

EDITION #7

# SO FI ZINE

A SOCIOLOGICAL FICTION ZINE

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**So Fi Zine  
Edition #7**

**A Special Issue**

**with**

**Rob Shields  
Nicholas Hardy  
Erin Ratelle  
Malcolm Stielow**

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**Created and edited by  
Ash Watson**



# Editorial

Ash Watson

This is a special issue of *So Fi Zine*. Rather than a suite of short stories, poetry and other visual forms of fiction, here you'll find four essays on self-tracking, creativity, craft, and angels. They are of course about much more than this – mermaids, proposals, counterpower, folds, safety pins, rivers, ghosts and zombies included. Find some quiet time to enjoy them, perhaps sitting in the sun. They really bring some rich and weighty theoretical ideas together with a resistant form of creativity that I find important, and I care about very much.

These four essays have sprung from the Material and Virtual Culture course at the University of Alberta. Rob Shields, who runs this course, and three of his students – Erin, Nicholas and Malcolm – have written these pieces. I have also made some horoscopes from his syllabus.

I wrote my editorial for the previous edition of the zine in my university office, looking out the window to the orange sky as bushfire ash rained down on the campus like snow. I write this one on my couch in my small apartment in Sydney, in the room I've worked in for the past five months, where I have watched the news of the pandemic and faceted with family who feel further away than ever and conducted my research hoping the shitty internet doesn't give up. The textures, images, currents and apparitions that these essays speak to capture something significant about this period. There is a dance between the tangible and intangible we must imagine and make sense of *vis a vis* power and resistance.

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## Introduction

This project is based on selected works from the seminar Material and Virtual Culture taught by Professor Rob Shields at the University of Alberta. Professor Shields welcomes students from across disciplines, which creates an interesting and collaborative space for students to learn from and with one another during the seminar.

Material and Virtual Culture is a critical interdisciplinary research workshop on theory-building about the materiality and intangibility, dynamics and performances, capacities and relations of bodies and objects, groups and institutions. It is directed at students interested in contemporary social and cross-cultural thought of the last century. The seminar encourages critical of a variety of subjects through an interplay with the categories of the real, the abstract, the ideal and the actual. The seminar's focus is on material culture and social forms that are not 'in our heads' or simply 'subjective' but cannot be accounted in nominalist or positivist ontologies. This is of particular relevance to areas such as design, social institutions, values, culture and cross-cultural interaction, media, environmental quality and online experience. For example:

Material	Virtual
Object	Style
Substance	Form
Identity	Representation
Population	Community
Element	Set
Presence	Absence
Assembly	Commons

Each student brought varying perspectives to the course theme. Malcolm, a trained jeweler and weaver, offered insights into material craft. Erin's research on self-tracking practices explores sport in virtual spaces, while Nicholas' research applies relational theories to examine expressive materiality in urban environments, in particular, the processes and experiences of creating street art.

This special edition originates in our belief that the vitality of material and virtual culture demands expression beyond mere text. The essays embrace a range of research approaches from digital ethnography, cultural theory, research-creation and craft work. Beyond the textual, what is the meaning of saying something with colour, lines, digital media, or craft? These articles are grounded in a range of topologies of contemporary experience.

- On a road bicycle, a digital "accounting" and metering of paces and places via each revolution of the crank in the topology or energy-speed-time-space of Strava.
- Rereading Deleuze and Serres produces a concept of the eddy as a topological and transformative figure of counterpower.
- A craftsperson beats silver wire and finds in the sprung form of the safety pin connections between practice and ethnography, traditional craft and creative originality.
- Angels, ghosts and zombies are featured as figures of transmission, translation and transgression as key phenomenal operators.

This collection covers flows and the dynamic motions of affective and relational lines. The articles included in this issue

illustrate the alterity of forces and their materiality, in the vortex of the eddy, in the digital dimensions of the maps made by a fitness app, or in the coils of a safety pin.

Among the articles included in this proposal three common threads are the oscillation between the material and the virtual; differences in kinds of forces between hegemonic power and counterpower as they arise in social spaces; and the contemporary moment as seen from the anchoring cases above.

If, as contends Benasayag, ours is an era born of the failure of a heterogeneous tradition of emancipatory struggles, one is faced with the need to hone in on the modalities of control and those of counterpower, however unusual or marginal. Our work demonstrates examples of creative gestures and thought experiments that elaborate an emergent meshwork of counter-models situated within both local and global spatialisations. Dividing lines, borders and grids are pitted against flickers ripples and eddies of counterpower, operating by concentration and liberation of surges of energy which question traditional forms of resistance.



## Towards a Topological Imagination of Strava

Erin Ratelle

My whole body is tense. Not tense, *charged*. I take a deep breath. This moment always makes me certain that time is a construct – jostled between a herd of spandex and sweat before the gunshot breaks the nervous energy. I glance down at my watch, 140bpm. *Too high*, I think, before starting the race. 142, 143...146. *Much too high*. Would it rise so if I couldn't see it? It doesn't matter though now, we're connected – a constant digital accounting and metering paces and places with each stride. I take it off my wrist – an un-tanned stripe of white a sign of my dependence. I plug it in, and watch as my exhaustion, pain and joy are flattened to a series of graphs, maps, and numbers.

These lines on the page only carry a certain memory. They know where I travelled, but not why. They know I sped up at precisely 400m into each lap, but they'll never know about the woman on the sidelines chanting "woman power!" each time I rode by (and how it made me smile each time). They'll know how fast my wheels roll, but never the crisp air rolling off the marina. What naïve lines they are. And yet, they can be anything. Sometimes they are mermaids, dinosaurs or a proposal to Emily. Sometimes, they are part of story lines – creating both the characters in stories, and narratives on bodies, health, and fitness...



In recent years, self-tracking technologies have proliferated in sport, health, and fitness. Self-tracking practices involve people voluntarily tracking and recording certain features of their everyday lives, often using digital technologies (Lupton, 2014a). This recorded personal data is commonly used to inform an individual's behaviour, particularly health-related behaviours. Given neoliberal forces that frame health and fitness as a personal responsibility (McDermott, 2011), it is unsurprising that research on self-tracking technologies largely focus on how they can be used in health and fitness interventions. Self-tracking applications, however, are also inherently social spaces that involve complex relationships between the individuals using these applications, the biometric data self-trackees produce, and the apparatuses they use to produce this data (e.g. smart watches). Indeed, as Lupton (2014a) suggests, "while by name, self-tracking devices are focused on the individual; many self-trackers view themselves as part of a community of trackers" (p. 78). Similarly, Swan (2013) asserts that, "...[self- tracking] is fundamentally a quantitative and qualitative phenomenon since it includes both

the collection of objective metrics data and the subjective experience of the impact of these data" (p. 85). While researchers (Millington, 2012; Lupton, 2014a), agree that sport and fitness self-tracking practices are an understudied phenomena warranting greater critical examination, little research exists that examines digital self-tracking and physical activity from sociocultural perspectives. This paper is part of a larger piece of work that seeks to address this call and analyze experiences and produced effects of self-tracking in sport and physical activity spaces (both real and virtual).

