

# VOICE AND AFFECT IN ENTANGLED PHENOMENA

Experimenting with writing voice to promote responsibility

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Today I am experimenting with writing voice as it's been retheorized as emerging from entanglement. I am interested in how writing this entangled voice may help promote understanding of inseparability, intra-action, and responsibility.

## WHAT I AM THINKING ABOUT

- How to represent voice as a collective assemblage of enunciation (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005) in writing
- Highlight voice as constituted within entangled phenomenon
- Importance of “becoming-voice” (Mazzei, 2016)
- How can this be represented?

I have been thinking a lot about how voice has been deconstructed and retheorized within a Deleuzian ontology – which I will discuss a bit later. I am curious about how voice can be represented as constituted within an entangled phenomenon – how can we represent voice as a dynamic, emerging process of becoming? How might the collective assemblage of enunciation be explored in writing?

I’m interested in how the becoming-voice can be represented. Although it may cause some prickles, yes, represented. In a non-representational ontology, we still have to communicate ideas. Representing is one thing, not the thing. Not representing truth or accuracy but attempting, in my case, to represent our entangled nature, in writing. Most of our work, as scholars, is still done in writing. Our language restricts us in being human-centered and individualistic; how can I represent becoming-voice, emerging from entangled bodies without organs, in a way that creates affective intensities?

## WHY I THINK THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Ethical imperative to re-imagine the world (Barad, 2007; 2010; 2012)
- Responsibility in truth-telling (Kuntz, 2015)
- Understanding intra-action and inseparability promotes greater sense of responsibility
- Responsibility is not a choice but a condition of interdependence; being responsible is recognizing and honouring the “stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being” (Barad, 2012, p. 217).

As scholars, or responsible methodologists as Kuntz describes, we have an ethical imperative to re-imagine the world. To think/be/do differently, in a way that is generative, transgressive, and full of potentiality. We are truth-tellers, despite the risks involved in doing so. We have responsibility – as Barad says – not as a choice but as a condition of interdependence, or recognizing and honouring the stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and nonbeing

As a responsible methodologist, my main problematic, right now, is how to represent the body without organs/assemblage/entanglement in writing, in such a way that it creates an affective intensity in the reader. I’m not trying to explain the assemblage and the collective enunciation that emerges from the assemblage, so it is understood cognitively, but am interested in expressing “voice” so that the entanglement is felt. So the reader experiences the condition of interdependence and intra-action.

I think that experience could promote responsibility and could help shift our relationships with one another.



## WHAT I AM THINKING WITH

- Lisa Mazzei's (2013; 2016) retheorizing of voice
- Swirlings – adapted from St. Pierre (2011), as form of writing as inquiry (Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005)
- Gertrude Stein's (1914) *Tender Buttons*
- Jessica Van Cleave's (2018, personal communication) squirrel bases

This is what I am currently thinking with, in relation to the problematic of representing voice. Lisa Mazzei – on her own (if that's ever possible) and in her work with Alecia Jackson – has retheorized voice. I will explain her ideas further as they provide the foundation for my experimentation. I also draw on what I call “swirlings” – taken from an idea articulated by Elizabeth St. Pierre – that I use to discuss experimental writing, or writing as inquiry. I also draw, oddly enough, on Gertrude Stein's poetry in *Tender Buttons*, where she examines common items with a very unique writing approach. As I was thinking through these ideas, images from last year's ICQI kept coming into my head – of squirrels with backpacks. I will explain how I am thinking with Jessica Van Cleave's idea of squirrel bases that she discussed in an excellent session about writing as inquiry. I will explain in a bit more detail about how each of these concepts/pieces informs how I am thinking about my writing/representation of voice.

Beyond that, what is just coming into my thinking is a beautiful novel by Tommy Orange that I started reading on the plane called “There There”. It is, oddly enough, titled after a quote from Gertrude Stein. A lovely serendipitous connection that is also fresh in my mind right now.

## RETHEORIZING VOICE



Mazzei & Jackson (2012) – beyond giving voice to fixed, stable subject



Voice without Organs, emanating from assemblage



Collective assemblage of enunciation



Becoming-voice

To start off, I look at Mazzei's work on retheorizing voice. With Alecia Jackson and in her subsequent work, Lisa Mazzei deconstructs one of the key tenets of qualitative inquiry – that voice belongs to a fixed, stable subject and is representative of experience. Instead, Mazzei, drawing on Deleuzian ontology, explains that voice emanates or emerges from assemblages. She examines her own role, as researcher, in these assemblages or bodies without organs, and how the voice of her participants does not belong to the participant but becomes across timespace as part of the assemblage. In their recent work, in the book provided for this conference, Mazzei and Jackson (2019) explain – “we refuse the primacy of voice as simply spoken words emanating from a conscious subject and instead place voice within the material and discursive knots and intensities of the assemblage” (p. 67).



