Decomposing Matter: From literary critique to language creation

Helen Palmer
Kingston University London

Beatriz Revelles-Benavente
University of Granada

Abstract

This article provides a context for the section "Creating Language and Theorizing Literature". The editors of the section discuss both contemporary and historical articulations of the materiality of language from a new materialist perspective. The new materialist project comprises looking for the immanence of language via three realms: its relation, its theorization, and its creation. Therefore, moving away from representationalist practices demands a definition of language as animate, sensory material requiring creative labour for its realisation. The article provides an example of this materialization of language, via the concept of *bodywording*.

Keywords

Once upon a time
Once there was
One day, a very long time ago
Once there lived a King
Once and a time

Once upon a time the world was round and you could go on it around and around.[1]

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo[2]

A long long time ago in a galaxy far, far away[3]

A very very long time ago
Long ago, long ago
Long, long time ago
In a time already long past, when it was still of use to cast a spell
In the ancient time

Behind seven lands and seas
Beyond nine seas, beyond nine lagoons

There was, once upon a time
There was, there was not
There was, and there was not, there was

There was once a time, a time that includes the present[4]

Time was time

This is an old story.

[1] Gertrude Stein, *The World Is Round* (1939), p. 2
[2] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* (1916), p. 3
[3] George Lucas (director) *Star Wars* (1977), opening credits
[4] Vicki Kirby, *What If Culture Was Nature All Along?* (ed.), Introduction, p. 1.

Language – is – data – is – information – is – matter. Beginnings and endings are markers of time, and these markers may differ through languages, though again they differ once we begin to translate. Beginnings and endings presuppose an axis of time through which language irreversibly passes. Listed above are some utterances and sentences, clearly marked as beginnings. Some are stock beginnings to folk or fairy tales, translated from a number of different languages into English. Others are literary or filmic beginnings which take as their inspiration those stock folk beginnings and translate them into a different genre or realm. Theory-creation splices temporal dimensions. The perception of language as an object or a force stretched across variously ordered spatiotemporal axes has been since the early 20th century, at the very least since Ferdinand de Saussure revolutionised linguistic study by proposing synchronic rather than diachronic perspectives for language (Saussure, 1959 [1916]). The effect of listing each of the above matter-realisations of linguistic temporal markers paradigmatically is that linear syntactical sense is obscured, whilst the repetition foregrounds the materiality of the words themselves. This syntactical strangeness produces an effect not dissimilar to the strangeness that comes from algorithmic language-creations, both deliberate – as in the case of AI (Artificial Intelligence)-composed nonsense poetry, and mistaken – as in when games are played with the predictive text function of iPhones (as discussed below). This estrangement from transparent meaning is part of the modernist tradition of linguistic experimentation, which we argue is given new life in a posthuman articulation. Beyond representation, beyond human authorial agency, these matter-realisations are productive of new worlds of meaning.

New materialism emerges out of a vast conflation of humanities and science research, described as "a paradigmatic shift" by Vera Bühlmann, Felicity Colman, and Iris van der Tuin in their "Introduction to New Materialist Genealogies" (2017, p.47). Feminist new materialisms uphold *enfleshed* as a key term, demonstrated by Rosi Braidotti's presentation of the "enflesed Deleuzian subject" (Braidotti 2006, p.182). Moreover, where the body is foregrounded as a threshold, "the very axis around which all the binarisms (such as sameness-otherness, body-mind,

nature-culture, the inside-the-outside, I-other) are falling apart" (Monika Rogowska-Stangret, 2017, p.61).

In light of the above, this article deals with what we develop as the feminist new materialist project on the embodiment or *enfleshment* of language, or the linguistics of matter. We argue that language itself, the material of words, is data and information that can be used, challenged, channeled, changed in order to provoke certain transformations in the way processes are developed in oppressive regimes of power. The introductory texts demonstrate how language is submitted (while at the same time materially changing) to certain active contexts that require its development to be situated (Haraway, 1988) constantly. Stacey Moran Nocek points to the need to retain the significance of language within new materialist discussions: that within these discussions, "language is not a thing we can simply throw out [...] Quite the contrary: it is the binary opposition between reality and language that needs to be redrawn" (Nocek, 2016 p.270).

