
Experimentation in the “Science of the Possible”

Specifying the Generative Dynamism between Form and Exhaustion through Divergent Series

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A clear plastic drop-sheet is stretched over and beyond the frame of video capture (see Fig. 1). The plastic surface agitates a heap of fine dirt as it tightens and relaxes under changing air pressure and the changing weight of the bouncing volume of dirt. The grains gently elongate diagonally over the plastic skin, reverberating the form of the caving plastic surface in the lifting and jumbling particulate collisions. The contour holds at the limit between form and dispersion, between the incessant lifting and landing of its own weight. The bouncing rhythm draws powder contours by shivering volumes, between contour and surface, in jumbling, multi-sidedness. As volumes of dirt turn in on themselves, they activate an intense and fleeting resonance between the surface of the plastic sheet and the contour of each particle. These underside or inside movements, exhaust and recombine tendencies of recognizing the relation between surface and form, as well as cause and effect, activating a virtual dynamism that is in excess of frame sequence.



Fig. 1 Video stills from *Sticky Currents* (2015) 0:58 min.

In experimental media ecologies that stage analogue techniques for video capture, the videographic surface becomes an intense topography of emergent form-taking. Sequence hops, skips and jumps between stretch and release, depth and proximity, dispersion and contraction. Gestures start to pull at the space before and beneath the walls, perhaps to the beat of knocking to listen for tone, through irregular densities of plaster, or that of listening through the viscosity of amniotic fluid. Rhythms of walking collide with the vibratory resonance of impact, absorbing sequence, between shades of flat black and thick white. Plastic becomes elastic as tendons extend beyond how far you thought you could reach. The dissociation of movement from a recognizable source or sequence in the experimental ecology intensifies the tension between continuous time and the dynamics of topographic composition. This activates an intense consistency, before there is an order of cause, dimension, surface, trajectory or duration, where past worlds co-compose in the present. This is a multiple and variable consistency, where an unexpected resonance can take renewed hold on thought and attention all at once, generating precise breaks that are hard enough to forge new forms and intense relational alliances.

The experimental media ecology sets up the conditions for *exhausting* and modulating the continuity of inhabited alliances, which inform tendencies of recognizing form, practiced techniques, movements, or gestures. Erin Manning identifies the character of this dynamism as emergent in but not reducible to

technique, and calls it “technicity”: “[t]echnicity sets the conditions for successive operations, each of which incorporates the implicit, creating an opening toward an ecology of experimentation” (2013: 35). The experimental ecology, then, is both the outcome and the means by which inhabited techniques develop and exhaust. For instance, in tending with the relations that co-compose in combing hair, the length of cut hair might fall out of synch with each successive stroke, and the mass of hair might all of a sudden become operative as an intense, lengthening and contracting elasticity. But the intense openings and exhaustions in the technicity of experimental media operations are only partial, and draw emphasis gradually, in poking and prodding the rote continuity of habit from different registers, durations and dimensions of attention.

In this article, I engage what Thomas Lamarre (2009) calls the “Animetic Interval” in an experimental ecology of video animation. To do so, I engage the qualities of this technicity from three different modes of entry. These are divided into parts and include 1) Emergent Form and Exhaustion in Experimental Process, 2) The “Animetic Interval” and 3) Divergent Series of the Animetic Interval. This organization weaves content between my own analysis of experimental media operations and a number of references that elaborate the dynamics of attention in the apprehension of emergent form. In some instances, the writing presented here changes register so that it can resonate more closely with the intensity of specific media operations. At the same time, I aim to draw explicit conclusions from this multi-modal process and make its instances of critical relevance clear to the reader.

Emergent Form and Exhaustion in Experimental Process

Gilles Deleuze’s concept of exhaustion is a generative concept in experimental media operations, since it expands the time before tendencies affirm given modes of recognition and identification. For Deleuze, exhaustion generates a space of recombination, which is an “any-space-whatever” (Deleuze 1998: 168-9). This any-space-whatever is not reducible to objective spacetime but involves a “fantastic

decomposition of the self” (Deleuze 1997: 154). In the any-space-whatever there is “equality between the straight line and the plane, and between the plane and the volume” (Deleuze 1997: 160; De Brabandere 2015). Exhaustion is then a state that activates an opening for recomposing given tendencies of perceiving form and dimension. Exhaustion opens up the potential to experiment with tendencies of perception that tend to draw quick conclusions from the lived ecology, a potential that Deleuze calls a “science of the possible” (1997: 154).

