

Languaging Body by Field (Ecoproprioception)

Orientation

*We could say that practically all the problems of the human race
are due to the fact that thought is not proprioceptive.*
David Bohm

There is hardly a moment throughout the day in which we are not in some way orienting ourselves in space and time, yet we're rarely aware it's happening. That's because the ability to physically orient ourselves is built in to body and mind so seamlessly that it's indistinguishable from just being ourselves. Self-orientation at the level of proprioception, the complex neurophysiological system by which we position ourselves, is self-evident to us and ordinarily requires no special attention on our part. Bohm's application of such a system to account for what is missing from how "homo sapiens" does its thinking, and therefore to many central problems facing our kind, may suggest a way into what is still unthought in how we orient ourselves in larger than personal senses and what that means for how we understand—or rather, perform—our relation to life on planet Earth. And it may also offer a way into how we embody, and can performatively think, ecosomatics.

Bohm goes on to explain his metaphoric extension of neurophysiology to thinking as

more or less the same as what technical people call "feedback." In a psychological sense, proprioception amounts to a kind of awakening of awareness to itself, i.e., awareness becoming aware of awareness. Proprioception means that awareness now also considers its own operations as something to be taken into account. Apparently there are not many people who have an awareness that includes awareness [itself] as being something to be aware of. (*On Dialogue*, 1996)

He seems to be imagining here a possibility of thinking that is aware of itself in its very act of coming into being, something like contemplative thinking aware of its own activity. In current emphasis it might be likened to “mindfulness.” But this is not quite accurate as to how proprioception works: while using feedback in its mode of operation, bodymind performs its spatiotemporal self-knowing *without* an overlay of conscious awareness. We might consider Bohm’s critique of human limitation and its would-be meta-perspective as better represented by our neologistic notion *ecoproprioception*: an extended self-awareness that actively senses and knows itself in dynamic interrelation with whatever makes up the surround. And we might understand this as an *orientational thinking by field*. It’s a field thinking, moreover, that includes both our intimate bodymind knowing in spacetime—proprioception—and its equivalent dynamic field which we call “environment,” viewed first as what we move through in the current of life itself, but also its many thinkable extensions. Here the implication is that environment is never fully separate from bodymind and neither is it without its own self-organizational and self-regulatory dynamics and criticalities. Thus two dynamic systems, self and world, activate one encompassing dynamic system, plus *its* self-knowing, or what we’re viewing as a dynamic meta-consciousness. Are we therefore saying that such a dynamic system of interactive awareness—an “organismic event”—might actually exist?

The first step in responding to this question—in fact, the first *ecoproprioceptive* stepping out—is to imagine dynamic systems occurring at just such a meta-level and generating a special kind of self-awareness. Yet such an awareness wouldn’t belong to oneself more than one’s “self” belongs to it. The awareness, rather, is an event that constitutes our interactive existence coming to consciousness of itself. This may seem abstract to the point of being fanciful, and yet this imagined dynamic system “exists” as much as proprioception itself does. The point is that proprioception, while a term designating a given neurophysiological system, describes something that only exists when it’s happening, a specific act of orientation; it’s in process at a given moment in time and space and does not exist otherwise. And we can indeed be aware of it when it’s happening yet only by paying special attention. We would suggest that such an act of attention may be, or may develop into, a bodymind thinking orientation by field. This should indicate an ecosomatic thinking that is

performative within a process of engagement between self and environment as well as leading to further theorizing of its possible enhancement and practice. Here we aim to sketch out some preliminaries toward a possible ecoproprioceptive practice.

It's important to keep in mind that a concept like proprioception is basically a description—a neurophysiological mapping—of “natural” actions performed in being alive; and it's a concept where a core principle, involving self-regulating reflective awareness, attracts us to thoughts of taking it further, as it did for Bohm and the poet Charles Olson among others before us. This has meant extending its principle of participatory self-reflective activity to higher levels of complexity.¹ What “exists” here, as we wish to make implicitly understood throughout, is an *event*, not a thing, and often occurs in the form of an *edge*.² Over the years the scientific mapping has gotten finer as well as broader. The proprioceptive system works together, for instance, with the vestibular system of the inner ear, the balancing aspect of orientation, and there's speculation about how these work with “mirror neurons,” the recently theorized neuroanatomy behind, say, our yawning when we see someone else yawn. The latter is a very basic kind of ecoproprioceptive event: an action we perform involuntarily as an extension of a happening in the field. The event is mental and psychological as well as physical, much like breathing freshly scented air in a rose garden which makes us feel elated. And if any such event is complex in the sense of being both cognitive and physical, we might consider its act of body-extending interactive awareness, like that of proprioception itself, as always potential and in some way already