In writing this article we have two objectives. Firstly, to create and materialise language wherein aesthetic properties are perceived and felt as politically valent. Secondly, to analyse writing methodologies which situate language beyond human practices in order to avoid dualist distinctions that consequently enhance privilege and power. These objectives are finally enfleshed through the process of *bodywording* – the enfleshing of words and the building of language-bodies – as demonstrated in our concluding linguistic experiment which writes with and through multiple others.

Beyond referentiality

Pronouncing everything as discursively constructed entails two problematic aspects in the attempt to understand the nature of a concept. The first one is that language becomes a self-referential concept which is defined according to the same parameters that structure it. Self-referentiality is a relative understanding that leaves its definition empty, as knowledge that is taken for granted. In this

way, language paradoxically produces the impossibility of understanding. On the other hand, the second aspect has to do with how language provides the point of departure for explaining everything else. As Toni Morrison writes in *Beloved* (1986, p.190)*,* "definitions belong to the definers, not the defineds", referring to how white people define black people in relation to animals. Thus, when we define something, first we are establishing it with the same parameters in which that thing is going to be explained, and secondly, we are encapsulating that thing into a passive entity in need of representation. Already in the 2000s, Karen Barad denounced the fact that "language [had] been granted too much power" (2003, p.801). This article presents the section "creating language and theorizing literature" since we believe that at times, 'language' has become a self-referential concept inserted in our common sense and academic vocabularies but defined within its own terms. According to one of the editors of this section, "[i]n order for the language to simultaneously create and self-theorize, it must depart from representation" (Palmer, 2014, p.54).

Nevertheless, departing from representation without falling into it is extremely difficult. We are sure that you, the reader, have tried to make sense out of the first text and perhaps the predicting function of the phone was not the first thing that came to your mind. For this article, we propose to depart from a very concrete situation which is literary language; but before moving forward, we would like to situate the explanation with Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* (2004). In this book Butler argues that nowadays life can only be recognized when we understand the interdependence between peoples and nations. A literary language brings a relational space for a precarious interdependency in order to provide methodologies able to assess contemporary life, since as Leyshon (2012) explains the relationship between power and writing can be an individual form of resistance.

In *Animate Literacies* Nathan Snaza describes the *literacy situation* as the situation where "intrahuman politics of race, class, gender, sexuality and geography shape the conditions of emergence for literacy events that animate

subjects and the political relations with which they are entangle" (Snaza, 2019, p.4). Literacy for Snaza is an animate practice, which requires not the destruction of writing and reading but rather their insertion into other networks and other narratives. One of the aims of this journal, and one of the aims of new materialist studies is to understand *naturecultures* (Haraway, 2008) from a monist perspective. According to Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012, p.115), "new materialist cultural theories are not relational in a negative, reductive manner, but rather are structured along the lines of an affirmative intensity, which in the ends turns into a non-dualism, a monist philosophy of difference, or more precisely, *immanence*". Thus, following Spinoza and Deleuze (in Saldanha, 2017), the authors of this article and editors of the section look for the immanence of language, which we argue is based upon its relation, its theorization and its creation: a non-self-referential materially enacting definition of language. That is to say, language will be considered a relational materialization of determined encounters, not a linguistic representation of a passive reality.

Language matters

In order to understand the materiality of language, we would need to start by understanding what we mean by matter. Feminist contemporary theory is revitalizing definitions of matter by providing genealogies that trace back to Aristotle (Bianchi, 2019) and contemporarily to philosophers such as Manuel DeLanda, Claire Colebrook, and Iris van der Tuin among others. Language is body is flesh: the link between matter, language and the female is analogically displayed. As Mayra Rivera points out in the *Poetics of the Flesh, "*the efficacy of words is intricately connected to the experiences of bodies" (Rivera, 2015, p.9). Rivera distinguishes between body (*soma, corpus*) and flesh *(sarx, caro*), pointing out 'flesh' is often linked to the passive feminine. In a sense, feminist new materialisms reappropriate this feminist material passivity and articulate it as not only active, but also self-organising. Colebrook also shows that literary language can prove this through a discussion of its materiality. "It is when language is

material – or literary – that it resists relations and vibrates in itself" (Colebrook, 2008, p.59). Matter can be described as being "understood as [an] encompassing force, motion, vitality, vibrancy, and agency […] with which to counter the many social and physical violences" (Bianchi, 2019, p.393). Texts are made to matter via the intra-active process of reading (Kaiser, 2014), which at the same time entails paying special attention to the methodological process itself. Barad (2007) specifies the need to include in the phenomena of research the researcher, the object of research, methodologies and all the contextual factors surrounding it. Therefore, in thinking through the nature of language it seems unavoidable to also know how texts come to matter as well. As previously stated, for some authors the reading process is paramount. Nevertheless, reading also implies interpretation and because of that, falling into a relativistic practice that might make us fall into what Donna Haraway denominated the God Trick (1988). From a new materialist project, we aim at providing a writing methodology that intra-acts the material, the researcher and the reader while providing scenarios beyond representationalist practices.

