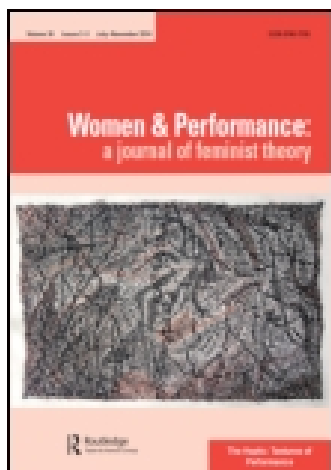


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### Introduction: other sensualities

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## Introduction: other sensualities

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This article, which serves as an introduction to the special issue explains our collective interest in the haptic as an object of inquiry. These collected essays generate critical insight into emergent tactile economies and approach the haptic as a specific set of material negotiations between bodies, spaces, and objects. Together the essays consider how touching, folding, fingering, or tracing the texture of an object, offer themselves as techniques of knowing in art and performance. In so doing, they expand the critical parameters of what the haptic can mean not simply in diverse contexts of art and art making, but more specifically, at the crucial edges of performance and social practice.

**Keywords:** haptic; texture; materiality; performance; performativity; blackness; race; gender; queer; undercommons; Moten; aesthetic production; phenomenology; food

One of the problems with time-based endurance performances like my crawl works is they have this marvelous creamy nougat center operating inside the performer, and this space is unfortunately not available in the images and mythologies that surround the work. So, typically, the surface of the work becomes the life of the work. Most folks only get the neatness of the feat. How many miles? How much pain? How many people said or did not say this or that? I am not interested in that.

–William Pope L. (Simonini 2013, 45).

This special issue of *Women and Performance* is dedicated to thinking about haptic sense with respect to the textured life of everyday experience. The etymological root of *haptic* in the Greek is *haptein*, which means to take hold of an object, fasten onto, or to touch it. Recent interventions in cinema studies, most notably Laura Marks' (2000) critical elaboration of *haptic visuality* as a way of seeing or knowing that exceeds the conventions of touch, taste, smell, or hearing has opened up new ways of elaborating material ways of sensing time, change, and memory in relation to different media. Marks emphasized the *tactile* as a means of seeing. Invoking and diverging from that project, this collection of essays rediscovers a certain depth of haptic experience beyond what is discovered in the image or the surface of performance. Our collective attempts to theorize the haptic as a visceral register of experience and vital zone of experimentation, direct us to somatic forms of

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knowledge attuned not only to contemporary bodies and spaces, but also to the worlds and imaginations that have both conditioned and surpassed the body in and of performance.

The noncognitive outline of Pope L.'s "creamy nougat center" was very much the starting point for this collective encounter with the haptic. The haptic can be understood as the viscera that ruptures the apparent surface of any work, or the material surplus that remains the condition of possibility for performance. The essays collected here generate critical insight into emergent tactile economies and approach the haptic as a specific set of material negotiations between bodies, spaces, and objects. Together the essays consider how touching, folding, fingering, or tracing the texture of an object, offer themselves as techniques of knowing in art and performance. In so doing, they expand the critical parameters of what the haptic can mean not simply in diverse contexts of art and art making, but more specifically, at the crucial edges of performance and social practice.

In their recent collaborative venture into the undercommons, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten introduce the term "hapticality" to describe what they theorize as "the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment," as they proffer "the feel that what is to come is here" (2013, 98). I would sooner point the reader to that text for a more thorough definition than what appears here. But what does appear in this collection of essays is less a definition and more so a critical excavation of the global and historical span and vital inhabitation of haptic life spheres. The materials and objects, the practices and affective arrangements that fly under the banner of *the haptic* are reflected in the ephemeral archives represented here. In many ways, this special issue hopes to capture the spirit of what moves through Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's accelerated phrasing. For they lay out what has proven to be our collective task: to philosophize the haptic as an explicitly minoritarian aesthetic and political formation – a figuration of alterity that simultaneously marks the overlap of and break between thought and feeling.