¹ The poet Charles Olson made notable earlier use in *Proprioception* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1965), a text that has had profound impact on poetry and poetics over the years, in particular to the present author. More recently Kate Tarlow Morgan—choreographer, movement artist/teacher, and writer—has extended Olson's insights, particularly within the context of Body-Mind Centering (conceived by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen) in “The Body Is a House: Approaching Proprioception” (*Currents*, Journal of the Body-Mind Centering Association, Winter 2011); there she begins saying proprioception is “from Latin *proprius*, meaning ‘one's own’ and perception, [and] is the sense of the relative position of neighboring parts of the body. It is the sense that indicates whether the body is moving with required effort, as well as where the various parts of the body are located in relation to each other. Unlike the exteroceptive senses by which we perceive the outside world, and interoceptive senses, by which we perceive pain and the movement of internal organs—proprioception is a third distinct sensory modality that provides feedback solely on the status of the body—as if it were a house and sited in place.” We take the mention of “place” to be significant in suggesting something more than bare or literal location; see Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 2nd ed., 2009).

² The force of this usage of “edge” is explored in depth in Edward S. Casey, *The World on Edge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

psychophysically built in to what we are—and in some equivalent way built in to what the environment, in all its networked complexity, is as well.

Preamble to More

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita...
Dante, *Inferno*

Midway in the journey of our life...: Orientation occurs in the middle of things, which is where we find ourselves all the time. Beginnings and endings are either mental projections of the present point in time or inflections of the sense of presence. The event of finding our way involves continuous registration in accordance with many levels of feedback from what we encounter on the road. All the senses are active, from the bottoms of our feet to the corners of our eyes, and somehow we manage, indeed edit to a focus, the chaos of scents, sounds, and signals. If the stimulus is from signals, language tends to be activated in response. If from the trees, what? Immediately we're in the question of what constitutes language. No doubt there are those—"native" persons come quickly to mind—who *read* the weather with uncommon accuracy; read birds, and not just carrier pigeons; read earth for its precious contents. Here we might ask: are dowzers masters of ecoproprioception? They reportedly work by formulating a sharp expectation in the mind (*water, gold*) and then via a two-handed stick they align rhythms of the body with "electrical" impulses picked up from hidden substances in a vibratory between. (Asked why another person hadn't located the water he'd just found, the dowser said, "He ain't got the '*lectric!*")

If language comes in response to anyone or anything, there may be impact—social, psychological, aesthetic, somatic. At the most fundamental physical and mental levels, acts of language are consequential and reciprocal, with resonance far beyond any immediate accounting. A striking language act flaps its butterfly wings and generates a complex response, much of which is involuntary and quite physical. Ecoproprioception, whether at the physical or linguistic level, should be viewed, at a minimum, as bi-directional interaction between agent and receiver—the sensing and saying goes both ways at once; there's oscillation of effect and interdependence of agency. What we look for in assigning

agency, as we'll see further, may be distributed beyond all accounting. No action is without that famous butterfly effect of remote consequences, and indeed the outflow may be omnidirectional and next to impossible to track. This is where the notion of ecoproprioception could help discover something inherent in us—a “system” including and extending the physiological level of proprioception—that orients itself amidst increasing complexity. Here we owe acknowledgment to Bateson’s “ecology of mind” as the beginning of a new order of thinking that inspires inquiry of the present kind.³

Language Selving: Somapoeia⁴

The truth is, when the sentence begins who knows?

Billie Chernicoff⁵

*Her body wishes to describe the indescribable, to light a
diamond cut with verve, to phrase salivating tongues
and quake flesh to spawn...*

Cheryl Pallant⁶

Any inquiry into extending our sense of self-presence in the world may intermingle disciplinary lines in an ecology-of-mind *field* perspective, and it will ask more of language than it's prepared to give, but not necessarily more than it's able to discover. Exploratory thinking—some name it “psychonautics”—calls for singular language, meaning that it has

³ See *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, And Epistemology* (San Francisco: Chandler Pub. Co., 1972, as well as *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (London: Wildwood House Ltd., 1979), both in multiple editions. Bateson's work goes beyond the interdisciplinary to the trans-categorical for a further rationality.

⁴ The neologism “somapoeia” and adjective “somapoeic” follow Ezra Pound's influential usage (1918) in speaking of three dominant tendencies in poesis: *phanopoeia*, *melopoeia* and *logopoeia*: see *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1954), 25. One of the contributions of *somapoeia* to the other three kinds would be the primacy of body-centered movement to poesis (including Olson's “projective verse”). “*Somapoetics*” would suggest the theory/principles (poetics) rather than the practice (poesis), and I have previously used this term with a more complex array of poietic nuances in the serial poem *Somapoetics* (Fremont, MI: Sumac Press, 1973).