## SWIRLINGS

I imagine a cacophony of ideas swirling as we think about our topics with all we can muster – with words from theorists, participants, conference audiences, friends and lovers, ghosts who haunt our studies, characters in fiction and film and dreams – and with all our bodies and all the other bodies and the earth and all the things and objects in our lives – the entire assemblage that is a life thinking and, and, and...All those data are set to work in our thinking, and we think, and we work our way somewhere in our thinking.

(St. Pierre, 2011, p. 622)

So, using Mazzei's idea of voice, not a voice but voice led me to think about how we represent voice. I use the concept of swirling from this quote from Elizabeth St. Pierre. It is a beautiful quote that elicits an affective intensity in me. I felt the experience of swirling and adapted this term to describe free writing that allows me to think/write through ideas and concepts. When I experience these ideas swirling, I write a swirling, as inquiry to find out what I think about things and engage in a sense-making process

I used swirlings – these pieces of free writing – in my dissertation to demonstrate how I was thinking with ideas, where I was experiencing tensions, how I was connecting concepts. My intention in sharing them differed, I think, from traditionally academic writing, in that my writing was more transparent and more explicit about my own entanglement in the ideas and concepts.

## SWIRLINGS

As I listen to the interviews, my mind automatically connects the conversation with the participant to different concepts, theories, thinkers, memories, experiences, and other stories I have heard. Almost like a pinball machine, the conversations bounce off my own experiences, the last article I read, a tension I have been thinking through. They are flung back into play by a YouTube video, a novel that I can't forget, or the snapshot in my mind of a beautiful vista from my last hike. They ring against current events, a passionate discussion in my classroom, what is possible. Ding ding ding ding ding. High score.

Example from dissertation exploring the experience of thinking through – with all I can muster – as I begin listening to and analyzing interview audio.

## SWIRLINGS

Swirling is an understatement. So many voices, ideas, theorists, bodies, concepts, experiences clamouring together as I think with all I can muster. And now, every time I write "I", I am painfully aware that there is no I; no stable and definitive subject-position. No doer before the deed. So that "I" becomes a practice of relating; an entanglement. Inseparable and indistinguishable. Coming into being, constituted in intra-action. With no words to capture it. So, "I" it remains right now - an "I" that is used and troubled simultaneously. Until something better comes along. Perhaps "I" should be a symbol, like Prince before he became Prince again. An image-thought. Or an emoji. Same, same.

Or in this example, I am speaking back to St. Pierre's quote saying swirling is an understatement.

These swirling ideas and the decentering of a stable, agential, humanist subject leads me to ask how I can write in a way that is not fixed, stable, or centered from individual experience.

It is my hope, in these swirlings, that readers feel some of the tensions and complexity of thinking through these ideas. Rather than just explain my experience to them, I want to immerse them in the messy entanglement.



## TENDER BUTTONS

### A BOX.

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and is it disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again.

### A PIECE OF COFFEE.

More of double.

A place in no new table.

(Stein, 1914)

I am also thinking with Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons - Poetry using experimental language, making common strange (Objects, Food, Rooms)

As mentioned just beginning to explore her and her work but I love the unexpectedness, openness, playfulness in Tender Buttons. I am inspired by this playfulness and the engagement it requires of the reader. The affective response it evokes.

## SQUIRREL BASES

- Squirrels with helmets and backpacks
- Building squirrel bases – climate change, weather, edible and medicinal plants, relation in nature
- “Squirrel bases have become a way for me to think and rethink the concept childhoodnature. The children don’t always build anything related to squirrels, and they have never actually seen a squirrel in one of these constructions. Rather, squirrel base is the name of a field/assemblage in which the children and sticks and dirt and trees and weather and and are all actants becoming childhoodnature.”

(Van Cleave, 2018, personal communication)

And another influence on my experimentation, right now, is Jessica Van Cleave’s discussion of squirrel bases. She playfully and creatively discusses encountering a sign with her children that showed cartoon squirrels with helmets and backpacks – an advertisement for an adventure theme park. These squirrels were the inspiration for her children to create squirrel bases – places where these super cartoon squirrels could be sheltered from storms, spend time with their families, even enjoy spa amenities. The squirrel bases led to discussions of climate change, edible and medical plants, and the children’s relationship in nature.

