitation that resonates at the edge of expressibility" (2013, p. 56). The process of redistributing sensation in language thus opens a propositional movement wherein sensation is intensified by the movement towards articulating it and not in the specifics of language forms or categories.

To take the proposition seriously as a lure towards activating the expressive potential of haptic intensity, I propose to follow the technicity of Woolf's lead and engage the qualitative ecologies of particulate materiality to develop movements of concern with micro sensations in language. In the following descriptions, the material, particulate qualities of loose dirt and dust move to intensify the felt "withness" of the body in experience. Words are activated to temporarily tack down otherwise unapprehended qualities of immediate experience, slowing and opening them to move thought in new trajectories. I have italicized the words and word combinations that have processual pull, moving thought and the memory of action in the process of composing the passages. (Please see "Inhabiting the Thick: the affects of erosive surfacing" for a more in-depth engagement with the intensive qualities of dirt and dust, De Brabandere, 2015).

1) In an open gait over a recently tilled field the recalibration of movements to counteract sinking and sliding forwards and outwards in the *irregular looseness* of the soil is felt. Dry dirt rises, integrates with the fibers on clothes, with the pores of skin, drenching the accumulating sweat on palms and inner elbow creases, leaving crumbly, muddy flakes

that stick to the skin. The absorbent dryness of the fine powder in nostrils and gritty in eyes, becoming a thick dark paste, *smudges* in the cleaning away with white cotton tissue. *I feel the variable porosity of my body.* The fine hair of my nose and ears accumulate particles, while the drips of my drying sweat absorb and hold the dirt against my skin like a fleet of benign leeches. The thin, moist skin membrane, covering eyes and separating the physical *threshold of seeing and seen*, becomes thick with *felt materiality*. The movement of seeing is slowed as it is redistributed in feeling with the physical materiality of vision. The *threshold of breathing* becomes an intensive separating of air from dirt in suppressed rhythms of inhale and exhale.

2) In domestic space the dirt and dust that accumulates on ledges and walls, the sediment of domestic living thickens and *complicates the threshold* between the materiality of the surrounding surfaces—walls, floors, chairs, tables—and the inhabitable space that they contain. In certain light, the dust dances in air as it *slowly settles* into thin layers on the top-facing side of things. Attention is guided with the *doubleness of surfaces* both as the smooth, defined continuity of an extensive parameter and as a dispersed airborne materiality. The movement of a finger over a dusty surface skirts between the two surfaces, lifting the loose from the smooth or intact as threshold of *intensive separation*. The routine tendency towards purposeful movement with the domestic space—sitting in a chair or reaching for a door handle—is also loosened and redistributed into the multiple openings that are generated in the movement towards cleaning with the subtly textured, powdery haze of dust.

3) In the technical and material milieu of preparing mined clay in the ceramic arts the clay tends to be contaminated with pebbles, twigs and sand and requires a process of sieving it through a gradation of increasingly fine mesh sizes. In the process, the *multiple, jumbling* particulate distribution of clay powder is intensified at the *sieving threshold* of what passes and what does not pass through. With the gentle, thrusting momentum of the sieve, the particles *lift, fold and fall* in delicate patterns in piles and in air depending on their weight, size and shape, inviting a tending with thier movement dynamics. The mesh, metal surface of the sieve is at once materially solid and in flux with the *thrusting movements of jumbling dirt*, redistributing both in the dynamics of collection, separation and dispersion into a hybrid dynamic.

In these descriptive passages the remembered material qualities and movements of inhabited processes combine with the qualities of specific materiality to pull words into

formal and semantic configurations, which also pressurize movements of thought and the emergent remembering of process. The expression of language that is in-the-making with specific material processes thus intensively resonates with the qualities, movements, rhythms and tensions of process. The processual grasping for words when speaking them into phrases thus intensifies vision, touch and smell by activating new distributions of feeling with and through movements of articulation in language.