My research focuses on the self-tracking application and social networking site, Strava, which is currently rated as the #1 app for runners and cyclists. Strava allows its users to upload GPS data tracking and fitness-related data (such as heart rate, pace, elevation etc.) to online profile pages that other Strava users can engage. Strava (and other self tracking programs) collect, organize and interpret data diagrammatically (i.e. graphs, charts, infographics) as a means to make this information easily digestible to the self-trackee (Lupton 2014b).



## Strava

Strava is a GPS data tracking application primarily used by runners and cyclists. Strava users can create online profiles, share photos and interact with other users in the Strava community. It is a rapidly growing online community, gaining one million new users every 40 days (as of May 2018). Further, Strava CEO James Quarles aims to grow membership outside of running and cycling communities in the future (Gonzalez 2019). With large-scale buy-in from runners and cyclists, all uploading their self-tracking data to Strava, this has some important implications regarding the role of sport and fitness in processes of surveillance. Strava is particularly interesting as it mobilizes self-surveillance to promote competition. For each uploaded running and cycling activity, the app details portions of these mapped routes as "Strava segments." Users can in turn see where they are ranked against every other user who has biked or run that particular segment. Competition on these segments is so popular that individuals (termed 'Strava Hunters') run or cycle routes in the express interest of being the fastest to complete a give segment. Susceptible to the same forces operating in high performance sport, there have also been instances of "Strava doping," wherein individuals use online programs to alter their activity data to post faster performances. These virtual races have also attracted the attention of profitable (and profit-seeking) corporations. For example, in 2017 Garmin, one of the foremost companies in GPS tracking software and devices, offered cycling computers with Strava enabled options. And while these activities (running or cycling) occur in physical spaces, the competition transpires in a virtual one, blurring physical and virtual lines.

## **Relationships with and within Strava**

As a competitive cyclist and runner, I have been fascinated with what it means to take sport (and sport bodies) from physical spaces to virtual ones. When I upload my self-tracking data to Strava, what character (or caricature?) of myself lives in this online space? Is this data *me* or born *from me*? Is it both, or neither? If online assemblages of self-tracking data are beings in themselves with "their own social lives and materiality, quite apart from the fleshy bodies from which they are developed", as Lupton (2014a, 82) suggests, how is my data both storied (organized and displayed via algorithms) and an actor in these stories? Further, what story does my data tell about understandings of health, fitness, sport and bodies?

This paper represents a small piece towards a larger project investigating the complex relationships (i.e. human-technology/ technology-human/technology-technology, human-human) that exist with/within Strava and digitized subjectivity. In order to understand digital selves, and the complex relationships that exist with and within Strava we must first understand what Strava is as a space. Invariably, what Strava *is* will influence the relationships that exist with and within Strava. In this paper I draw from Deleuze and Guattari to conceptualize Strava as an acentered, nonhierarchical topological space which complex social relationships exist amongst individuals, between individuals and technology (and technology and technology, and technology and individuals), as well as individuals and physical landscapes.

## Strava as Rhizomatic

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, post-structuralist French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychotherapist and philosopher Félix Guattari have used the root structure of rhizomatic plants in order to conceptualize a different way to approach thought. Rhizomatics is not a theory that can be applied *per se*, but it is a different way of understanding that challenges the limitations of humanist research assumptions such as binary logic and arborescent linear hierarchical organization. Deleuze and Guattari explain 6 different characteristics of the rhizome: connectivity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography and delocalomania. Connectivity and heterogeneity refers to how any point can be connected to any other point regardless of similarities or differences between points. Multiplicities are magnitudes and dimensions that cannot increase in number without changing in nature. The rhizome can include a number of multiplicities combined. Asignifying rupture refers to how the rhizome can be broken off at any point and is able to start up again or create something new. Cartography and delocalomania refers to how one can think of the rhizome like a map, wherein neither map nor rhizome has a specific starting point, or rather, is something that is open and can be entered at any given point.

Given that the very structure of online spaces is likened to webs and networks, it's unsurprising that rhizomatic theory has been taken up by a number of researchers in order to conceptualize online spaces. Similar to the rhizome, online spaces (such as Strava) have no central root, origin, or logical pattern to their growth. Further, Strava can be accessed from any given point. This isn't to say that online spaces such as Strava are not ordered, but rather that because of the rhizome, can continually be *reordered*. For example, Strava users can continually upload or remove data from the platform such as self-tracking



physical activity data, and social communications with other Strava users. It is in a continual state of (de)recomposition. Thus Strava can perhaps be understood similar to Donna Haraway's (2016) dystopian children of the compost, who co-evolved with organisms. Compost too, is in varying stages of transition. Haraway believes that we are in a continual process of entangled-making, wherein Haraway wants to do theory in a contingent way, instead of a 'once and for all' framework.

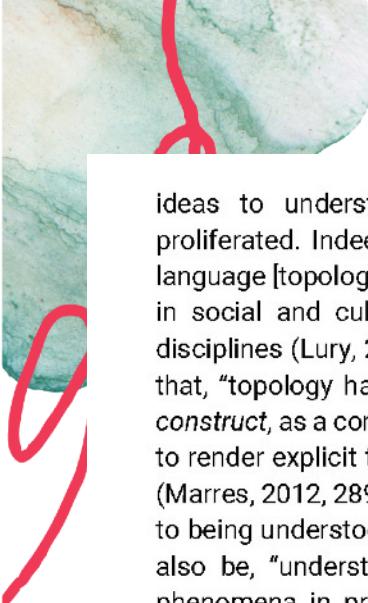
Rhizomes can include a number of multiplicities, which are properties that cannot increase in quantity without changing in quality. Lupton (2014a) notes that data doubles (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000) created via self-tracking practices, "...never stand still. As soon as they are generated they are subject to change when more data are added. Data doubles are constantly open to reconfiguration and hence re-interpretation" (p. 82). When new data is uploaded, this results in both a change in quality and quantity to the data double, thus a multiplicity. Multiplicities are also fundamental in understanding topological spaces. Delanda (2002) traces topological understandings co-opted by philosophers to mathematicians Carl Friedrich Gauss and his protégé Bernhard Reimann. Gauss and Reimann developed an understanding of space that rejected classical Cartesian understandings of space. Gauss and Reimann rejected that space could be understood by creating an arbitrary 'box', or global set of coordinates (i.e. Cartesian plane) that contains the space, in order to understand said space. They proposed that space can be understood relative to the points within a space. For Gauss and Reimann, space is a field of rapidities and slownesses referred to as a multiplicity. It is from these understandings that topological space is conceptualized and from which Deleuze and Guattari borrow the term 'multiplicities'.

