

Playing with Propriomic Augmentation

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Propriomics is a term we have created to refer to the evolution of information-theoretic coupling of embodied perception and action, in relation to the processing of data available from the environment, in order to build models of physical intentionality that operate within the sociocultural, physiological, skeletomuscular and neural capacities of the human organism. We investigate the entangled potential of propriomic augmentation through a practice-based research case study, of the band formed by the authors, whose first performance as part of the 2024 Entangled Futures festival was promoted as follows: *Assemble to disassemble with doom metal algo-collage improvisers Chainsaw Trousers. The Blood Countess is chopped and mixed with wood from a Highland forest, code cut in Sheffield, and a breath of drone from Iceland, playfully crafted in Cambridge. On their way to a post-text academy where propriomic apparatus is driven by AI critiques from UN missions in Africa to the mātauranga Māori of Moana Oceania.*

Chainsaw Trousers features Annouchka Bayley, a regular jazz and blues singer apprenticed in Roy Hart Vocal Extension Technique, Mongolian throat singing and urtynn duu at the Tumen Ekh Theatre, Mongolia; Luke Church, designer of the live coding language Candela for creating algorithmically synthesised video projections in real time; orchestral double bass player and music live coding researcher Alan Blackwell; and jazz musician / sociophonetics researcher Liz Blackwell. In rehearsal and performance, three of the band look for underground spaces shaking with sub-bass, large instruments, loops and distortion pedals, while Luke is a networked presence, as likely to connect from an airport boarding lounge as from the Scottish forest where his chainsaw is not loud enough to interrupt the band.

We intentionally undermine our established expertise as writers of texts and notational codes, working in genres that defy digitally discrete-music "claviocentrism" (Morrison and McPherson 2024). Seeking knowledge in and through the body stands against text-driven “artificial general intelligence”, and the science fantasy of transplantable intelligences (*The Ship who Sang* and *Ancillary Justice*), or alternate digital realities (*eXistenz* and *The Matrix*). Real bodies make sound and inhabit space, and our critical technical practice entangles wood, breath, blood and code (Blackwell 2010, 2022, 2024).

As an ensemble of scholar-artists, Chainsaw Trousers propose three thought-experiments that congeal around / emerge from the practice of creating together. The experiments generate each other. They do not aim to build upon but rather diffract through one another, creating swells and flows of emergent knowledge:

Experiment One: presence and attentiveness in relation to human experience. The way the media is created only makes sense in relation to the presence of the audience and the creators. Music, visuals and text, created by synthesis algorithms to conform to social norms of performance or publishing lack situatedness in human experience. Because they lack the

meaningful engagement and presence of an author and an audience, they are worth less than the hot air they expel to create them.

As the remote participant in CT, Luke experiences the interruption of technical disconnects. They're moments of loss. He reflects: *My participation becomes solely tied to a memory of previous events, more a reminiscence than a performance. Much like reading text written by an LLM, I can only do it out of a fondness for a previous meaningful connection, but tinged with the sadness of the meaningful connection as memory. I hope the connection will soon be restored.*

Experiment Two: CT moves us simultaneously towards and away from Donna Haraway's 'tentacular thinking'. Whilst an octopus might experience the world through both an eight limbed and single limbed probe, thus changing conscious experience depending on what way they use their bodies (*Metazoa*, Godfrey-Smith), Chainsaw Trousers vibrates across human and nonhuman bodies-limbs-skins: digital (code), human (vocal folds), instrumental (bass strings). Moving from limb to vibration as the exploratory apparatus via which new ways of re-configuring relations emerge.

Our 4-headed 16-limbed system experiences detachments and prosthetic reconnections, during which those interfaces become a research probe - a potential point of abstraction, but also of potential commodification or surveillance. Commercial collaboration platforms censor the sound, classifying our work as noise not signal, unable to encode the body, invoking the sad disembodiment of a Zoom-ed generation.

Experiment three: We consider how Chainsaw Trousers moves porously through Elizabeth Povinelli's concepts of the 'surround' and 'embagination'. When there is no exteriority but a endlessly differencing, generating, emerging vibration expressed in a body of tones no longer reinforced by *a body* but by multiple species/nonspecies boundaries. Mongolian sounds is all about finding the particular resonance of *that space you're in* So Sound and how you 'throw ' sound is totally dependant on the space which extends an articulatory phonology (Browman and Goldstein 1989) through bodies in space, objects in space, walls etc) the 'surround' which Povinelli describes via an analysis of the furthest fringe of neoliberal interest (see Povinelli Routes/Worlds on surround as the desire for sameness, the pinnacle of neoliberal views of total 'inclusion'), dissolves into an ontology of motion in line with Thomas Nail's revisioning of Lucretius.

In summary, "propriomic augmentation" involves the use of technology to explore, extend and enhance the changing nature of knowledge in response to the rise of stochastic parrots. The experimental practice of Chainsaw Trousers relies (never exclusively) on an entangled view of sound, noise, instrument, code, breath, audience, space and so on, seeking to delimit discreet forms of 'self', 'nature' 'culture' digital' by tapping into and extending the flows of vibration that sound within, whilst simultaneously solidifying/materialising across afk and keyboard modes of response in real time. The hope is nothing less than this: by materialising multiple pasts and presents of sonic ontology, we might be able to dream new kinds of futures - futures that do not repeat epistemic routes of the past (but with better tech) but that are in some sense 'unimaginable' without some serious work.

Further Reading

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