When outlining a new materialist cartography around language, it is important to introduce Julia Kristeva's work. In *Language: The Unknown* (1989) Kristeva refers to two differing but complementary ways in which language matters: first, language is *concrete matter* and second, *objective laws* framing it. The concrete matter she refers to is "the phonic, gestural, or graphic aspects that *la langue* assumes (there is no language without sounds, gestures, or writing)' and the objective laws are 'the laws that organize the different subsets of the linguistic whole and that constitute phonetics, stylistics, semantics, etc" (Kristeva, 1989, p.18). In the division of *langue* (the abstract system of language) and *parole* (its concrete enactment) derived from Ferdinand de Saussure, Kristeva posits both as material. She also describes the relation between language and the "real"; language and the world; as one of "isomorphism" (Kristeva, 1989, p.36). These two gestures are important, firstly because they present language as material in its articulation and its signification, and also because they present language as

inseparable from the world. Rather than viewing language's materiality as a step away from the political, Kristeva sees it as inherently political from every angle.

All of the above composes what we believe is one possible genealogy for understanding a new materialist approach to language. What we propose in the following is a possible definition that, in line with this genealogy, conceives the concept, language, beyond representationalist practices and self-referential definitions.

In this journal section we will try to build understanding of the materiality of language (or linguistic matter-reality) via three realms (although it is not limited to these): re-conceptualizing the aesthetics of the literary piece, thinking through writing methodologies that produce differences that matter; and a relational notion of language that emphasize how this language is beyond a human characteristic depending on the terms of its intra-action. As a result, we expect differing languages such as the language of technology, the language of mathematics, the language of more-than-human beings, and also the other cultural definitions of language.

Defamiliarisation and the sensory: Re-conceptualizing the ahesthetics of the literary piece

The stratagems for perceiving language and literature *anew* within new materialist discussions require critical and creative processes of defamiliarisation and disidentification. This process is generative of its own new feminist new materialist genealogy, as we can see from Rosi Braidotti's outlining in *The Posthuman* of defamiliarisation as "a critical distance from the dominant vision of the subject" (Braidotti, 2013, p.88). As Carolyn Lau explains in the *Posthuman Glossary,* dis-identification involves the concurrent processes of creativity and critique, and perceives *memory* as *imagination* and *creation* as *becoming,* allowing for the creation of new conceptual personae and figurations (Lau, 2018, p.347). Helen Palmer's work takes up this feminist new materialist articulation

and thinks it alongside queer as a concept; *queer defamiliarisation* as a process that is "necessary to awaken us from automatic habits in our perception, creation, destruction and infinite reimagination of the categories of identity formation"(Palmer, forthcoming 2020), and what is needed for us to feel both ourselves and beyond ourselves is the sensory.

In terms of the field of feminist new materialisms and literature we can identify two strands of thought: firstly one which conceptualises the literary text as a specific instance of active and resistant materiality, which we can perceive Claire Colebrook's Derridean readings (Colebrook, 2011); and secondly one which does not perceive materiality of the signifier in the same way as the materiality of the object, but rather as a site of affective creativity, as discussed in the work of Stacy Alaimo (2016), Mayra Rivera (2015) and Jane Bennett (2009). These figures emphasise literature's affective and sensory potential for transforming the perceptual sensibility of the reader. Tobias Skiveren proposes a "carncacriticism" which would engage it "as an affective and imaginative site for witnessing what it *feels* like to live as a specific corporal configuration, subjected not only to the powers of discourse, but also to the recalcitrant materiality of the flesh" (Skiveren 2019/forthcoming, p.14). This is in line with what Rita Felski has called 'postcriticism' – a type of theoretical engagement which does not work *against* the text it encounters but rather works with or alongside it, in order to produce new affective patterns (Felski, 2015). Within feminist new materialist thought we have seen this develop primarily in the work of van der Tuin and the practice of diffractive reading (van der Tuin, 2011), but this is now expanding exponentially into multiple disciplines and intra-disciplines.