## Towards a Topological Imagination of Strava

As noted, Strava can also be understood as rhizomatic, in that it is not hierarchical and the information it displays can be accessed from any given point. Strava also involves a number of translations, such as the case with data doubles, and the translation of the self. Thus, in what ways can Strava be understood that lends to exploring these relationships?

First, it is important to recognize that similar to Gaussian understandings of space, Strava is not a container wherein social interactions occur, but rather is participatory. Strava itself can be understood as an actor, interacting with Strava users, the data of Strava users and the devices utilized by Strava users to collect this data. Thus, what Strava *is*, is precisely in related to the relationships that Strava is in. Judith Butler argues that the self is not innate, but socially constructed. Butler suggests that the self, and by extension gender, is an ongoing, iterative process of producing oneself through actions. From this, she argues that masculinity and femininity have no fixed origin or meaning, but rather continue to be produced as subjects embody gender (Butler, 1999). In addition, as Lupton (2014a) suggests, the data doubles that are configured via self-tracking processes are also open to constant change. Thus, if Strava is predicated by its relationships, and the other parties (human and non-human) in these relationships are shifting, then Strava must also be in constant flux.

Strava includes mapping (both of cycling/running routes, but also diagramming the body), and timing. In this sense, Strava is topological. Over the past decade, the use of topological



ideas to understand technology in relational terms has proliferated. Indeed, as Lury points out that, “the conceptual language [topological thought] offers has been widely taken up in social and cultural theory... across many social science disciplines (Lury, 2013). Yet, Noortje Marres further discusses that, “topology has been mostly understood as a *theoretical construct*, as a conceptual language that can help social theory to render explicit the structure of socio-technical phenomena” (Marres, 2012, 289). Marres continues to argue that in addition to being understood as a theoretical construct, topology must also be, “understood as a *device*, as a way of structuring phenomena in practice, which is enabled (and disabled) by particular technologies” (Marres, 2012, 289). By understanding topology as a device, rather than a theoretical construct, Marres (2012) decentralizes technology as the principle vehicle for social change. Thus, Following Marres, it is my aim to understand topology not just as way to conceptualize the social and technological, but also, “to help dramatize the contingent, non-coherent, unfolding issues” (Marres, 2012 p. 288) that exist with/within Strava. To understand topology as a device is to ask how a “topological imagination of technology and society arises and takes form in material practices” (Marres, 2012, 289).

Marres (2012) uses the example of smart-meters that measure electricity and hydro usage in homes as a way to understand topology as a device and object. Marres (2012) notes that smart meters are objects insofar that they have become topics of public concern, wherein, “devices like smart electricity meters, in recent years, have become the focus of a whole array of advocacy, research, and lobbying activities, in industrial, policy, scientific, non- governmental and creative circles (297). Similarly, Strava and other self-tracking fitness devices are tied

to public health concerns, wherein, paradoxically; health is often considered the responsibility of the individual. Strava then, is both a self-tracking device that diagrams the body, but also, these diagrammatic understandings of the body position Strava as an object for concern in that this data is tied to public understandings that individuals are personally responsible for their health and well being. Understanding Strava in this way necessitates a topological imagination of Strava, in that it helps to understand contingent and unfolding issues and relationships.

## Conclusion

Positioning Strava as topological space provides a way of understanding Strava's immanency. Strava is predicated on the beings that interact with and within the platform. Just as a star can bend the space around it, so too can Strava users, self-tracking data, etc. change and shape Strava (and vice versa).



## Image credits

Stephen Lund (mermaid, dinosaur)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/35612884/strava-artist-draws-pictures-with-his-bike-and-gps>

Murphy Mack (proposal)

<https://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/five-best-strava-art-139034>

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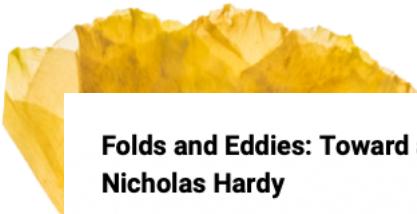
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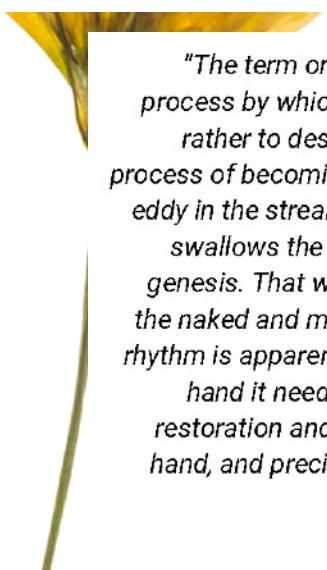
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## Folds and Eddies: Toward a Topology of Counterpower

Nicholas Hardy



*"The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete."*

Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>



This article departs from a *topology of the fold* as introduced in Deleuze's *Foucault*, and features a work of research-creation leading to an alternative topology of the eddy. Lines have long been constitutive to the elaboration of social theory (cf. Bickis). Through the fold – a configuration of line – taken as a virtual model which presents the topology of subjectivity, Deleuze illustrates the topological operation of power as developed in Foucault's oeuvre.

The impossibility of escaping the exteriority of Foucault's topology of power is introduced as a *problématique* through Deleuze's theorization of the fold.<sup>2</sup> The fold stands as a response to the question introduced by Foucault regarding the "incapacity to cross the line" drawn by power relations, thus

modeling the repeated operation of the formation of social subjects.

Following Serres' view that theories constitute epistemological pathways drawn by civilizational processes, the choice of these pathways is of great import to a theorization of a counter modality of power. Contra the fold's logic of power, the eddy emerges as a figure of counterpower. While the fold's topology concerns the subjectivation and determination of the self, the topology of the eddy concerns the emergence of the self as a figure of alterity, an altering and vital form of counterpower. Each presents a difference in type and directionality of force.

The insights encountered in my own work of research-creation on the emergence of the eddy are introduced to enable one to home in on this figure as a topological model of counterpower. The relationship drawn between the artwork and these preceding social theories serves as a pivot toward theoretical insights joining the perspectives of creative practice and cultural topology.