Susanne Langer suggests that we recognize form through an inhabited alliance with feeling. Langer elaborates the example, of an undulating line, where an inhabited alliance with direction gives the line virtual movement affects (1953: 65). The co-composition between inhabited tendency and objective form is not fixed but exhausts as tendencies of form recognition take on new emphasis in situated ecologies of practice. For instance, if one emphasizes the rhythm of the undulations over the line’s directionality, the line seems to repeatedly impact the surface instead of move over it. When the edges of the line come into tension with the surface of the page it can seem as though the line carves a path through a thick, gummy surface, where direction slows in the sticky mass. The thought of these dynamic relations of emergent abstraction are felt, as emergent intensity, and the precise relations of corporeal abstraction that give it force, can only be identified after the fact.

Valéry describes the informing dynamics of situated ecologies in the context of operations of drawing texture, where a clear form is not given, but emerges by tending with the movements and qualities of emergent process (1938: 77). As the specific qualities of the rendering ecology generate intense tensions, they also *inform* how the texture is rendered and perceived. This intensity might emerge in the way a smooth surface informs a contour that seems to accelerate, or the way a contour rendered with drying ink informs the way a surface seems to become dense and textured. [1] The inform emerges in the experimental ecology as the

situated relations of form-taking activate new openings to attention and inhabited alignments of force and form.

When the line begins to behave like a fold, or derive tendencies of folding from the inhabited past, it emphasizes the role of surface dimensions, rather than merely linear dimension, in the form-taking ecology. Such a change of emphasis can generate openings for experimentation with the way surfaces exhaust and become lines (when directional vectors activate surface tension, or when a page lifts to reveal its cross-sectional edge), or when lines exhaust to become topographic (as they widen and smear or bleed through the fibres of a page). This change in dimensional and directional emphasis is felt as much as it is activated in the media ecology and becomes perceptible by analyzing the relational dynamics of the emergent forms that it generates. The affective coincidence of line and surface compels me to inhabit the “any-space-whatever” where attention flickers in and out, long enough for lines and surfaces to resonate with dimensions that are in excess of Euclidian spacetime—where the page becomes equivalent with the surface of skin, or where the floor seems to harden as the legs walking over it start to tire and weaken. Or in an instant, banal forms acquire a newfound urgency to stand tall as the voice starts to pulse in and out in nervous, fumbled and fumbling speech.

In activating the concept of exhaustion in the experimental milieu, I need not exhaust a complete subject (towards death). Instead, I attend with how particular inhabited tendencies fall in and out of register, how they resonate with formerly unassociated dimensions of the inhabited past. This is a living dive without the top-down order of gravity, where the elastic need not snap back into formerly given terms for inhabiting and recognizing corporeality. Deleuze calls the content of this process “impoverished,” but its intangibility finds force in growing new legs, and the potential to inhabit an emergent world before it is practiced.

In regular kneading operations, the substance of clay, or dampened soil, is sustained in a continuous movement of emergent surfacing and aggregate re-composition. When different membranes are kneaded into the substance, there is an intense tension that slows attention from the repeated rotational movement to the way the surface pulls, presses and resurfaces against the membrane. This process exhausts multiple registers of intense alignment between feeling and form, including the rhythmic continuity of kneading (which was a practice that I had inhabited after several years of throwing pottery), the mass of clay as a distinct and homogenous material, and the clear distinction between surfaces involved in the kneading process (the surface of clay, skin, membrane and surface of the table or floor on which the clay is kneaded). The intense resonances that emerged through the operation gave germ to a series of operations involving kneading foil, balloons, nylon and charcoal powder into clay (De Brabandere 2015).