⁵ From the poem, “Since You Asked,” *The Red Dress: Charms Troubled & Amorous* (New York: Dr. Cicero Books, 2015), 69. Chernicoff's work brings out the singular intimacy of ecopoiesis.

⁶ From “Dance Concentric Waves,” *Her Body Listening* (Kenmore, NY: Blaze Vox [books]), 19. Pallant is a poet, writer, somatics specialist, energy healer, dancer, and professor whose writing pervasively embodies ecoproprioception.

to find its poetics, its unique way of carrying out its unprecedented inflections in thinking. Poets of course know about this fundamental principle, but philosophers do too, at least implicitly, and also explicitly starting with “the first philosopher” Parmenides who did it all in one extended poem! And Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Deleuze—whom to read is to learn a language—an idiolect—of thinking. Bateson, who thought innovatively and influentially in the ways of anthropology, psychiatry, social patterns, cybernetics, epistemology and ecology, invented the “metalogue”:

a conversation about some problematic subject. This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject....⁷

The key point here is that language isn’t just “expressing” thought and affect but these are generated and evolved through the very “matter” of language in action, itself worked through the physical body—indeed as Charles Olson specifies, through the *breath* of the thinker/maker/poet, as should become more vivid below.⁸ And in the case of dialogue the generative body is multiple and distributed in space.

Human bodies are words, myriads of words
Whitman, “A Song of the Rolling Earth”

What happens when language enters into a space? Of course it depends a lot on the kind of language, space and situation. In times of yore the poet goes to a place and sings a song, which adapts to the environment as the story emerges—a narrated mythic hero may take on the qualities, say, of a person famous in the town (proto-Homeric stage).⁹ The most ancient poems were place-specific, flexible acts of oral language conditioned by particular local needs and limits. With the advent of writing the limits become additionally codified

⁷ Bateson (1972).

⁸ A rare instance of body-centered thinking about poesis previous to Olson’s influence was Francis Berry, *Poetry and the Physical Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), a book that influenced the present writer around age 26.

⁹ Albert Lord, *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). Oral poets presented the “same” poem very differently in different contexts, with local political/social accommodations, so the actual poem is a dialogue with environment.

and generalized, the conventions spelled out, whereby the “medium is the message,” and so on. It’s debatable as to how much any language act is ever truly solitary, as the external world lives within the language created in it and the writer internalizes both the conditions and the inherited *speaking force* of the language in its native condition. There is feedback from the world even when the world is silent.

Ecoproprioception is always already going on in the unmoving, non-directly engaged maker’s body with the arising of the very impulse toward language, which may be, for instance, what the poet Robert Duncan called a “body tone,” signaling a coming poem. Language is called forth bodily or calls itself into play physically—*somapoieia*—and the emerging event is ecoproprioceptive. Language is reaching out to meet the world which, in keeping as well with its own rhythms, simultaneously seems drawn into languaging: so much so that the world often comes to us *as*, as well as *in*, language. Among the many comparable phenomena is Atsushi Takenouchi’s *Butoh* aligning with “a cosmic wave or rhythm that is *Jinen*”¹⁰ or the related work of post-Butoh and post-traditional dancers Eiko and Koma, where the poesis is dancing in accordance with a place and can merge human with non-human trans-identity. There is impact, action in space, further “rousing the faculties to act” (William Blake) among the sentient and sapient.

Let’s declare a basic principle: ecoproprioception when languaging, just as when extending sensing, is a *process of self-knowing interactive with space-knowing*.¹¹ Here “space-knowing” is what I call “axial” as an “open concept” left ambiguous as to whether the knowing agent is only oneself or also a knowing in, or distributed in, space independently of oneself. Axial concepts, a kind of bracketing, leave undecidable issues open as a spur to further thinking. And the interdependent/intergenerative principle of living language making —itself

¹⁰ Quoted and discussed by Sondra Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 52, a book that is implicitly one of the major expositions of ecoproprioception.