**Key words:** Fold, Eddy, Topology of Experience, Counterpower, Research-creation.

### **Vital Lines: Creative Experience as Counterpower**

*Where there is line, there is transformation.*

In this theoretical paper I centre a research-creation piece to engage socially inflected questions related to lines at the level of the creative experience *in situ*. Transformative questions in

social thought are thus directly engaged through creative experiences, which feature the emergence of lines, and the appearance of figures that lead to conceptual reflections. However important these reflections may be to intellectual activity, first and foremost, the creative experience warrants special consideration as distinct from theoretical thought.

This work of research-creation (Figure 1) is the outcome of a pedagogical exercise initiated in the context of a cultural studies seminar. As an invited guest, I sought to introduce students to an approach to creative practice derived from an improvisational technique which pertains to a street art aesthetic. The exercise invited a consideration of the encounter between human sensibilities and social spaces. In particular, the exercise drew students to consider street art from the perspective of its creative experience, specifically, as kinetic and affective. In this sense, the aim of the exercise was simply to *follow the line*, as it emerged and spread throughout the surface while responding to encounters with other lines, which together altered the organization of the surface. This, in turn, was to serve as material for reflections derived from a creative engagement with social spaces and emergent lines. As lines began to emerge through kinetic interactions throughout the exercise, a creative energy encountered therein directed a creative process toward the becoming of the artwork.



**Figure 1.** Nicholas Hardy, Untitled, markers on pressboard, 2019.

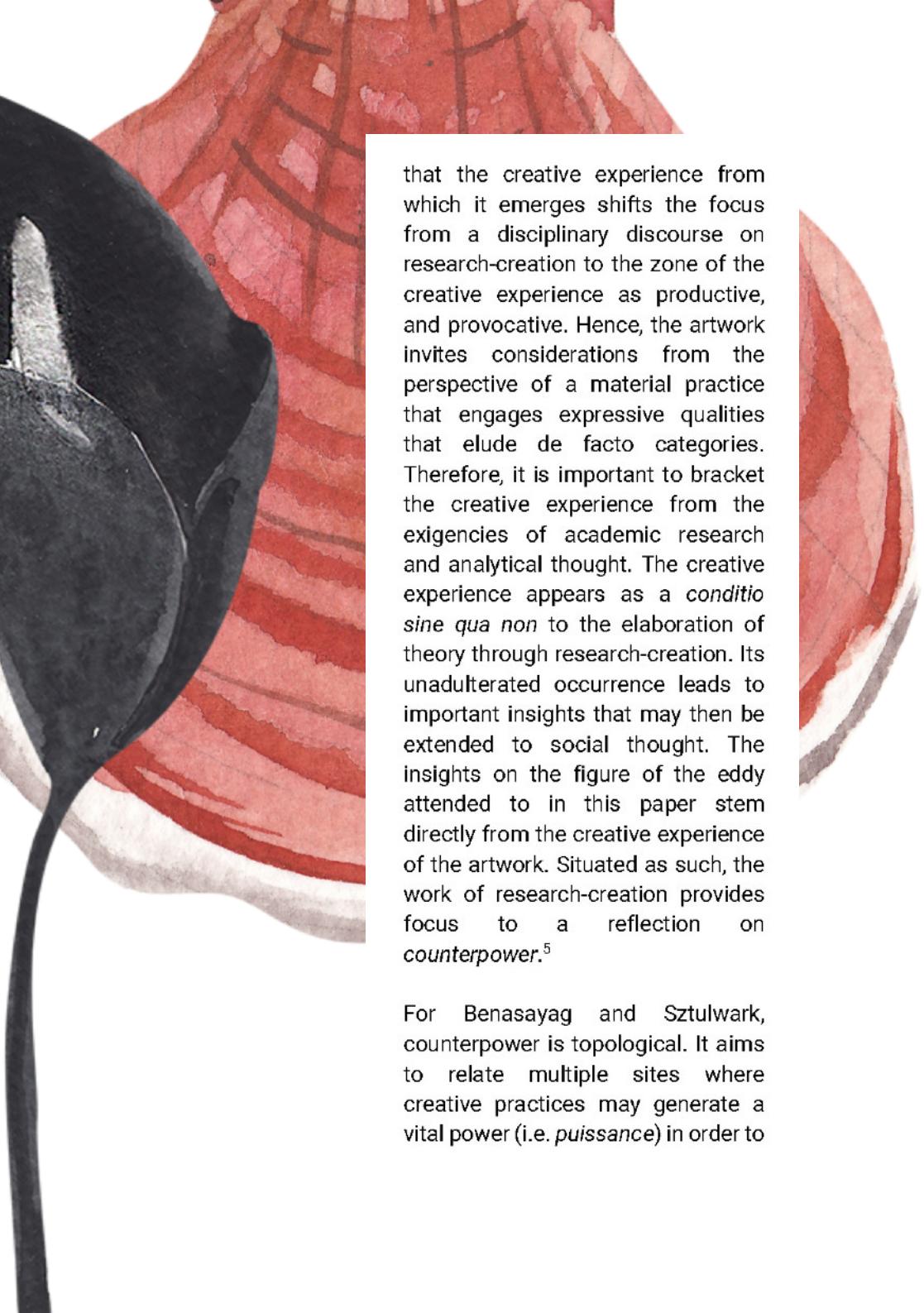
Introducing a reflection on creative experience echoes from the margins the ongoing debates and experiments surrounding the role of arts-based methods in research (cf. Jagodzinski, Loveless). In the scope of this paper, this reflection exceeds disciplinary concerns to consider the importance of the vital creative component essential to creative activity that is meant to lead to profound, complex and novel articulations of social thought. I argue that creative experience enables a thought of the situational quality of social and political struggles, insofar as the ordering of the social may be encountered within this experience as unbound and indeterminate (cf. Bataille).

Moreover, the argument of this paper revolves around challenging topologies of subjectivity as mechanisms of power *directed* at human vitality, in particular, at the shaping of processes of becoming of people in their relation to society. By drawing a relation between the eddy (an emergent figure featured in the artwork), and the presence of this figure in social thought, the eddy is presented as a topological model of counterpower following a contrary logic to that of the fold.

Furthermore, the perspective of the creative experience enables to further a thought of the in-between, insofar as the qualities of the eddy are felt and encountered, *in situ*, in the relationship between the spatiality of the eddy and one's self. Taken as such, works of research-creation may gain a singular vantage point to explore the socially inflected questions related to the emergence of lines in social thought.

The importance of the relationship between lines and social theory is considered within the scope of Bickis' (2014) work on social theory's encounter with lines and bodies, which provides a space for reflection on the productive potential of *lineliness* for social theory. In particular, Bickis examines how "the drawing of invisible and intangible lines is (...) crucial to the making of social identities, bodies, and relations".<sup>3</sup> Bickis focuses on the line's variety of effects within pictorial, discursive and material spaces, as profoundly affecting bodies (for e.g. the line's resonance in Lyotard). For instance, citing de Zegher, Bickis reflects on how "lines draw us", denoting the active quality of lines which (trans)form social fields, and provide a means to explore relationality.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the line is understood as having an affecting and effecting potency. By virtue of the line's radical refusal of determination, going beyond abstract potentiality, the line leads us to consider its altering qualities. What is to be retained from Bickis' work is the seminal relationship between the configuration of lines and the elaboration of social theory.