Now the clay is no longer a balled mass, but a felt tension on the surface, where its rhythmic tension between surface and rhythm remains as it is rolled into a slab that is placed on top of glass coated with charcoal bits (see Fig. 2). The movement becomes the rhythmic, pressing and lifting of a rolling pin against the top-side of the clay slab. Now the surface of video co-composes with the surface of clay as the view of the video camera is positioned under the glass to frame the action. In the video capture, the visible plastic, rolling, pressing, appears to stretch the charcoal contours flush against the smooth glass surface. The slowly stretching charcoal contours appear to heave the weight of the bulk of the clay, but also the screen, or the lens, in waves. The glass surface becomes intensely continuous with the emergent surfacing of clay, through the appearance of a moving image that exceeds identifiable cause and effect. This process haemorrhages a gaping potential in the operational ecology, such that it is prone to gather up new surfaces, rhythms and volumes in order to resolve the problem of irresolvable surface dimension.

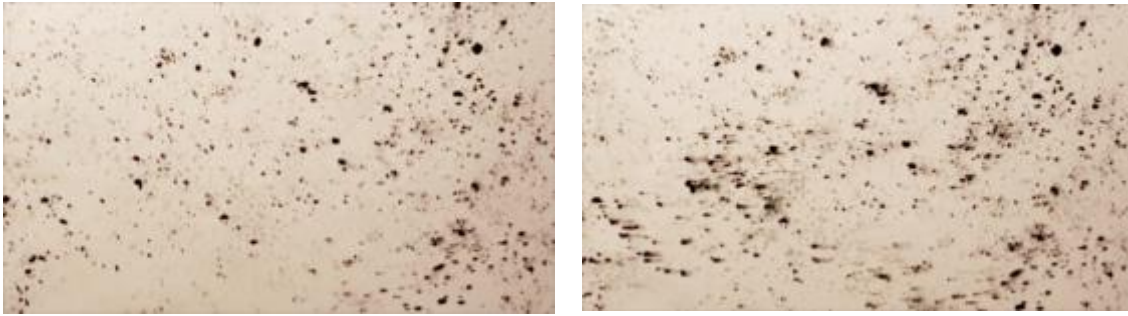


Fig. 2 Video stills from *Charcoal Roll 01* (2015) 0:21 min.

The “Animetic Interval”

The co-composition of discontinuous surfaces in the spacetime of video animation activates a technical consistency for experimenting with the relation between force and form, position and dimension, recognition and affect. Thomas Lamarre explains the importance of the animation stand in emphasizing the “animetic interval” or the space between the layered planes of the animated image, relative to mechanical succession (as compared to the continuous movement of the camera in classical cinema): “[b]ecause of the relative immobility of the camera, the emphasis in animation often falls on drawing the successive movements from frame to frame” rather than the content of each individual frame (2009: xxiv). This change in the emphasis in the relations of image capture is critical, since it prolongs the space where form and feeling co-compose. Here, emergent, situated relations can begin to co-compose with tendencies of intense alignment, in relation with sequence:

The stacking of sheets or planes of the image (and thus compositing) happens in concert with the mechanical succession of images. Such a machine is not, then, a structure that totalizes or totally determines every outcome. It not only comprises the humans who make it and work with it, but also on other virtual and actual machines. It thus

unfolds in divergent series as it folds other machines into it.
(Lamarre 2009: xxvi)

The animetic interval thus opens a space-time where the continuous succession of images variably swells and folds with emergent techniques of movement and attention. Time is no longer an abstract continuity, but inflates, absorbs and stretches with the non-linear dynamics of emergent movement and attention that derive new resonances with the inhabited past. The intense alignment of continuous succession and situated relations of practice puts the fixed position of camera position, and the infallibility of its capture in tension. As different modes, movements and dimensions, confront the relentless drive of continuous time, they fold and spread new intense textures that defy any single direction or sequence. Anticipation congeals at the threshold of continuity and change, where tendencies of recognition reveal the thought of their own anticipation, where lifting and landing seem to cut between forward and reverse. As this compositional dynamism gives momentum to the emergent form of composite layers, it also permeates the flesh, and is strong enough to smoothen a nervous tremble into a thinning contour. The following sequence of descriptions traces a lineage across a divergent series, where the movement of the operation *moves* to make the transitions between frames (both intense and objective) apprehensible relative to a fixed camera position.