¹¹ Elsewhere I’ve discussed the difference between “principle” and “concept” in art: e.g., a Conceptual work aims to fully represent its preconceived concept, whereas a principle-based work is only one manifestation of its root principle; indeed, no single expression can be a definitive representation of a principle. A related notion of principle is used in somatic practices like ch’i kung and many contemporary approaches to dance where grasping the principle of a movement is more important than perfecting the outer form. See the three essays (“Poetry in Principle,” “Healing Poetics,” and “The Poetics of Thinking”) in *Poetry in Principle: Essays in Poetics*, foreword Edward S. Casey (New York: Spuyten Duyvil Press/Dispatches Poetics, 2019).

inherently axial—shows up variously on a spectrum that runs from typicality to diversity. The language we’re thinking in here—in this very essay—is fairly atypical without being disruptively divergent. Even though it’s not standard expository English, it’s nevertheless practicing an intentional degree of restraint (especially on the part of its thinking poet) aiming to meet the *constraints* of its *context*: a chosen field of interaction. However unruly (nonlinear) it may appear at times, it remains clearly within the bounds of what is now called *neurotypicality*. This makes it a quite consciously dialogical and nuanced extension of the ecoproprioceptive principle operative in language. Its ability to observe itself, project a likely accepting readership in context, and monitor its own progress accordingly, all the while doing the (largely performative) thinking which is only minimally preformulated, speaks to its degree of neuro-adaptability and -resonance with environment.

Now let’s consider a contrary perspective. But not without mentioning your readerly complicity, if you’re still here, making you co-performative of its ecoproprioceptive principle. You may understand these renderings of principle quite differently from the author’s intended meaning, which assures their axially/intrinsic ambiguity. Reading is a non-universal kind of togetherness that implicitly raises challenging questions like “how neurotypical are you?”

Divergence

We “think with sticks” (Wolfond), rubber bath toys, tics, flaps, taps, space, pace and proprioception.
Estée Klar & Adam Wolfond¹²

My body pacing is the task of feeling my body and
the feeling of the pace of the environment I am feeling.
Adam Wolfond, *S/Pace*¹³

¹² “S/Pace: Neurodiversity in Relation,” *Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture*, Volume 2, Issue 1 (2020) Autism and Neurodiversity: scholarworks.gvsu.edu/ought/vol2/iss1/7/.

¹³ Wolfond and Klar, 2019: <https://vimeo.com/363876394>. A nonspeaking autistic artist, poet, and university co-lecturer with Klar, Wolfond is also a founding member of *dis assembly*, a neurodiverse artist collective based in Toronto. Clearly non-speaking and other occasional characteristics of autism are not directly connected to intelligence, except in the claims that autism (particularly in the “high-functioning” end of the spectrum) have been linked to “genius,” with serious speculation that Einstein, and indeed the likes of

In the film *S/Pace* (2019, 16 min.) a young man performs actions that, although superficially dowser-like, are basically uninterpretable by neurotypical standards: he moves with high concentration through a room with a substantial, carefully groomed twig in one hand making it twitch quickly as if doing something invisible to the air; and with no goal or apparent endpoint in sight: a pure activity for its own sake. He calls it *ticcing* and alternatively *scattering*. Adam Wolfond, 20, a non-speaking, autistic poet, calls those intense actions with a “talking stick” one of his two principal kinds of poetry; the other he types slowly, laboriously with one finger on a computer that voices the words for him. His speech-generating device says that poetry is part of his body: “It is nature to me, and I think that non-speakers like me dance with language.” It’s all “*linguaging*”—“an event in which the body and the atmosphere are related.”¹⁴

This identification of signifying movement with language is intrinsic of course to the ontologies of dance and signing, and indeed it’s part of ordinary speech gestures, but *ticcing* is divergent in having no meaning-corroborating context; it’s *alien* language.¹⁵ Yet its maker views it as a coherent action of bodymind in communion with space, and he identifies it as “thinking.” Clearly it realizes an inherent linguistic potential, manifesting as a personal singularity. It’s one of the clearest enactments of proprioception, a word he sometimes uses; indeed he says,

The art is the way of the stick
and the stick is the way
of my feeling body

Each wave art moves

Newton and Michelangelo, have been studied as potentially autistic: <https://www.autismtalkclub.com/did-albert-einstein-have-autism/>.

¹⁴ Quotations here and below from Wolfond appear on multiple websites, including those cited above as well as text from the NPR broadcast, “For neurodivergent, non-speaking poets, collaboration is the basis of language” <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/29/1095206261/for-neurodivergent-non-speaking-poets-collaboration-is-the-basis-of-language>. Regarding atmosphere as conveyor of affect, see Edward S. Casey, *Turning Emotion Inside Out* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2022).

¹⁵ Diana Reed Slattery, *Xenolinguistics: Psychedelics, Language, and the Evolution of Consciousness* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015) is a far-reaching account and crossdisciplinary study of successful intentional encounters with non-human language, suggesting that human beings have the intrinsic ability to learn non-natural language (“*exoproprioception*”).

is like seconds
that rally movement.

His selving actions—his workings—become ecoproprioceptive in their degree of performativity and in the energetic feedback relation with the medium of space as it is realized in a chosen place. They become *somapoetic* in the body's identification with language action, the somapoiesis, the realized intensity of unprecedented verbal configurations: "ticking through the world is like touching it"; "the way of the hand that likes to see." Wolfond's space itself is aroused to action: "inside the world is/the question of easy touch"; "The work is to feel the world/that is touching me."