As several scholars have pointed out, new materialism and the realm of the sensory have much to say to one another (Tompkins, 2016; Luciano 2015; Shomura, 2017; Huang 2017). The linguistic aspect of this encounter is made most concrete in Michelle N. Huang's provocation that "we might root the experimental power of language in its challenge to our sensory-perceptual apparatus" (Huang, 2017). What this field can particularly offer can be gleaned

from its perspective on transversality (and the trans* prefix matters here in all of its multiple figurations) – an analogous perspective can be seen for sensory perception.

In place of the conventional localisation and segregation of sensory perception, Florence Chiew proposes the transversal processes sensory substitution or cross-modal plasticity. Chiew defines sensory substitution as "the process by which information ordinarily acquired through the pathway of one modality is instead obtained through those that process another" (Chiew, 2017, p.49). This is precisely the sensory substitution that takes place with synaesthesia. Chiew also gives the examples of Braille reading as a cross-modal interaction between visual and tactile information processing, and also of the enlargement of the cortical representation of the reading finger in Braille readers, which evidences "the malleability and adaptability of sensory function" (Chiew, 2017, p.49). Similarly, the success of TVSS systems (tactile vision substitution systems) demonstrate not only ways of seeing *with* touch but of seeing *as* touch (Chiew, 2017, p.56). Chiew gives these examples as part of a general critique of the notion of deficiency in perception as a lack of 'normal' function; in other words, "the logic of substitution or compensation is not a productive way to appreciate the complexity of *individual* perception as a *field,* because it is grounded in a restricted binary opposition between deficiency and recovery, or cast in quantifiable terms of more or less, addition and subtraction" (Chiew, 2017, p.64).

There are similar attempts at a re-orientation of sensory systems in the work of Jasbir Puar and Xin Liu, in terms of racialised visual encounters and ways in which the haptic can subvert these channels of automatized perception and defamiliarise the senses. Liu points out that Jasbir Puar's critique of ocularcentrism brings it within the new materialist field with a focus on racialised visual encounters (Puar, 2007, p.189). As Liu points out, Puar goes for the haptic rather than the visual. What Liu and Puar are arguing is that visuality as seeing through the eyes is "an overdetermined, epistemological and cultural construction where power's intention is to restrict and to prohibit" (Liu, 2017, p.144). In all of

these examples we therefore gesture here towards a de-familiarisation and de-hierarchisation of the senses in favour of a transversal approach.

Differences that matter: The literary conceit revitalized, defamiliarised and queered

As Kathryn Bond Stockton writes, provocatively and deliberately, in her book *Making Out,* some words are weightier, heavier or more impactful than others. Historically perceived as a literary device dating from Renaissance metaphysical powerhouses such as John Donne (Donne 1994), the conceit is an elaborate, extreme or even surreal extended metaphor used for hyperbolic effect. "Perhaps the word 'dildo' has arrested you. Perhaps it hits you differently than my other words. Maybe you like it. Maybe it repels you. Or just jolts you. It is now in you" (Stockton, 2019, p.100). This utterance is strikingly – yes, arrestingly – resonant with Austin's descriptions of performative language in the sense that something is *done* through its enunciation, though the relationship is somewhat different in that the words perform something different – there is a gap, perhaps – between the words and the thing that is heralded or being done. Stockton's reading-as-barebacking, word-as-dildo analogies operate as vivid conceits for our present arguments concerning the materiality of the signifier. As Stockton writes earlier, "Gay male barebacking is like dildoing is like kissing is like reading: it's a *fetishizing of sign and surface* that must get inside us […] the word births in us, with us, and through us, as we take it in: courtesy of us, it's allowed to *breed an intimate estrangement of itself"* (Stockton, 2015). Estrangement both *is* and *as* queer defamiliarisation: it is these words we must focus on here, in the moment of arresting luminosity when the word-thing arrives within our perceptual field. If we think of the process of barebacking narrated multifariously in Stockton's texts– deliberate thrillseeking unprotected sex – it sets off a chain of reactions which will differ in each reader, but overall they encapsulate the very process of perception without the *contra*-ceptive sheath of linguistic prescriptivism. Put simply, meaning is untethered; the seeds, *semina,* are without their protective husk. Or, more

crudely, amorphous sausagelike stuff of meaning is squeezed out of its sack. Whichever conceit-strewn pathway is chosen, it is precisely queer defamiliarisation that Stockton elucidates here; precisely through a conception of the materiality of words. What Stockton describes as tumescence of words – their getting fat inside us – is the process of shifting our perception of those words as they are perceived anew. It is through *writing, mattering* and *making strange* that this striking image – the word inside us – is born.