## Speaking Sensation

To take the immediacy of articulation seriously as a performative that activates movements between registers of sense and thought, it is important to consider the materiality of speech. Language and the process of annunciation, invites the expression of intensive emergence in the contrast or differential between glossing over details and elaborately articulating them, as well as in the contrast between the phonetic qualities of speaking and their semiotic or semantic meaning. In expression in language, words accumulate into intensive gatherings, activating dynamic, tensile distributions with intensive rhythms, textures and meaning, making language palpable as a haptic expression.

The emergence of expression with the embodied performance of speech is particularly important in the Quichua oral poetry. In their book *The Ecology of the Spoken Word* Uzendoski and Calapulcha-Tapuy show how Quichua voicing is a technique that explicitly develops an ecology of annunciation to activate the redistributive fluxes of vision, body, voice, gesture, words, living and non-living etc. In turn, the Amazonian people's philosophy and spiritualism involves practices of modifying and refashioning the body via experience towards the equality of subjects across species and nonliving subjectivities (Uzendoski and Calapulcha-Tapuy, 2012, p. 11). In this context the textual and the grammatic does not have authority over the body. Instead, body and text co-emerge in the midst of the performative: "[a]s a process of oral textuality, somatic poetry organizes the voice and the body as privileged agents of creation. Rather than allow the printed word to dominate ... somatic poetry allows the body not just to create but also to become the poetry" (Uzendoski and Calapulcha-Tapuy, p. 24).

It then becomes pertinent to consider how the felt particularities of immediate experience move with the rhythms, qualities and sensitivities of speaking, or how the

expressive milieu of language activates haptic qualities in the expressive feeling of it taking form. As part of my exploration of textual techniques of haptic redistribution, I developed a spoken audio performance (in Canadian English) that activates some of the techniques in Quichua poems as described by Uzendoski and Calapulcha-Tapuy. Specifically, I make explicit the pauses and breaths in speaking, the discursive relation between the reflexive and the continuous and the rhythms and aural similitude of phonemes, words and phrases. The audio poem is part of the installation *Thick Smells, Thin Skins and Fluid Constraints* (2014) which also includes the live performance of tempering chocolate and an associated thick chocolate aroma. In the text of the poem, I make explicit the pauses and breaths in speaking, the discursive relation between the reflexive and the immediacy of process, as well as the rhythms and aural similitude of phonemes, words and phrases. The audio performance activates both a mnemonic and immediate feeling with the materiality of the body, which is both invitation and redistributive quality. For example, the text suggests that the olfactory qualities of chocolate become the sound of humming or the feeling of breath on the skin, while the sound of breathing and humming are felt in the speaking, embodied voice. In the transcript of the procedure (below) voicing emphasis is suggested by capital letters to invite participants to perform the redistributive movements as spoken expression. To participate in the sensory distribution, please eat a piece of chocolate while reading / speaking the following poem:

(audible breathing) *I wAFT into you* (inhale)

*with swEET*

*THICKness* (exhale)

*swEET* (exhale) *breathing* (inhale)

*on your face* (exhale)

*on your hands* (exhale)

*rAIsing hAIrs* (inhale)

*HUmid between your fingers,*

*now sweeT*

*on your wrisT* (pause)

*If you come cLOser* (inhale)

*you will smell the chocolate even more strongly ... (exhale) ...*

*feels thick (pause)*

*Coursing in your blood and joints (pause)*

*between your toes (pause)*

*warm build-up (inhale)*

*Seeing is heavy and slow (pause)*

*As you taste the chocolate the residue eddies*

*folding (pause)*

*holding folds (pause)*

*gathering fluid (pause)*

*gummy gumming (pause)*

*gummy gumming*

*sticking your nasal passages, throat, ears and eyes? (inhale)*

*Are you drowning in it? (pause)*

*Or (pause)*

*do you swim through its sonic depth (exhale)*

*Finding notes of cherry and baritone?*

(low humming)

This text activates the specific qualities of chocolate with movements of felt sensation so that smelling, tasting and feeling chocolate becomes a morphological milieu in language. The saturated and saturating aroma of chocolate become the feeling of swimming through it, while melting chocolate acquires the particular aural frequency of humming. Participants are invited to feel the chocolate with the same intensity and material closeness as the warm humidity of another person's breath on the skin, pressurizing the inhabited limits of the body so that the qualities of chocolate become sensible as a



shifting physical boundary. In the process, the haptic body is affectively loosened and redistributed in a fluxing universe of sensory, psychic, remembered and inhabited experience.