The self-aware thinking commitment at stake here is to *movement* as fundamental, enabling a transformative and virtually trancelike state of mindbody: "I sometimes gain the space/like a backwards spiral/that tries to find its way." The torsional, spiraling actions with the sticks follows a principle of movement I call *axial*, where a universal turning on an axis, along with the generation of wave resonance in matter (cymatics), is converted into languaging coherence and aesthetic appreciation: "the inward rotation of the spiral is like amazing tall idea always thinking around and out," writes Wolfond; "the man of autism is rallying the colors of life to move."

Much of what Wolfond says applies to intimate human experience more generally, the mostly undisclosed part, witnessed as if in slow motion through cracks in the ordinary, or an infrascopic perspective. A close-up viewing of neurodivergence in its creative manifestation is an invitation to discover unexposed dimensions that are mostly submerged within neurotypicality. It can reveal how any high degree of singular and embodied language realization exposes the intrinsic diversity of experience awake to its qualities—what our neurotypicality typically fails to appreciate. Wolfond's written poetry invites serious study, and could be related, for instance, to the work of a major poet of recent time, Larry Eigner (1927-1996), a contemporary of Olson influenced by his poetics of "composition by field" ("Projective Verse, 1950):

bird sounds

make the sunned room pass

the opened window

*Air the Trees*¹⁶

Eigner, critically palsied at birth as a result of a bungled forceps delivery, wrote on a 1940 manual typewriter using only his right index finger and thumb; the act of writing took tremendous physical effort and commitment to inscribe thought in words on paper, yet he wrote over forty books in his sixty-nine years. Unlike Wolfond he could speak but few could understand his speech. He created a singular world experience page by hard-won page, transferring a half-reached physical place onto a parallel materially written space. He composed his reality “by field.” Eigner and Wolfond are true poets of ecoproprioception.¹⁷

Middle Voice

What might be a mode of communication for our human kinship with Nature?
Rebecca R. Burrill¹⁸

Who speaks the language of trees?
Laynie Browne¹⁹

“At root our taboo,” said the poet Robert Duncan, “is against unintelligibility.” We fear what we can’t understand, and our education prioritizes right interpretation as endpoint over

¹⁶ (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1967).

¹⁷ There are a number of interesting autistic poets now writing and being published, e.g., in the journal *Ought* mentioned above, among others. Perhaps the best known autistic poet/artist is Christopher Knowles, now 63, his fame due initially to collaborations at age 13 with Robert Wilson (for the Philip Glass opera *Einstein on the Beach*, 1979). For a superb recent account see *Christopher Knowles: In a Word*, ed. Anthony Elms and Hilton Als (New York: Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2017), created for an exhibition curated by Elms at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania; Elms’ own essay “This could be about the things on the table” is especially relevant to the present piece in discussing the “aesthetic rhythms” of “daily life” and its implications for art. Unlike non-speaking Wolfond, the speaking Knowles’ works are planned out in remarkable detail, “pure conceptualism,” as John Ashbery said in a review in *New York Magazine* in 1978.

¹⁸ “Languages of Nature, Languages of Art,” <https://humansandnature.org/languages-of-nature-languages-of-art/>. Burrill’s writing, thinking, dance, and teaching (directly relating movement and art making to fundamentals of child development, learning and literacy) embody a pervasively high realization of ecoproprioception, integrating thought and practice in exemplary ways we can learn from.

¹⁹ *You Envelop Me* (Oakland: Omnidawn Publishing, 2017), 28. Browne is another kind of ecoproprioceptive poet, variously innovative in language process alive in relating to the environment.

open processual speculation. We like clear boundaries in the thinkable. Such a bias in thinking has delayed our embrace of possible engagement with “alien” language, including the very idea of intelligence and communication in nature between animals, plants and fungi, recently foregrounded, for instance, in plant and fungal biology and ethology.²⁰ We can now begin to think in accord with a neurodivergent poet’s movement languaging in the same frame with innovative poiesis of the last many decades as well as diverse practices both artistic and therapeutic. These practices range widely as different kinds of bodywork and intentional movement, where the latter go from international, sacred and “postmodern” dance to a variety of therapeutic systems with names like Feldenkrais Method, CranioSacral Therapy, Alexander Technique, Body-Mind Centering, Trager Mentastics, t’ai chi, ch’i kung, *ad infinitum*. A strong practice of field thinking is highly developed in the work of Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, Sondra Fraleigh, and others, representing the integration of multiple ways of thinking, languaging and practicing, fully embodying ecoproprioceptive thinking.²¹ This ever expanding frame invites every kind of interdisciplinary attention but remains trans-categorical like Bateson’s ecology-of-mind thinking. The deeper message that *we need to keep relearning how to think* gives the right impetus in appreciating how we *ecoproprioceive*—an intransitive verb with promiscuous transitive tendencies, articulating verbal action in the middle voice.