In the preface to her *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination* (Morrison, 1992, p.x – xi), Toni Morrison claims that her literary project is to struggle "with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language." To this, she adds a possible solution, "to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (ibid xi). As mentioned at the beginning of this article, it might seem easier to see the predictive processes that language suffers when technologically related. Nevertheless, literature proves that these predictions are materially charged and they potentially provoke certain feelings and affects in those participating in that writing process. When we try to provoke a queer defamiliarisation in our writing process, we are at the same time attributing a multiplicity of images to certain signs and surfaces. In *A Mercy* (Morrison, 2008), the walls of the haunted house are written with the story of a woman who is raped and enslaved so that her daughter (Florens) is able to connect with her (since she does not know who her mother is). The narrator starts questioning the reader with the following: "Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done […] Stranger things happen all the time everywhere. You know. I know you know. One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?" (Morrison, 2008, p.3). In this novel, the walls become the materiality of the writing, the surface in which spacetime tries to merge in order to identify a self-definition of her own identity. Her lover tells her that she is a slave in the house, and a slave because of the love she has for him, to which she answers: "What is your meaning? I am a slave because Sir trades

for me." (ibid, p.141). To this, his answer is: "No. You have become one [because] your head is empty and your body is wild" (ibid). This strangeness that the reader finds in the haunted walls is there to intra-relate with; to start making their own meaning, to try to understand in the distance of physical time that the walls will be forever haunted, because that story can't pass on, just as at the end of *Beloved.* As Florens explains at the beginning to her reader, "Other signs need more time to understand" (ibid, 4). The walls, like the words, are inside us.

The predictive function of language is present in all the forms and surfaces that material meanings are enhanced. The problem with its prediction is that the force is beyond human agency and knowability. Again, following a new materialist perspective entails engaging with productive instances in which the materiality of language can enforce changes to structural hierarchies. As Morrison claims, freeing language from its representationalist nature is one of them. Another example that we can find in literature is with Nell Leyshon's *The Colour of Milk* (2012). There we can see how Mary, the protagonist, writes her book with her own hand, which also means with grammatical mistakes, without capital letters and lacking some punctuation marks. Mary is a girl from 1831 who learns how to read and write in the house of her master. In her act of writing, in our act of reading the novel, in our ability to relate with the book itself is how meaning becomes material. Those instances in which we see that language is not what we expect on the surface are precisely when those words become heavier. Certainly, when reading the pronoun "i" without its capital letter in English, we see how language covers certain signs of injustices. Who is allowed to self-define? How are we to find instances of resistance in a writing that is not our own? Or, as Florens asks, who is able to read?

Differing languages: Fictioning

One of the caveats that Bianchi (2019) sees in Baradian theory is how the physical discourse is translated and transposed to every sphere of reality. A

transposition is "the discovery of the limit and then the stretching and breaking of this limit" (Palmer, 2014, p.27). Nevertheless, transposing a specific discourse to every other sphere also provides "too much power" to that specific discourse. Thus, we see the limitations of the physical discourse, in order to provide linguistic transpositions we need to stretch and break that precise limit. Bianchi (2019) points out the limitation in the impossibility of translating the micro-world present in quantum physics to the macro-world that contemporary society offers. Nevertheless, what do we mean by translation again? The prefix *trans* "presupposes a metamorphosis, a difference or spatiotemporal change or relocation" (Palmer 2014: xii). Thus, translating physics to contemporary society entails relocations and metamorphosis. According to Braidotti (2002), a metamorphosis is a process of becoming that entails new figurations and differing social representations. Therefore, if we look for the limits that these new figurations have (as the ones provided by Bianchi's critique), we can provide those differing materializations. In this section, we argue that literary language can provide the site for these metamorphoses, for stretching the limits, and for translating and transposing social realities.