Divergent Series of the Animetic Interval

The surface of a marbled balloon no longer presses, stretches and contracts in relation with the dynamic pressures of kneading clay but invites the surface of video capture to stretch and contract with its movement (see Fig. 3). Now the balloon surface is stretched over the entire surface of the frame, while a finger presses into and distorts its marbled contours from behind. One can quickly identify the marbled contours that differentiate areas of the video surface, but as the surface is stretched and distorted by an invisible source, the objective difference between layers of lens and balloon breaks down. The stretching

activates the balloon surface so that it resonates with the image of its own viscosity, but also with a video surface of variable density, elasticity and consistency.

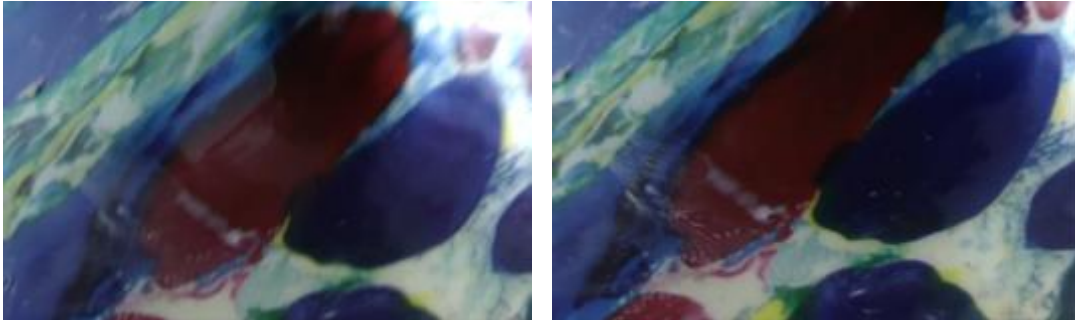


Fig. 3 Video Stills from *Sticky Currents* (2015) 0:38 min.

The rhythm that intensely degrades the difference between particulate volumes of dirt and the plastic drop sheet (described in the introduction) or that softens the surface of glass in rolling, plastic undulations (in the operation of rolling clay over charcoal-coated glass), or that presses the balloon between viscous and elastic intensities in the above description, continues to activate an intense consistency between surface and position. This time the rhythm kneads the aggregate surface of pavement in increasing and decreasing acceleration with the pace of walking. The rhythm kneads the aggregate ground between swathing contours as it accelerates, and a grazing staccato as the movement slows into position (see Fig. 4). The video image emerges when holding the video camera downward while walking, and to the side to avoid letting walking feet enter into the frame. In co-composing the variable pace of walking with the surface of asphalt, and the distance to the ground from the waist down, the virtual intensity of the animetic interval emerges. The relation between movement and distance travelled, and the relation between image capture and the number of steps taken (and the rate with which they punctuate time in position) exhausts, while the alignment of surface and direction intensifies.

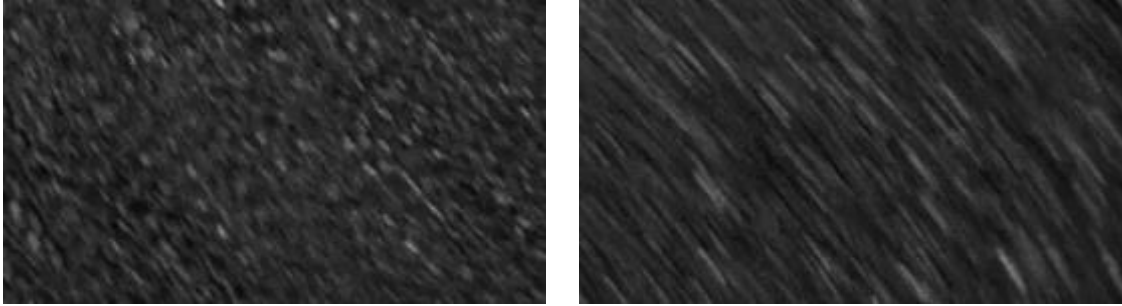


Fig. 4 Video Stills from *Asphalt Knead* (2015) 0:31 min.