Since the 1950s poets like Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Kelly and Charles Stein have invoked the grammatical function of middle voice, straddling the active and passive, while the mysteries of undecidable agency serve “the poem of the mind” (Wallace Stevens), and the transformative awareness its operations afford. The ecoproprioceptive practice of reflecting on language even as we are using it accesses a built-in grammatical flexibility. In poiesis this can be tantamount to letting the language do the thinking. There’s a long

²⁰ For a rich account of how recent these openings in science are, see Jeremy Narby’s *Intelligence in Nature: An Inquiry into Knowledge* (New York: Tarcher, 2005), and for how far science has come since intelligence and language in animals and plants were viewed as “New Age nonsense,” see the PBS Nature documentary, *What Plants Talk About*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrrSAC-vjG4>.

²¹ Manning and Massumi’s innovative discourse with its clear poiesis of transformative thinking in *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) directly addresses our issues here (e.g., neurodivergence). See also Manning’s equally relevant *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Her work with the SenseLab at Concordia University and in “relational art” is itself a laboratory in the ecoproprioceptive.

history of displaced agency right back to Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi; in this “inner tradition” Blake channeled his deceased brother for lines of *Jerusalem*; Surrealist Robert Desnos performed automatic writing; Rimbaud wrote “*Je est un autre.*”²² And Wolfond seems to discover this self-generating *linguaging* through an urgent energetics of his own body, excited into space awareness by body’s raw relational powers.²³ Indeed his title *S/Pace* suggests that the rhythmic pacing realigns body and space, the self-composing field, and he can say there: “Good thought moves/like fluid water/and the way of water is raining/really into/the seething good cracks/of wanting thought.” Where is the agency, and where the cherished boundaries of self?

In Merlin Sheldrake’s *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures*²⁴ we encounter the vast underpinnings of biological life and the seemingly limitless complexity of what constitutes individual being, indeed, *self, subject*. It seems that we are networked through and through and mind is everywhere and thinking is “non-local.” How do you language such complexity, or rather how is nature, with which we are coterminous, linguaging itself? Marjolein Oele sees the grammar of middle voice as offering “an alternative way to grasping the relationship between subject and process.”²⁵ She goes further to “propose that the middle voice is *materialized* in the ambiguous inner-outer potentiality of the plant... [and] plants *live and embody* the open, futural, participatory existence of the middle voice.”²⁶ Language is not just an intellectual human construct and

²² For a radical new poietic rendering of the Parmenides poem and texts in the Hermetic tradition, with extensive commentary implicitly supporting a “poetics of thinking” and ecoproprioception see: Charles Stein, *The Light of Hermes Trismegistus: New Translations of Seven Essential Hermetic Texts* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2022).

²³ In the late 1960s Robert Duncan spoke of taking a decadelong break in publishing poetry, in part to return to the basics of language, as if a child’s first encounter, to renew the liminal zone between body language (including first sounds, stammering) and clear articulation, which in retrospect seems like a conscious neurodivergence in linguaging as a source of primary poiesis. This raw state of language he seemed to relate to the state of *receptivity* of the poem, a disturbance of agency in its action.

²⁴ (New York: Random House, 2021)

²⁵ *E-Co-Affectivity: Exploring Pathos at Life’s Material Interfaces* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), 21. In this study that opens many new avenues of thinking and the importance of language for thinking about liminal states of agency, Oele notes the extensive and various philosophical understandings of middle voice, mentioning Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, John Llewelyn, and Rolf Elberfeld among others.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

instrument; it's embodied, made flesh, alive, intersubjective, interdependent, cocreative—in short, ecoproprioceptive.

The Body of Language Singularity

*I start in the middle of a sentence
and move both directions at once.*
John Coltrane

When a dancer is imaginably moving in and with the forest and its inhabitants, the level of identification may seriously confuse the boundaries of self, space and alien entitativity. The body has inherent rhythm and syntax potential like anything that communicates using biological and neurological feedback loops. And somatic practices and dance approaches often develop ways of *tuning into* inherent rhythm and intuitive ordering like the previously mentioned rhythms of nature (*Jinen*). If every place has a vibe, it also has a music and a “tongue.” Sondra Fraleigh speaks of “intrinsic dancing” (“predicated on pleasure rather than perfection”),²⁷ reflections of intrinsic value, which are amplified and subtly discriminated in body and language poesis. The Butoh dancer reads the ground and aligns through energetic feedback; likewise the poet *listens in* on the unfolding syntax for its subtle directions. In “The Structure of Rime I,” Robert Duncan writes:

I ask the unyielding Sentence that shows Itself forth in the
language as I make it,

Speak! For I name myself your master, who come to serve,
Writing is first a search in obedience.²⁸

Agency is axial, interactive and enactive, and language itself is the ground, the shifting source of feedback (Duncan speaks of “the tone-leading of vowels”), the contraries and energies with which the poet is in continuous oscillation. It's an art of *tuning*.