### Quote

This image, created by Jessica representing her experience with the concept of childhoodnature, of the squirrels with backpacks keeps coming back to me as I think about how to write entangled phenomenon or assemblages in a way that creates a meaningful affective response.

## THINKING THROUGH...

- Some examples of how voice as collective assemblage of enunciation has been represented
- Mazzei – Voice without Organs
- Jackson - Deleuze and the Girl
- 3<sup>rd</sup> person and 2<sup>nd</sup> person account

Those are the things that are swirling and generating my thinking. I draw on these ideas to think through my problem of how to represent voice as an entangled phenomenon.

I have two examples – from Lisa Mazzei and Alecia Jackson – of how voice as a collective assemblage of enunciation has been represented.

## VOICE WITHOUT ORGANS

She sits in a meeting with a group of educators thousands of miles from the place she calls home. A visitor to the campus is asking questions about the community and the neighboring school district in preparation for a talk he will give to teachers later that evening. A district administrator dispenses with the usual demographic data by referring to the district as Springtucky in a shorthand move to classify the students in the district as low income, ignorant, from families who place a low value on education, clannish, etc. She is stopped in her tracks as she is jolted to a time when she was asked if she had her shoes on, or told that she didn't sound like she was from West Virginia because her accent wasn't thick enough, or denied access because of where she went to school. Her accent has diminished with multiple moves over the years, as if by stripping the speech from her body, she can author a new history.

(Mazzei, 2016, p. 159)

Written in the third person, an entanglement of people, places, discourses, material conditions – interview data, her own experiences, memories, sensations, and and and.

## DELEUZE AND THE GIRL

Your first class of the day is weight training. You are one of three girls in the elective class, surrounded by football and baseball players, Who Have A Right To Be Here. You still wear your un-uniform. You tie a bandana around your hair, do-rag style, and knuckle-bump two football players who are your best friends. All three of you live on the west side of Garner, two streets away from crack town, and all of your parents work at the window-making factory. The other two girls in the class spin on the stationery bikes for an hour. You lift with the boys. You inhabit the molar masculine field house with your expanded body, your body that is hyperdifferentiated. You cherish this derelict space, this zone of indeterminacy. You use the same equipment as the boys; sometimes you press as much weight as they do. You spot their heavy lifting; they trust you. You crack open the existing order of the molar masculine field house to make it your own, forcing it to expand to fit you. Your becoming is in-between.

(Jackson, 2010, p. 585)

2<sup>nd</sup> person to one agent, Jessie, in the entanglement. As observer to the entanglement.

Drawing on the things I am currently thinking with, and these examples, I share a swirling that I wrote in relation to a hiking experience. I then experiment with re-writing this swirling to demonstrate this expression (voice) as one agent within the entanglement.

My experimentation is both similar to and different from the examples provided by Mazzei and Jackson.



## EXPERIMENTATION

My heart pounds as I breathe in the air,  
so fresh that it feels green in my lungs.  
Connected to the mountain, I breathe in  
rhythm with the trees. As an uninvited  
guest, I am created in the landscape.  
Bathed by the same sun, I am  
trees/dirt/ferns/birdsong.  
Indistinguishable. My hand reaches for a  
stump, worn smooth by the wind, rain,  
and human hands, just as it reaches for  
me.



## EXPERIMENTATION

The air is alive and vibrant. Green becomes so many iterations of itself. Breathing, pulsating, vibrations. Energy emanates through trees/dirt/ferns/birdsong. Strength of the mountain pushing human feet forward. Resilient stems push through patchy snow, becoming in sunlight. A knobby stump, worn smooth by the wind, rain, and human hands reaches out. My grandmother's hand.

Not I-centered, not anthropomorphized. Representing entanglement – connection, interdependence

More playful, dynamic, unexpected but elicits affective response – feel intra-action/connection - affective intensities, desire

## WHAT EXPERIMENTATION MAY ALLOW



Playful, creative expression that catalyzes affective intensities



Poem, swirling, plateau, and and and



Experiencing entanglement, intra-action, interdependence, connection, and ultimately, responsibility

If we are able to write voice in playful creative ways – as ethical, responsible methodologists, we may catalyze affective intensities and *experiences* of entanglement

This can be done by writing voice as poems and swirlings and plateaus and and and

My hope is that experiencing the affective intensity of entanglement allows for greater understanding of intra-action, interdependence, and connection, and ultimately promotes greater responsibility.





THANK YOU!

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