My perspective on the emergent line, however, is distinct from that of the observer. When attempting to define the contribution of my artwork to this theoretical paper, I arrive at the view

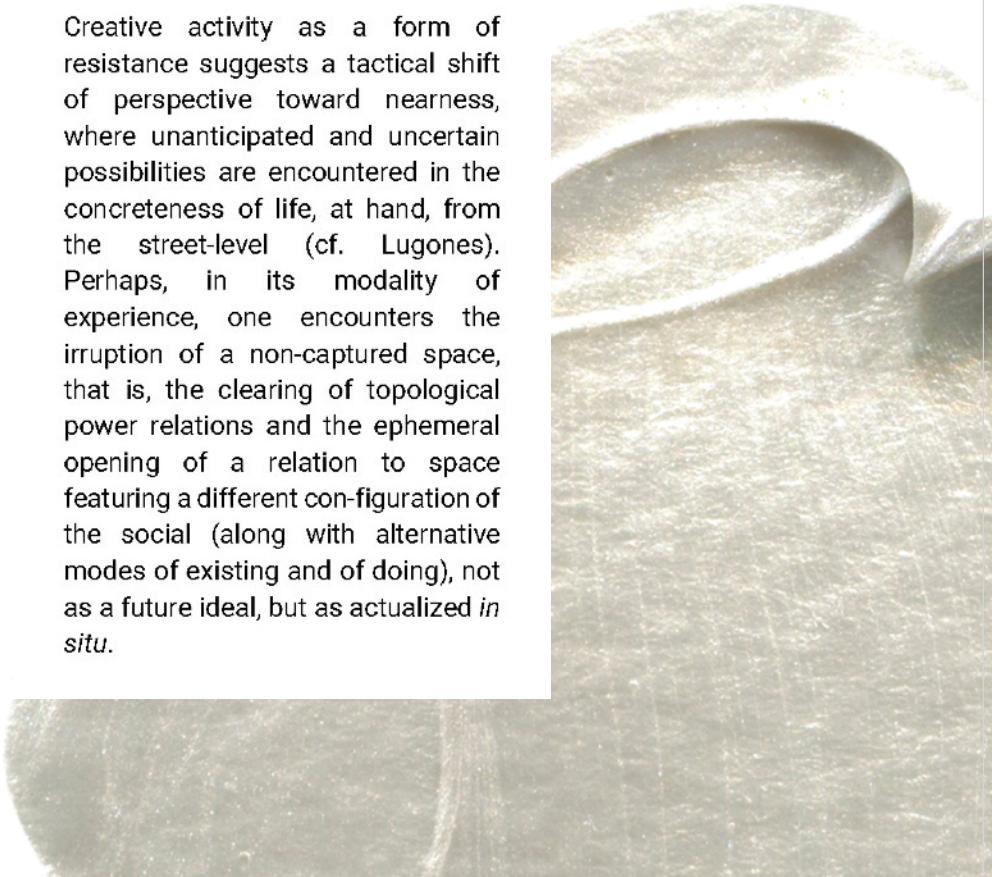


that the creative experience from which it emerges shifts the focus from a disciplinary discourse on research-creation to the zone of the creative experience as productive, and provocative. Hence, the artwork invites considerations from the perspective of a material practice that engages expressive qualities that elude *de facto* categories. Therefore, it is important to bracket the creative experience from the exigencies of academic research and analytical thought. The creative experience appears as a *conditio sine qua non* to the elaboration of theory through research-creation. Its unadulterated occurrence leads to important insights that may then be extended to social thought. The insights on the figure of the eddy attended to in this paper stem directly from the creative experience of the artwork. Situated as such, the work of research-creation provides focus to a reflection on *counterpower*.<sup>5</sup>

For Benasayag and Sztulwark, counterpower is topological. It aims to relate multiple sites where creative practices may generate a vital power (i.e. *puissance*) in order to

transform the relational properties of social spaces. While Benasayag and Sztulwark do not attend to the model of the fold as Foucault's "topologization" of the self, their wider socio-historical analysis aligns with a conceptual understanding of the becoming of the self as the crux of political struggles.<sup>6</sup> This, in turn, leads to the intermarriage of resistant and creative practices, inasmuch as "*to resist, more than ever, is to create*".<sup>7</sup>

Creative activity as a form of resistance suggests a tactical shift of perspective toward nearness, where unanticipated and uncertain possibilities are encountered in the concreteness of life, at hand, from the street-level (cf. Lugones). Perhaps, in its modality of experience, one encounters the irruption of a non-captured space, that is, the clearing of topological power relations and the ephemeral opening of a relation to space featuring a different con-figuration of the social (along with alternative modes of existing and of doing), not as a future ideal, but as actualized *in situ*.