Serenella Iovino (2018, p.233) defines literature as possessing the "power to act as a privileged means of liberation and of emancipation […], especially if considered in the framework of an ecology of culture". That is to say, it performs in an agentic capacity within specific socio-cultural discourses. It entails a micro level frame of action providing certain intra-actions between novels, themes, writers and readers; while at the same time, they are also part of a macro-level in which past, present and future are conflated.

Important to this discussion for understanding differing ways in which a literary language becomes a material tool for social (feminist) transformation (and beyond representationalist practices) is the work of Moira Gatens and her presentation of fiction as a philosophical praxis. According to Gatens (2013, p.1), "[p]oststructuralist literary theorists came to question what they saw as George Eliot's naivety in supposing that language could be a transparent medium for the

representation of reality". Scientifically speaking a particular canon was created around Eliot's novels which clearly identified one definition of language based upon a concrete reading of Eliot's writing. Language was defined as a representative signifier for a particular reality based upon a concrete canon that identified who was considered a great novelist and who was not. This assumed two particular facts: that there was a concrete definition for what "language" as a concept means, as well as, a set of conditions pre-defined in that time that could clearly identify a set of characteristics prior even to the moment of reading the novel. Gatens asserts that Eliot and her partner were some of the first theorists who understood that "the novel cannot be distinguished from science or philosophy on the basis of truth versus falsity, the real versus the ideal, or facts versus imagination. Scientists, philosophers and novelists all rely on the power of the imagination in their respective pursuits" (Gatens, 2013, p.10). This is why this article includes creations of language itself (philosophical and literary constructions) and theorizations of the relations that it creates. As in Eliot's works, for future articles devoted to this section and what we are aiming at start theorizing in this article is examples "of an interventionist practice that aims to transform the ethical frame of human [and more than human] action through a forceful revisioning of reality" (Gatens, 2013, p.13).

The concept of *fictioning* as praxis (see Palmer, 2019; Burrows and O' Sullivan, 2019) is vital if we are to think about the relation between words and worlds. Skiveren begins his article on the relationship between fiction and new materialism by pointing out (quite rightly) that Slavoj Žižek's criticism of new materialism which aligns it with the fictional world of Lord of the Rings misses the mark, because it does not perceive fiction in the way that it is understood by thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett and Astrida Neimanis: that is, "preferred way to assert new worlds of vibrant, intra-active, trans-corporeal, and sympoetic matterings" (Skiveren, 2019, p.1). Sympoeisis, drawn from Haraways's use of the term as a word for "worlding-with, in company" (Haraway, 2016, p.58), is defined alongside sympathy in Elizabeth de Freitas' article in *Posthuman Ecologies* as "a process of *becoming other that does not erase the*

other"(de Freitas, 2019, p.89). Or, again, taking Toni Morrison's words (1992, p.4), "imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking onself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*".

How, then, do we become-with-writing? Setting as an example the preromantic Karl Phillip Morritz, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define writers as sorcerers (Deleuze & Guattari, 1978, p.265). These sorcerers are responsible for feeling the unknown, the affect as "the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel" (ibid). Yet again, another question remains open here since we cannot single out the possibility of the affect in a human sorcerer, so how are we defining here responsibility? Following Haraway (2008), responsibility is the materialization of the capacity to respond at a micro-level that influences somehow (reeling and shaking) some macro-structures. Coming back to Morrison again, the combination between "individual freedom *and* mechanisms for devastating racial oppression" is the point of view of a responsible writer (Morrison, 1992, p.xiii). Morrison explains that when we take this view "seriously as agency, the literature produced within and without it offers an unprecedented opportunity to comprehend the resilience and gravity, the inadequacy and the force of the imaginative act" (ibid). That is to say, when we become with the previously mentioned example, *The Color of Milk,* the impossibility of the capital letter "i" already opens up this effectuation of power in which we are combining this individual freedom of a woman in the 1831 who, even in vulnerable circumstances (first exploited in the farm with his father and then sold to be maid), learns to read and to write to express the inequalities of that time. Also, when we become with the Florens' writer, we intra-act with those material walls in which oppressive letters have become our responsibility. As readers, we cannot feel the oppression that Florens is feeling, but precisely the unknown is the locatedness of the relationship between all the elements partaking in the moment of reading, where possibilities and multiplicities come to the front.