Whether recognized in aural/oral experiences, in the poetics that music affords, in the gesture and drape of fabric, or in the circulation and temporal extension that breathing sustains, what we are invited to discover in the midst of these textured experiences, are forms of "non-normative sensuality," to draw from Kyla Tompkins' insights on *yeastiness*. Branching out from a knowledge of touch, these essays explore hapticality as that which exceeds a phenomenology of experience. These projects write through the interfacing and flows of objects and bodies, as well as the violent encounters with racist and xenophobic state structures and colonial and neocolonial imaginaries in ways that anarrange genres, methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies to illuminate other performative scenes and resistive potentialities.

This collection endeavors to say less about what the haptic is, and more about how it is thought and experienced. The task of theorizing the abstract convergence of touch, feeling, and relation marks the difficulty of attempting to translate a thought about feeling in advance of and in the midst of feeling. Hypatia Vourloumis' "Ten Theses on Touch" recognizes hapticality as a variation on Jacques Rancière's notion of a "distribution of the sensible." Alighting upon Caribbean dance, Audre Lorde's erotic poetry and prose, and a re-encounter with Adrian Piper at Max's Kansas City, Vourloumis' experimental text, which appears in the Ampersand section of the issue, suggests that we are remade through overlapping choreographies of sound, vision, taste, and smell that open new vistas of resistance, speculation, meditation, and lingering. The artistic meditations

presented here, mark resistive practices whose perverse affinities and anti-generic tendencies move us toward the composition of different times, spaces, and zones of experience. From these examples we learn that the haptic is not only experienced but performed *in* and *as* an otherwise dimension, always slightly out of reach and evading our complete understanding.

Here I would like to take a brief detour through Virginia Woolf's short story titled, "The Mark on the Wall," which might be regarded as a meditation on the (re)ordering of consciousness in relation to objects of perception. Woolf's internal monologue about the mark on the wall works to capture a certain movement of thought, or in her words, "How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object" (2008, 3). The author's well-known stream of consciousness confessional style demonstrates the way thought is structured by a series of perceptions that remain somewhat elusive to the thinking subject. "Thought alights upon an object," and "lifts that object a little way ..." only to "leave it" (3). The meditation is valuable precisely because it marks a crucial relay between cathexis and detachment that generates patterns of feeling.

Woolf exposes a decentered subject and betrays something vital for our understanding of the haptic. Woolf is concerned here with a scattering consciousness and a defocalizing of the mind's attention. Her reordering of private experience directs us to the interior limits of thought, in a way that potentially rends the intelligible self indecipherable. From Woolf we learn that consciousness is not simply "consciousness of something" as Sartre would have it. She adds another layer to this formula: consciousness is always consciousness of itself, feeling in relation and resisting relationality. In this way, her prose offers us an alternative to the phenomenology of seeing, for just as the narrator wishes to clearly see the mark, to achieve further proximity to it and intimacy with it, she struggles to apprehend it and ultimately wishes to disappear it: "But for that mark, I'm not sure about it ... Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing ... There is a vast upheaval of matter" (10). The encounter with the mark entertains the possibility that there will always be something excessive in the object, some change, variation, or transformation in its substance that the subject of perception cannot readily capture and that consciousness cannot account for.

If Virginia Woolf seamlessly transports us from contemplating marks to making marks, the artist and poet Stephen Vincent, whose drawings are featured on our cover, are meditations on marks or markings that prompt an exploration of the interior space of thought through the movement and exchange of paper, pen, and the hand. Vincent's multidimensional, haptic drawings appear to perforate the surface of the page. The entangled lines, sketched, crossed, and worked over by the hand, discover a new density and texture for the page. These drawings are the product of an impromptu courtship between the eye and the hand. Vincent registers a poetics beyond the word, a poetics ushered in by drawn landscapes of sound, music, and words scattered across a page. He rediscovers all of these in a vortex of ink and color where the limitations of line and text dissolve, and content and form aggressively converge.