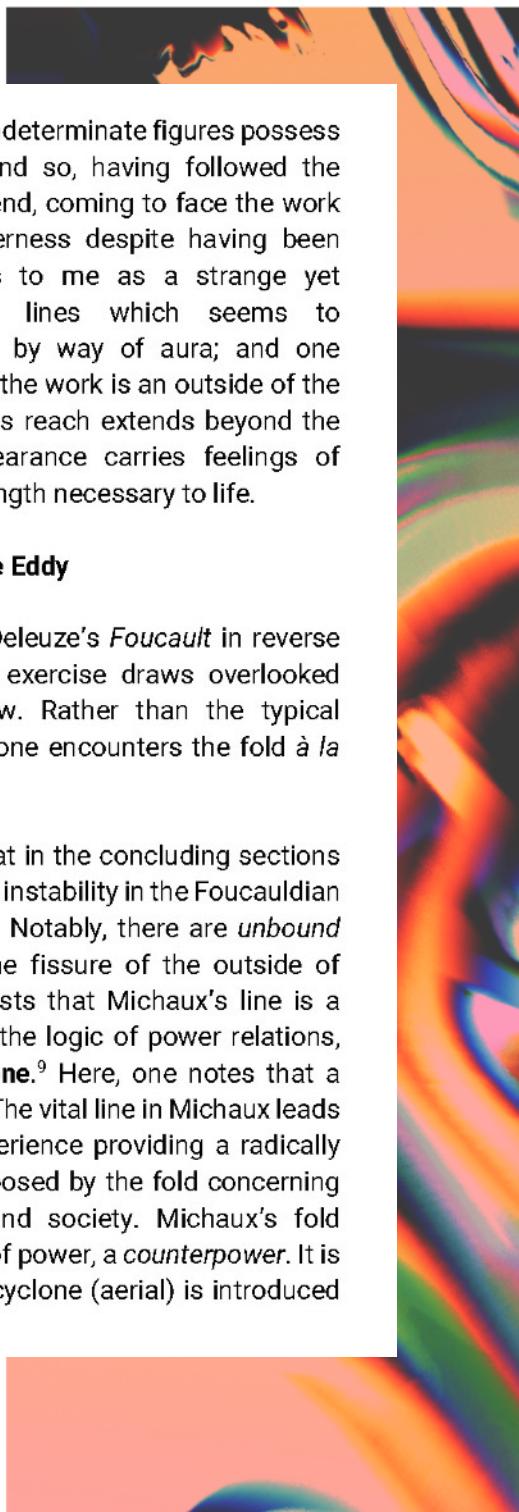


The creative experience places one within a space of emergence of alterity. The emergence of the work of art implies a convergence of multiple elements. This convergence entails a giving of one's self over to the process of becoming of the work. In other words, the becoming of the work has a power of attraction that follows the revolving pull of an eddy.

Creative gestures directed at the production of an artwork of a large format mark a shift from a representational approach to drawing toward a kinetic approach focused on broader bodily gestures. Whereas plastic arts focused on smaller formats explore the intricate movements of the hand, mural-style approaches (as is the case with action painting) are rooted in a kind of aesthetic gymnastics, mobilizing the movements of the entire body in addition to those of the hand. By virtue of the rapidity of the production of the work, the body is intensely engaged in following the emergence of a yet indeterminate figure through the application of motions. The following of flowing patterns of movements, for instance, responds to the affective force of the lines as they emerge. Through the intense engagement of the body, a shift of focus from a cognitive to an *open corporeal sensibility* enables a more focused awareness of the relationship between line, spatiality and movement, the aim being to reach a dynamic corporeal mode of interaction in order to generate and liberate creative energy.

Through this technique, one could say that otherness guides or coaxes the becoming of the work. Ergo, in the creative experience, special attention is given to figures in their



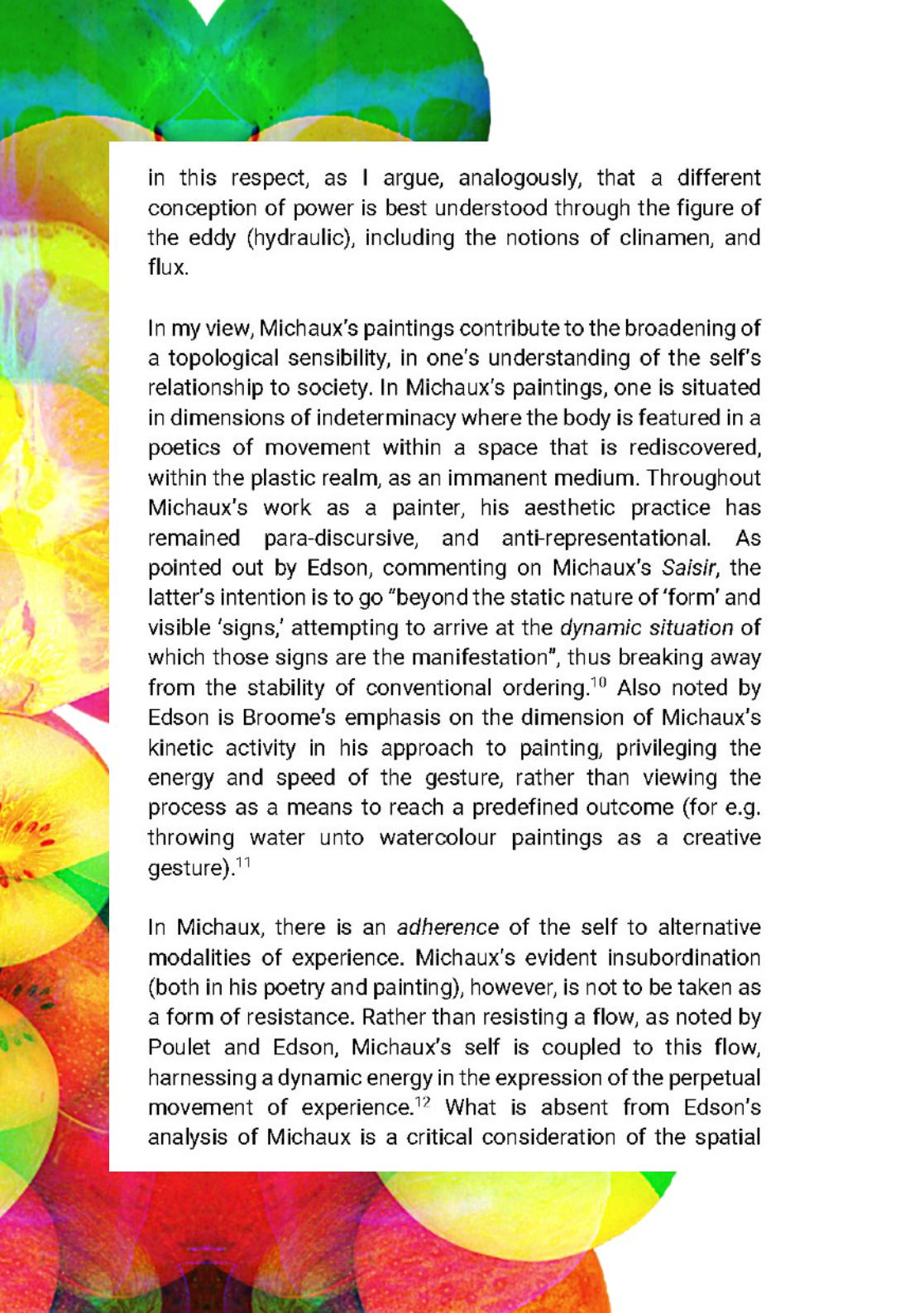


processes of emergence. These indeterminate figures possess affecting and altering forces. And so, having followed the idealistic play of creation to the end, coming to face the work once again, stricken by its otherness despite having been drawn by my hand, it appears to me as a strange yet recognizable entanglement of lines which seems to communicate by way of flows, by way of aura; and one considers that the provenance of the work is an outside of the inside, and that for this reason its reach extends beyond the grasp of any outside. Its appearance carries feelings of liberation and awe, a strange strength necessary to life.

### **The Topological Sensibility of the Eddy**

The reader is invited to re-read Deleuze's *Foucault* in reverse order, from back to front. This exercise draws overlooked elements of the book into view. Rather than the typical reference to the Leibnizian fold, one encounters the fold à la *Michaux*.