## The Micro Movements of Speaking

In "He Stuttered", Deleuze resonates the affective intensity of the stutter with the poetics of several writers who use breaks in words and phrases to generate new expressive openings in language. Deleuze emphasizes the way words and sounds are co-generative in the affirmation of additions of meaning registers or the layers and passings through of words in disjunction or fragmentation. Importantly, Deleuze stresses that this formal or *informing* movement surpasses the discursivity of speech: "speaking is no less a movement than walking: the former goes beyond speech toward language, just as the latter goes beyond the organism toward a body without organs" (Deleuze, 1997, p. 111).

The stutter then becomes pertinent as a proposition towards making speaking felt as an emergent process with inhabited tendencies to language. The dynamics of the spoken text become newly available as modulations of sound that are generated in the vocal and respiratory tract as continuous, fricative and interruptive. For instance, in the English language the angularity and friction of consonants creates resistances and modulations in the continuous sound of singing or in speaking open vowels. The throat, larynx, tongue, teeth and diaphragm generate the physical resistances that surpass those that are required in phonation.

Onomatopoeic words are of special interest for developing ways of speaking and expressing the intensive intersection between immediate material qualities and speech because they recreate the qualities of the referent through the sound of the spoken word. These inhabitable patterns of utterance resist a separation of subjects and objects by activating both in mutual emergence. For example, the word "splash", incites the vocal performance of the referent—the "spl" of impact with the water's surface, then the open "a" of movement with and through the water and finally the "sh" of multiple water drops landing on the water's surface just after impact. The same can be said for words such as crash, tickle, grate, press, among many others.

The onomatopoeic utterance also activates the dynamics that are inherent to a general or abstract concept, which is evoked by demonstration. For example, when speaking the "mo" that initiates the word "move", which is then modulated with the "ve" that decelerates the continuity of the voice by pressing the upper teeth against the lower lip, the word is performed as an opening and closing of sound. The word "mo - - - ve" prompts the feeling of a movement outwards, that is carried by the open continuity of the "o" sound, which then slows to a soft "v" landing. The experience of opening and closing sound in speech is redistributed in both the word and the interval of spoken movement in time and space. The verbal articulation of "o" opens the flow of speech in the movement of a temporal trajectory, which is also distributed extensively in the physical gesture of opera singers as they hold their arms in a horizontal moving outwards in time with the duration of utterance.

The onomatopoeic thus activates performativity with the complex dynamics of felt material qualities and inhabited experience. It then becomes possible to develop a propositional milieu to explore how the onomatopoeic moves with the immediate material qualities in more detail. *Material Voicing* is a procedure that I designed to initiate a voicing technique for articulating the material textures of the lived environment with visualization techniques used in representational drawing. The procedure is a simple six-step process as follows:

1. Locate an object in the space—it could be a pebble, a fleck of loose paint, a fingernail or perhaps something larger.
2. Now, try to look at the object from all sides. Where is it thin? Where is it thick? Where is it delicate or strong? Where would it easily break?
3. Now, examine the object for texture, ride the texture with your eyes for as long as you can, gripping it's contours and peaks. Now, make a trace with a pencil on paper that describes your visual movement with the texture. How did the tracing move your vision? How did your vision move your tracing?
5. Now, take the object and run it against a surface while holding it. Pay attention to the dynamism of sound, the friction, resistance and vibration that this process generates.
6. Now, verbally sound out the visual movements that you make over and around the contours of the object, as closely and as carefully as possible.

7. Now, vocally sound out the object's density. Consider the heaviness or lightness of sound that would be required to resonate with the visual and material density of the object. Consider how articulating material density is different from the vocal profile that you used to sound visual movement over and around the contours of the object.

This procedure activates an intensive rupture in the inhabited continuity that binds speech and words, while preserving a focused milieu for expressive articulation. The specific vocal quality of the articulations is strongly influenced by the native language of the participant. But the visual references that are activated in the vocalizations tend to be easily identifiable once one becomes attuned to the material textures of the immediate environment and the relative patterns of articulation that participants begin to adopt over the course of 10-20 min procedure.