²⁷ Fraleigh, 168.

²⁸ *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, ed. Peter Quartermain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 8.

Somatic disciplines, going back to Gerda Alexander (1908-1994) and Eutony, discussed by Fraleigh as an important source for health conscious innovations in dance, teach movement awareness that *tones* the moving body by finding what accords with one's own biorhythms. Over the years my own experience of dancers like Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, Eva Karczag, and Nancy Stark Smith (Contact Improvisation) contributed to a theory and practice of *axial poiesis* because these dancers (or "movement poets") bring out a sense of *singular body syntax*. Their somapoiesis imparts awareness of...—here I have to give it a place-holding name: *imaginational performativity in precarity, working the edge*.²⁹

We are learning more and more through what our poiesis, our "search in obedience," teaches us; namely, that the natural world enacts and co-enacts the principles that guide us. As mentioned Marjolein Oele explores middle voice as the appropriate grammatical mood to open up "an alternative and promising stance to contemplate the affectivity at the heart of plant life":

If it is the case that middle voice offers us a subject that is "inside the process of which it is the agent," and provides a vision of life that grows from the middle, without origin or end, then plant life *par excellence* offers us an instance of middle-voiced life.... Plants emerge and become who they are as products of a polyphonic, communal space. In this space, they result from hybrid, trans-species and trans-generational partnerships, which both sensitize and protect plants in numerous assemblages and through numerous means....³⁰

If for the word "plant(s)" in the above we substitute "poem(s)" or "dance(s)" or "musical composition(s)" we get further insight into our connectedness, our entangled placing, our "co-implacement" (Edward Casey). One kind of insight is how this connection with earth life is the occasion of somapoiesis, the further languaging in conjunction with our place here. The action is both ways at once, and the possibility of mutual healing—an event from the middle of the sentence underway, as Coltrane says his music is.

We use "body language" to bring us closer to sensory experience of the body. We also need to cultivate Whitman's awareness that language is *of* the body as well as the psyche/mind

²⁹ My own celebration of the underlying principle ("beauty=optimal x precarious") is in *Axial Stones: An Art of Precarious Balance*, foreword Carter Ratcliff (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2006).

³⁰ Oele, 46.

and therefore itself may be said to *have* body. The different nuances of the word *body*, even in how we're using it here, are suggestive of the many senses in which both body and language *can* be used—a multiplicity calling up the subtly different ways we *experience* body, reflect on it, and transform it. Ambiguity and variability become opportunities for further nuance and avoidance of “misplaced concreteness” (Whitehead). What arises into view in any particular instance of close somatic experience is its singular syntax. In the case of axial poiesis there's a similar phenomenon: each spiraling breath in its distinctive particularity impels words forward while connecting them with other words by somatic-psychical attraction.³¹ It involves a curve of connectivity according to the enacted psychical biorhythms that issue forth. This unprecedented syntactic event is a matrix of new and indeed *axial* thinking, happening on the spot, true in alignment with the axis of the moment.

Reading/hearing the axis, the center of balance in syntax or in relational events—indeed one's own spine or another person's or a plant's stem—may induce a feeling of being touched, a haptic eye-ear reading-listening that gives rise to singular non-reducible meaning. It can have the power like that, for instance, of hearing the recorded voice of a missed friend. Such a unique significance brings to the surface a now amplified awareness of our implicit singular being, and our connectedness. It transmits a state of free being, as perceptibly true on the outside as on the inside; it *ecoproprioceives*. How could this not be a deep intention behind the artistic goal of *mimesis*—life and art inter-imitating, co-entrainment and co-embodiment? That would be functionally a principle of *ecopoiesis* with free play in the somatic.

³¹ Beside the previous mention of Olson's emphasis on the breath in Projective Verse, it should be part of our thinking here that a practice of the breath is central to many yogic, ch'i kung and meditation practices as well as extraordinarily subtle contemporary methods like what was taught by Ilsa Middendorf (1910-2009) at the “Institute for the Experienced Breath” (*Erfahrbaren Atem*)—<https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/middendorf-breath-experience>—where, according to Middendorf, the key point is: “To let the breath come, let it go, and wait until it comes back on its own is to perceive the unconscious function of the breath. A movement emerges, a connection to the human wholeness, and the possibility to get to know and experience oneself” (1990). She also amplifies our sense of the “naturalness” of axiality in foregrounding the *spiraling nature of the breath*.