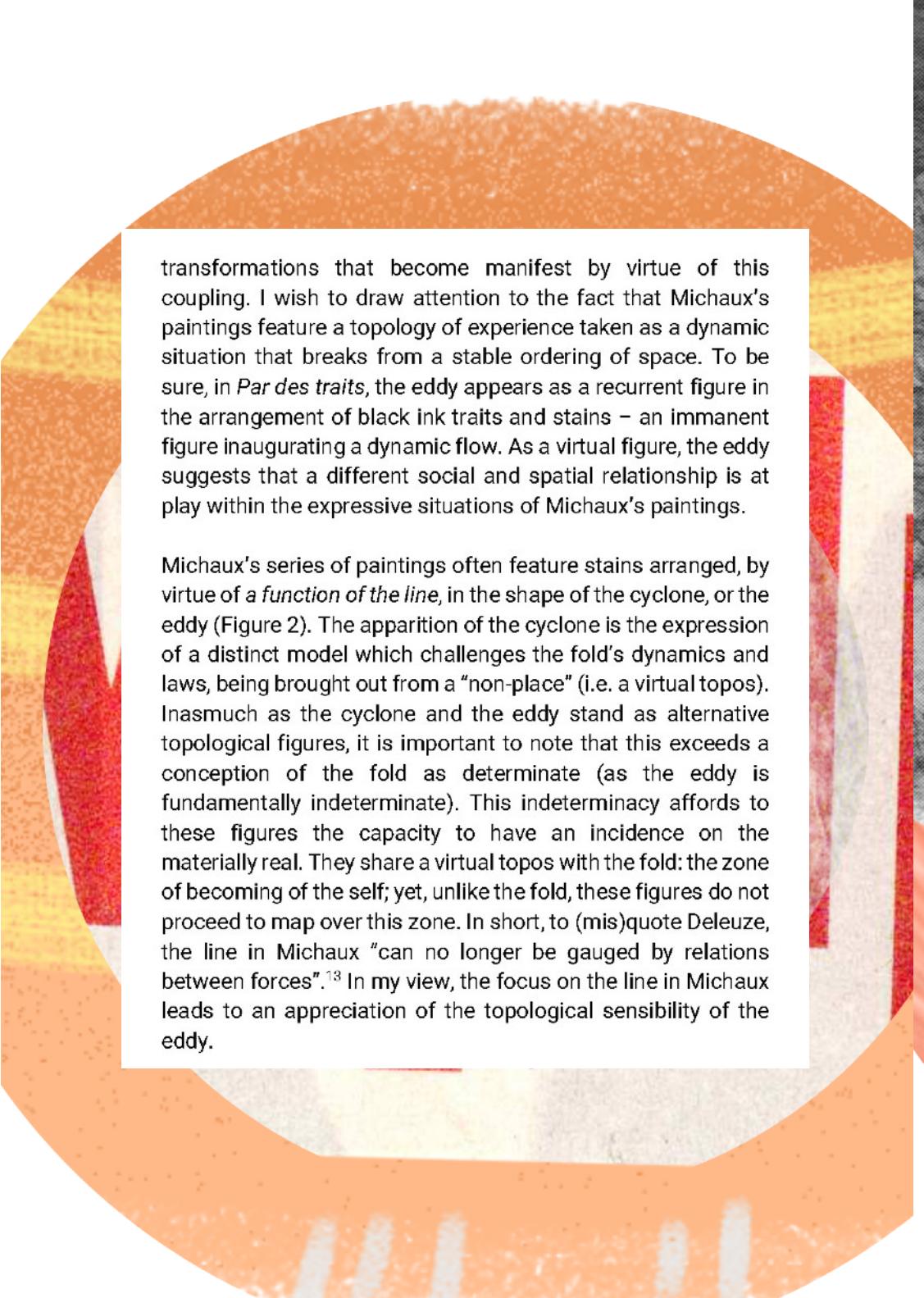
It is of great relevance to note that in the concluding sections of *Foucault*, Deleuze expresses an instability in the Foucauldian diagram of the fold via Michaux. Notably, there are *unbound singularities* bubbling beneath the fissure of the outside of Michaux's folds.<sup>8</sup> Deleuze suggests that Michaux's line is a vital line which takes us beyond the logic of power relations, twisting into the loop of a **cyclone**.<sup>9</sup> Here, one notes that a different type of power is at play. The vital line in Michaux leads to an alternative topological experience providing a radically distinct reading of the question posed by the fold concerning the relationship between self and society. Michaux's fold speaks to a different conception of power, a *counterpower*. It is significant that the figure of the cyclone (aerial) is introduced



in this respect, as I argue, analogously, that a different conception of power is best understood through the figure of the eddy (hydraulic), including the notions of *clinamen*, and *flux*.

In my view, Michaux's paintings contribute to the broadening of a topological sensibility, in one's understanding of the self's relationship to society. In Michaux's paintings, one is situated in dimensions of indeterminacy where the body is featured in a poetics of movement within a space that is rediscovered, within the plastic realm, as an immanent medium. Throughout Michaux's work as a painter, his aesthetic practice has remained para-discursive, and anti-representational. As pointed out by Edson, commenting on Michaux's *Saisir*, the latter's intention is to go "beyond the static nature of 'form' and visible 'signs,' attempting to arrive at the *dynamic situation* of which those signs are the *manifestation*", thus breaking away from the stability of conventional ordering.<sup>10</sup> Also noted by Edson is Broome's emphasis on the dimension of Michaux's kinetic activity in his approach to painting, privileging the energy and speed of the gesture, rather than viewing the process as a means to reach a predefined outcome (for e.g. throwing water unto watercolour paintings as a creative gesture).<sup>11</sup>

In Michaux, there is an *adherence* of the self to alternative modalities of experience. Michaux's evident insubordination (both in his poetry and painting), however, is not to be taken as a form of resistance. Rather than resisting a flow, as noted by Poulet and Edson, Michaux's self is coupled to this flow, harnessing a dynamic energy in the expression of the perpetual movement of experience.<sup>12</sup> What is absent from Edson's analysis of Michaux is a critical consideration of the spatial



transformations that become manifest by virtue of this coupling. I wish to draw attention to the fact that Michaux's paintings feature a topology of experience taken as a dynamic situation that breaks from a stable ordering of space. To be sure, in *Par des traits*, the eddy appears as a recurrent figure in the arrangement of black ink traits and stains – an immanent figure inaugurating a dynamic flow. As a virtual figure, the eddy suggests that a different social and spatial relationship is at play within the expressive situations of Michaux's paintings.