## Stretching Speech

In another movement to explore the materiality of speech as an expressive morphology with the body, I developed the sound installation *Breaking Waves*, a four channel sound installation that is played on speakers that are evenly spaced down the length of a long space or corridor. The installation intensively activates the qualities of embodied speech by distributing the phonemes of processual words through extensive space. The suggestion of movement in the form, sound and meaning of the words becomes a script for different speeds, rhythms and densities of sound distribution. The movements, split and relays words, redistributing the limits of space and embodiment. The limits of the space are felt by positioning speakers down its entire length and in its acoustic qualities; the limits of the body are felt in the tension between the physical and audible limits of embodiment. The following scheme demonstrates how the words "rupture", and "leak" are distributed across the four speakers:

Speaker 1	Speaker 3	Speaker 3	Speaker 4
ru	p + 1 sec.	p + 2 sec.	ture
ru	uu	ture + 2 sec.	uup
le + k +3 sec.	ea	ea	ea
le + k +2 sec.	le + k +3 sec.	le + k +2 sec.	le + k + 4 sec.

The sound installation redistributes the movement of thought that would habitually be attributable to word meaning or semantics as spatial extensity, foregrounding the contrast between the qualities of spoken words and the way they activate the meaning of a referent, or associative worlds and memories. The palpability of aural qualities of speech become intensified as language is felt in its unspeak-ability. This sound installation thus opens a propositional milieu for activating intensive tension in the meaning, qualities and inhabited rhythms or distributions of language. This is the intensity of the uninhabited on the verge of becoming habitable. This is the feeling of the vital pull towards the intensive potential of the inhabitable, or the lure of the proposition towards active expressivity. *You - re - br - k - k - ing - up - re - breaking - gup - p - you - rebr - r - e - a -ki - king - u - p - py - urebr - e - ea - kk - king - up.*

## Conclusion

This paper explores how expressing the haptic dimensions of experience in language, either in the description of material processes or in the performativity of speech, activates a redistributive milieu of intensive movement, thought and sensation with the propositional. This is demonstrated in the way that material quality is intensified in the description of the particulate qualities of dirt; in the way that language intensifies the sensory qualities of chocolate as it activates it in movement with an expressive and associative milieu; in the expressivity of phonetics with material qualities in the visual movement of seeing; and finally in the intensive stretching of speech in spacetime. In the propositional explorations discussed in this paper, it is seen how articulation in language, merges and emerges thought and sensation in dynamic movements and distributions with the immediate qualities of experience. Rhythms, qualities and suggestive associations of words *move* thought and memory towards new ways of feeling intensive distributions that are activated in linguistic expression. These movements are felt as they activate the verge of inhabitability and share-ability. This process does not begin with pre-determined formal or grammatical structures, but with the movements, thoughts and sensations of expression in the ecological midst of its emergence.

After Nietzsche, Manning develops a notion of valuation that resists fixed evaluative hierarchies that are maintained by subject and object designations, imposed from outside of the creative process. Valuation expresses a work's potential from the inside by

activating a field of emergent, expressive openings (Manning, 2008, n.pag.). These openings or ruptures in the inhabited continuities of language are not reducible to formulaic structures but emerge in and through propositional movements that sustain a tending with the felt immediacy of experience. This sustained tending or *invaluation*, sustains a creative process that guides expression with the affective contrasts and intensities and that emerge from within the relational milieu.

This brings us urgently to the question of method. To embrace the relational flux of the milieu and feel the force of affective intensities as they come to sensation and relation, requires resisting the paradigms of empiricism that presume categories of active and passive, analyst and analyzed, expression and evaluation. Instead, it becomes important to linger in the flux of the procedural, in the movements that activate the qualities of routine so that they become insubordinate, opening the potential for expressing them in new distributions and expressions. In the process, bodies are conjoined, not as one and the same or as stable entities, but in the felt excess of expression in a flux with trans-subjective, trans-medial and inhabitable morphologies.

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