A seldom discussed intention of poiesis (relating to a core principle emphasized in axial poiesis) is a work's communication of its own state of creative being. It projects an attractive force of its *level* of somatic and psychological realization. This points to a vital social as well as environmental aspect of ecoproprioception: the invitation implicit in an artistic process for the receiver to take on its state of singular realization—to entrain to an *other possibility*. I call this *mirroring by alterity*. Its embrace of performativity qualifies the more traditional aesthetic focus of appreciating the formal qualities and “perfections” of a work in favor of valorizing its transformative impact and transmission of enactive value. That value is resolutely non-coercive. It invites. As Adam Wolfond says: “Each wave art moves/is like seconds/that rally movement.” Such performative work projects outwards its self-regulating, self-directing action of field awareness—its state of singular possibility. The action is not so much forward or toward as spiraling and radial.

Practice makes perfect variability in non-perfective thinking

Let's be in touch through it all is the cry of the field.
Body talks non-stop.
An action by field lets the whole thing die in your arms.
*Preverbs*³²

A poem is an exposed root.
M T C Cronin³³

How to speak in the middle voice? You can only try: language happens “inside” us even as we happen through its agency “outside”—the bodily act of poiesis at large. Did I say try? That may be misleading. Ecoproprioception is not helpfully viewed as a skill, the result of repetitive action, calling for a new method, evaluated by codified standards. There's no

³² Preverbs, an invented poietic genre, are axial acts of language central to my practice for over twenty years. The first two lines are from a recent series, “Gnostalgia for the Present,” unpublished; the third line is from the series “Rippling Scales,” *Waking from Myself (preverbs)* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 2022), 116.

³³ From *The Catastrophe of Meaning*, unpublished poietic work by an Australian poet, author of many books, whose work is a high realization of axial thinking.

mastery in the relational and the psychonautic. (And there's no sure path to the *'lectric*.) We're aiming to trap an elusive sense here: It's not motivated by the wish to improve but to *know further and other* (more *connaître* than *savoir*, more like knowing biblically as it were than abstractly). Its evolutionary principle is less getting fit to survive than erotic and playful to enjoy, and it's far more collaborative than competitive. The “-ception” in *ecoproprioception* may be closer to *conception*, toward birthing, a kind of bodymind adjustment that puts a pressure on thinking to be something *more*, some further state of connectedness it doesn't know just how to be. But as *prehensive* it's open to sensing.

Ecoproprioception responds to a *discipline of release* wherein space opens for connective thinking to occur of its own accord, or an *open accordance*, accommodating insight, a mindbody event of unaccountable origin and projective force. In this practice frame, discipline occurs receptively and without coercion, and retains the possibility of pleasure, indeed a somatic sense of ecstasies. There are precedents to help guide us in the West with, say, an idea like *Gelassenheit* (“releasement, state of letting go into what is” from Meister Eckhart to Heidegger), or, from the East, t'ai chi and the “soft” martial arts and related therapies,³⁴ and a range of somatic practices; and indeed process philosophy (Whitehead, Bergson, Deleuze...), our native pragmatisms (William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey...), and “enactivism” in cognitive science (Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson et al.),³⁵ among other great intellectual adventures. These approaches and many current practice disciplines (somatic, noetic, gnoetic) offer guidance in developing an extended orientation by field. Ecoproprioceptive events are not so much planned as invited, or called home, to find ways to let nature, including our own nature, do the talking.

³⁴ The language of the Taoist disciplines of release (e.g., t'ai chi's “beautiful lady's hand”=energized-relaxed alert body) is instructive for ecoproprioceptive thinking, and there are words in Eastern philosophical language that are connected as well, such as Tibetan Dzogchen (e.g. *lhug-pa*=alertly relaxed with presence as contemplative bodymind state).

³⁵ See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010) for the core position that cognition arises through dynamic interaction between active agent and environment.

That talking is drawn to our poiesis, the immediate energy of language renewing itself, revitalizing ecosomatic thinking, in training to face the crisis that is the new life on earth. And despite the utter seriousness of the crisis facing us we must not lose the sense of play, always the first thing to go in “serious” environmental discourse, because play—enjoyment—is the attractor of inspired making which is critical to new thinking—the willing disorientation that conjures new orientation; the precariousness and being-on-edge that brings leaping to thought. Otherwise we lose motivation through broken connection with “the force that through the green leaf drives the flower.”