Rather than exclude language at the expense of matter we look towards a site of commencement, which is also the place precisely where the body was disavowed

from language. As Vicki Kirby points out, the 'outside' of signification is a site of gendered exclusion, read as impenetrable 'matter' and therefore feminine, excluded through phallocentric somatophobia. Following Kirby, we may see the relation between ideality and materiality in the signifier as a "productive entanglement" (Kirby, 1997, pp.54-55). We must consider our textual worlds as material at the same time as we consider our material worlds a textual. To create language within itself is *itself* a theorizing of naturecultures from a monist perspective; while, at the same time, articulating an agentic capacity of matter to perform feminist political moves.

Playing with language: IPhone or stein?

Through the advances of technology we now find ourselves not in the postmodern condition but rather the algorithmic condition, which according to Felicity Colman et al in their report 'Ethics of Coding: A Report on the Algorithmic Condition', the algorithmic condition "extends beyond, and fundamentally changes, such spatial modes of relating by foregrounding the temporal logics upon which both interfaces and navigational practices rely" (Colman et al 2018L, p.11). If the interface we are considering is language itself, or a chosen medium with which to express it, the order of 'once upon a time' sequential linearity is glitched: sometimes consciously, sometimes imperceptibly.

Once upon a time it is so much better then it is so fun to be a nice app for a good few hours of playing

Once upon a time to be a great person I would be a great friend and a wonderful family

Once upon a time I will have to wait for the last few days to get the fuck out of the woodwork

Once upon a time to get a chance to see if you need to be on the same night as well as the event by visiting recording in surveillance

Once upon a time with your family, I think I realised that you were on the way to be a little bit more than the average person in the world

Once upon a time to be able to I have a great idea of how much fun it would have been for you in the first day is a good is a good next time

Once upon a time it would have been better for you to come back from your lunchtime meeting and then we could try something really outrageous that you might just want

The nonsensical beginnings listed above emerged from a game that you can play at home; variants of which you may have already played at home. Let's presume for now that you, the reader, have a smartphone with a predictive text function, and that function is switched on. The function predicts words which are most likely to come directly after the word you are currently typing. These words are generated algorithmically, and are based upon a philosophy of what is known in computational linguistics as 'disambiguation'. The keyboard learns your typing habits and together you and the keyboard move harmoniously towards the elimination of ambiguity and maximum communicative efficiency. And yet. Ambiguity, error, equivocation, wordplay and the deliberate manipulation and subversion of expectations are what fuel the movement of language; its mobile sense of variation. In *What If Culture Was Nature All Along?* Kirby discusses the Enigma Code used at Bletchley Park in the UK during WWII. The code is a cipher code; it is both broken by algorithms and exhibits algorithmic patterns itself. It just so happens that the algorithmic pattern of the code is also the pattern of a language. "How can a superposition of recognisably different codes, an essential de/coherence, nevertheless appear as *one* language? How can any individual language have myriad manifestations, or translations *within* it?" (Kirby, 2017, p.13). Kirby's point here is that *all* languages have myriad manifestations and translations within them: as variation, language itself varies.

The italicised sentences above were generated by typing 'Once upon a time' and then following this with the middle word of the three words suggested

automatically by the predictive text function. Each of the sentences above was typed by a different human animal into their phone, and consequently each result was different. This dual sentence construction, halfway between human and algorithm, is interesting both in terms of its questionable or multiple authorship but also because of its spatiotemporal strangeness. The resemblance between the quasi-nonsensical statements above and deliberate modernist or avant-garde syntactical deformations demonstrate the significance of the move away from transparent representation and the foregrounding of linguistic materiality. It is this resemblance that causes us to foreground precisely this – materiality – as the very thing that links up the seemingly indecipherable aspects of avant-garde linguistic experimentation with current preoccupations of materiality in general. It is through opacity – thickness – unreadability – that language departs from representation and tends towards something other. Rather than linguistic opacity as something within the realm of the privileged, we present it here in all is glorious singurality, following Édouard Glissant who employs a material metaphor to convey the significance of this concept for post- and de-colonial discourse: "Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics" (Glissant, 1990, p.190).