The even rhythm of walking or of the glass that once pressed against heaving clay, returns as an irregular variation as the top-most layer of the animetic interval rolls and presses against a brittle, and slightly irregular charcoal stick (see Fig. 5). Now the camera is positioned facing downward over a glass surface that exerts an invisible tension over the charcoal stick, rolling it jerkily back and forth on its horizontal axis. The glass agitates the surface of the charcoal stick, exhausting its virtual alignment with the direction of linear proportion, under the pressing pane. The source of movement remains undetermined until, under increasing pressure, an irregularity in form or density cause the stick to crack, exposing the glass surface with a bursting spray of dust that coats its underside dimension. This quick release of material tension affectively coincides with the deflation of the intense anticipation of the animetic interval, where attention returns to identifying cause and effect.



Fig. 5 Video stills from *Charcoal Roll 02* (2016) 0:42 min.

The regular rhythm of the earlier examples remains exhausted, while the irregular movement relation between surface and form begins to amplify. White sheets of paper with edges aligned along the horizontal axis of the frame move and undulate in relation with each other (see Fig. 6). Now the glass is gone but the vague appearance of rolling lingers, as the lifting and lowering pages seem to roll. The gap between the edges articulates a contour of varying width as the edges of the pages impact and separate to reveal a black ground underneath. Then the edges impact and align, all of the sudden, and draw a contour in perfect synchronicity by sliding the point of contact between the two sheets in a smooth crescendo. While watching to identify a clear difference between the composite layers of pages and ground, a contour emerges that activates an intense, inseparable relation between them.

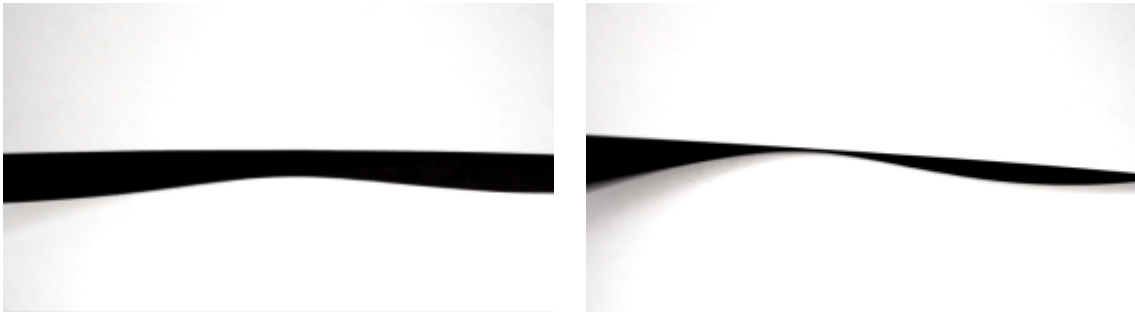


Fig. 6 Video Stills from *Experimental Line*, 2016, 3:06 min.

The synchronous force of the streamlining contour doesn't hold but the form of the line as an animetic layer persists. A nervous shake returns to the arms holding the paper, activating a contour defined by hardened and straightened paper edges that bite flat and hard into the visible contrast that separates them (see Fig. 7). In the jittery agitation, the ground, or space of contrast between the two pages, becomes coated with charcoal powder (affectively and literally), so that the line spews and smokes a thickening atmosphere. Now the nearly vibratory movement

of the nervous shake starts to become more refined as it resonates with the micro movements of the dissipating, multi-directional circulation of dust.



Fig. 7 Video Stills from *Experimental Line* (2016) 3:06 min.