Nathaniel Mackey asks us to think about music as "a way of going out of our way not to speak as we otherwise would" (this issue, 225). In the letter from the instrumentalist N., Mackey instructs us to read musically, as if the words on the page were dancing notes. Djamilaa, N's love object, is constructed through the double time of a solo performance and cut by the text's scattered musical transgressions. To transmute musical feeling into language –

that is the task both Mackey and Aliza Shvartz set for themselves. And in reading, we find ourselves placed against their sonic backdrops. Feeling the drone time of SunnO)))’s doom metal, Shvartz offers a tactile access point for audible-vibrational pleasure. The affect of metal, the space of enduring noise, is Mackey’s “prelude zone” – the place or moment in which an anticipatory hearing takes place. Collectively we approach a “listening-for,” which, as Mackey tells us, is “hearing’s near equivalent,” (this issue, 228) the teasing edge of audible comprehension.

Other essays examine the ways in which art circumscribes aspects of queer, feminine, or minoritarian life that elude direct expression. Hentyle Yapp traces techniques of breathing in the works of Chinese performance artists Zhang Huan and He Chengyao. Arguing that their meditational practices draw out different horizons of duration, Yapp demonstrates how the works of these artists develop through the “minor frames of breath and feeling,” (this issue, 135) which disrupt our familiar narratives of endurance/resistance. Chinese performance art considers the temporality of a mode of *lingering* that complicates the presumption of the subject’s linear and progressive consciousness, and refocuses our attention on the body’s internal rhythmic configuration around balance, reflection and being in the moment. Laura Harris’ examination of Lygia Clark’s eggs re-approaches the question of birth. Harris asks us to consider how the feminine architecture of the egg can be reimaged as the site for the non-biological gestation of new modes of sociality organized around reproductive collectivities.

Kyla Tompkins exposes the visceral experience of *yeastiness* as a material catalyst in the production of a nineteenth-century literary imagination preoccupied and concerned with race, arguing that that the “overfermentation,” “yeasty consciousness” (this issue, 155, 160) that is central to Louisa May Alcott’s “microbial life,” disrupts the racialized biopolitics at the heart of the production of nineteenth-century American morality. Nicole Archer investigates the complex figuration of the hood as the definitive icon of modern, state sanctioned violence in the context of Abu Ghraib. Archer explains how the hood’s reduced material status as a textile justified the US legal construction of the unlawful enemy combatant and the violent treatment of those captured in the Global War on Terror. “The textile,” Archer writes, is ... presented as both the most neutral medium and the most reliable index through which to think and experience all forms of modern life and power ... Beyond the politics of vision, the War on Terror is being waged within the haptic politics of the textile.

Woolf’s experimental short story marks her own “authorial ambivalence towards modernization,” to quote Heather Love. It is an essay that calls attention to “the temporal splitting at the heart of all modernism” and accesses a form of perceiving backward (2009, 6). I would like to link this backwards perception to the idea of hapticity, or what Harney and Moten call “modernity’s insurgent feel” (2013, 98), which has had a long history (perhaps before and since Marx) of defamiliarizing what we generally refer to as sensuous experience. The artistic experiments that comprise this special issue draw from this same defamiliarizing/relational technique, and explore the poetic im/possibilities of what Harney and Moten refer to as “skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh” (98), through figurations of giving and withholding that have become so crucial to the quotidian performances that constitute practices of minoritarian worldmaking. New affective bonds emerge out of these insurgent histories of thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, eating, fabricating, and

touching, which cut through representations of the modern subject. The essays in this special issue claim haptic experience as poetic minoritarian experience. The shared intimacy of thinking and feeling in relation is what I believe this collective issue holds open as a possibility – for thought, for writing, and for our future collaborative work.

### Notes on contributor

Rizvana Bradley is Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Emory University. She has published her work in *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, and has articles forthcoming in *TDR: The Drama Review*, and *Black Camera an International Film Journal*. Bradley is currently working on a monograph that locates the history of blackness and black aesthetics as central to current debates about community in contemporary continental philosophy.

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