If we take Gertrude Stein as an example, her style has been described as something approaching unreadable due to its opacity but perhaps more specifically its syntactical irregularity. If we take the first sentence of 'Composition as Explanation', for example: "There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking" (Stein, 2004 [1926], p.21). Repetitions of words do precisely the opposite of what they purport to do; the first 'a difference' means something different to the second, and so, context-bound, time-bound variation is consistently, playfully suggested here. Far from being consigned to a fairly recent historical period of early modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century, the playful linguistic tripwires that we observe in Stein are not so much divested as supercharged with meaning. This syntactical irregularity is produced because of a deliberate manipulation of spatiotemporal

lines. It is this niche of literary and linguistic production that we would like to propose as inextricably linked to the project of new materialism.

The advances of technology for the purposes of communication have historically sustained an ambivalent relationship with the styles associated with poetic experimentation. As Natalia Cecire narrates in her article on Steinian unreadibility, there is an amusing moment in the 1935 Fred Astaire film *Top Hat* wherein a difficult-to-comprehend telegram is dismissed as sounding "like Gertrude Stein" (Cecire, 2015, p.284). This is of course a rather glib comparison on the part of the character as Cecire points out, because the repetition of the word 'stop' in a telegram carries a very specific purpose and would be read as such by the unseen telegraph workers, who are usually women. In a feminist materialist reading, Cecire points out that the opacity in Stein's writing has been historically read corporeally: quite literally as a *failure to work.*

To draw a conclusion, we think diffractively with three linguistic materialists: A-B-C: Acker-Bahktin-Cixous: in order to sculpt, or, after Acker, to bodybuild, or, after us, to *bodyword* our critical/creative argument for linguistic mattering.

A-B-C of Bodywording: A Primer[5]

-To speak and/or to enthing?

    (1) the phonic side of the word

        luminous torrents

          (the raw material)

-Yet should we still suppress the thing of it?

    (1) the musical constituent proper

[5] The first column of questions are our own; the lines in the second column come from Bakhtin's enumeration of the materiality of language in *Art and Answerability* (1924); the third column is from Hélène Cixous' 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) and the fourth is from Kathy Acker's 'Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body' (1993)

sold for a stinking fortune

(after each workout, I forgot to write)

-The material yes and/or the material no?

(2) the referential meaning

ebullient, infinite woman

(what is the picture of the antagonism between bodybuilding and verbal language?)

-Is the anti/thetical sense of every word?

(3) the constituent of verbal connections

you punished yourself for writing

(It is in this geography of no language, this negative space, that I can start to describe bodybuilding)

-From transparency/invisibility to opacity?

(4) on the psychological plane – the emotional-volitional

as when we would masturbate in secret

(the verbal language in the gym is minimal and almost senseless, reduced to numbers and a few nouns)

-Is opacity agential?

(4) theaxiomatical directedness of the word

Write, let no one hold you back

(let us name this language game, the language of the body*)*

-A nomenclature of category-bending?

(4) the diversity of the speaker's axiological relations

imbecelic capitalist machinery

> (the closer I am moving toward
> foreignness and strangeness,
> the more I am losing my own
> language)

-When is a word a cheat?

   (5) the feeling of verbal activeness

lovely mouths gagged with pollen

> (as long as we continue to
> regard the body, that which is
> subject to change, chance, and
> death, as disgusting and
> inimical, so long shall we
> continue to regard our own
> selves as dangerous others)

-What of sirens?

   (5) active generation of signifying sound

we the labyrinths

> (when a bodybuilder is counting,
> he or she is counting his or her
> own breath)

-Does the saying do beyond the sayer?

   (5) all motor elements – articulation, gesture, facial expression,
etc.

libidinal and cultural – hence political,
typically masculine – economy

> (I always want to work my
> muscle, muscular group, until it
> can no longer move: I want to
> fail)

-Does the transcendental signifier still hold sway?

(5) the whole inner directedness of my personality

the very possibility of change

(meaning approaches breath as I bodybuild, as I begin to move through the body's labyrinths, to meet, if only for a second, that which my consciousness ordinarily cannot see)

-Are we sitting on a branch then sawing it off?

(5) actively assumes through utterances

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason

(this sign is also the sign of patriarchy)

-Do I mould what I mean?

(5) a certain value-and-meaning position

the invention of a new insurgent writing

(the language of the body is not arbitrary)

-----They all lived happily ever after.

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