In the next operation, the appearance of the movement of dust, and that of the movement of vibration linger, as does the dimension of the line as an animetic layer. A charcoal-coated elastic string is strung over a white ground and the position of the video camera is facing top-down (see Fig. 8). The tied ends of the string are cut from the frame so that the dimensions of the videographic staging become less clear. When the taut string is disturbed it oscillates, and releases charcoal dust. In the vibration the string doubles and falls out of focus, such that it is not clear whether the charcoal powder is falling off the string, or whether the string is transforming into powder. The convergence of line and dust co-compose an intense, durational atmosphere where cause and effect fall out of focus. Before the oscillation stops, and before the animetic intensity dampens to reveal a motionless, singular string (that is vulnerable to the optical space of intense object capture), the video footage is edited to cut between forward and reverse, drawing a last gasp from the intense indeterminacy between movement and image capture.

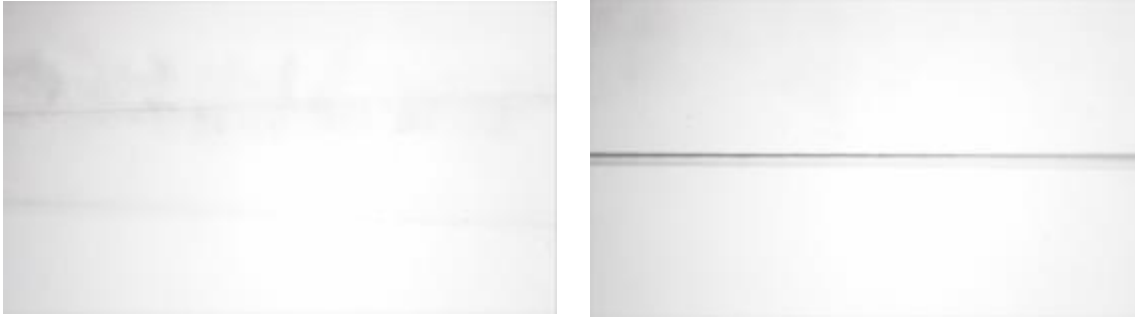


Fig. 8 Video stills from *Charcoal String* (2016) 0:07 min.

Concluding Remarks

In this rendering of divergent series, there is no singular, recurrent relation. Instead, what recurs is the way the different elements of the animetic machine exhaust existing tendencies of intense relation by activating intense openings for emergent form-taking. One of these elements includes the fixity of camera position, which exhausts the intense capture of cinematic camera movement, by intensifying the emergent form-taking in the movement and quality of co-composing, animetic layers. Another emerges in how editing out the clues that fix the animetic machine to its objective components, whether in framing or in splitting the clip, exhausts tendencies of equating optical recognition with infallible perception. The recovery from exhaustion, through emergent form, does not remain allied to any single mode of inhabited alignment, but resonates transversally. In turn the virtual movement of linear form might vibrate out of intense directionality, and the intense flatness of everyday architectural surfaces might acquire new give. The dynamism of these intense alignments changes the emphasis in how the past is derived in the present, a process whose impact can only be identified partially, after the fact. At the same time, the partial lineages of intense relation that emerge in this process become perceptible through the traces of divergent series (in this case the video renderings). By attending with and articulating the emergent alignments of form and intensity in the traces and

operational dynamics of the animetic machine, I develop an analytic of emergent corporeal abstraction (or the felt thought of inhabited tendency as it comes into new intense relation with the inhabited past). Unlike the pervasive cultural tendency to presume a deterministic relation between identification and the lived ecology, I invoke the identification of form as part of a “science of the possible.” In the “science of the possible,” distinct entities implode and fold over themselves as they integrate intensities that are not definable by a co-ordinate system, a sequence of events or a stable relation with feeling. Through this process, artefacts remain that are prone to dislodge from their order of cause at any moment. In turn, the artefacts of this intense science are also prone to help activate diverse technical ecologies, by making palpable the emergence of felt thought. [2]

Notes

[1] I develop several variations of these intense, informing dynamics in (De Brabandere 2016).

[2] I have shown the videos presented here in different workshop settings, where participants are given similar materials to work and think with. This process amplifies the emergence of felt thought and the potential to think corporeal abstraction collectively.

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