Michaux's series of paintings often feature stains arranged, by virtue of a *function of the line*, in the shape of the cyclone, or the eddy (Figure 2). The apparition of the cyclone is the expression of a distinct model which challenges the fold's dynamics and laws, being brought out from a "non-place" (i.e. a virtual *topos*). Inasmuch as the cyclone and the eddy stand as alternative topological figures, it is important to note that this exceeds a conception of the fold as determinate (as the eddy is fundamentally indeterminate). This indeterminacy affords to these figures the capacity to have an incidence on the materially real. They share a virtual *topos* with the fold: the zone of becoming of the self; yet, unlike the fold, these figures do not proceed to map over this zone. In short, to (mis)quote Deleuze, the line in Michaux "can no longer be gauged by relations between forces".<sup>13</sup> In my view, the focus on the line in Michaux leads to an appreciation of the topological sensibility of the eddy.



**Figure 2.** Henri Michaux, Untitled, Chinese ink, 1960.

### **Micro-Tactics: Overcoming the Fold**

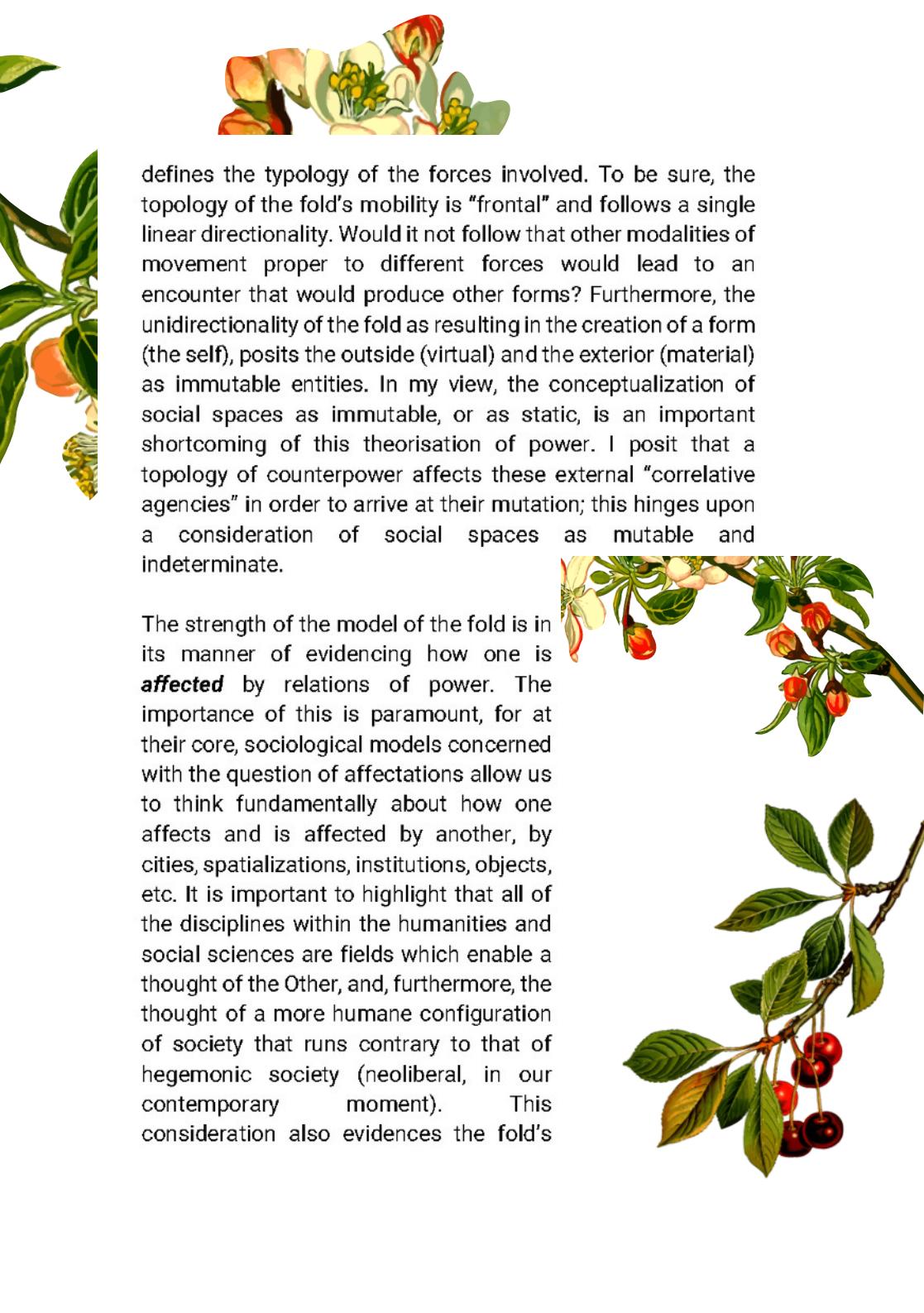
In order to overcome the topology of the fold, I will home in on the site of its activity. As the fold and the eddy share a virtual topos, my argument is that this serves as a pivot to exemplify their differences, and to identify the stakes involved in overcoming the fold. In doing so, I am following along the leitmotiv of this paper which considers the varying modalities of lines, and their influence over the elaboration of social theory. In overcoming the fold, the aim is to pit this apparatus of power to the altering figure of the eddy.

Following from Deleuze's statement in the appendix of the book on Foucault's general principle that "every form is a compound of relations between forces", the question thus considers "with what forces from the outside" do these forms

enter into a relation, and “what form is created as a result”?<sup>14</sup> I have stated that the fold’s main principle concerns the relationship between self and society. To ask: what do these encounters *do*? may serve to question the construal of the forces at play. How one answers this question hinges upon the type of forces that are considered, leading to a distinct modeling of the line, and consequently, to a distinct topological representation of this relationship.

Deleuze underlines that, for Foucault, there are historical formations that produce sets of statements. For instance, the classical thought of the 17<sup>th</sup> century produced statements which displayed a constant unfolding toward the infinity of God, whereas the statements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as definite, were concerned with comparisons, revealing that folding became an incarnated element in the thought of that epoch.<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, the affirmation of the fold as a figure which models the *determination* of the self can also be taken as a statement that is given particular salience in the context of the intellectual landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, revealing a concern with themes which follow particularly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s declaration of the death of God, namely, the death of Man.<sup>16</sup> My point is to highlight that theories and concepts are inscribed within epistemological pathways whose historical trajectories are localizable, and which direct the flows of social theory. As such, I mean to state that the topology of the fold (by virtue of its qualities) pertains to an epistemological pathway which is in conformity with the structures of power.

The fold is a line in motion, a “diagonal mobile”. In considering the aforementioned general principle stated by Deleuze, one can question its presumption that an encounter between forces follows *per se* a linear directionality. In fact, this already



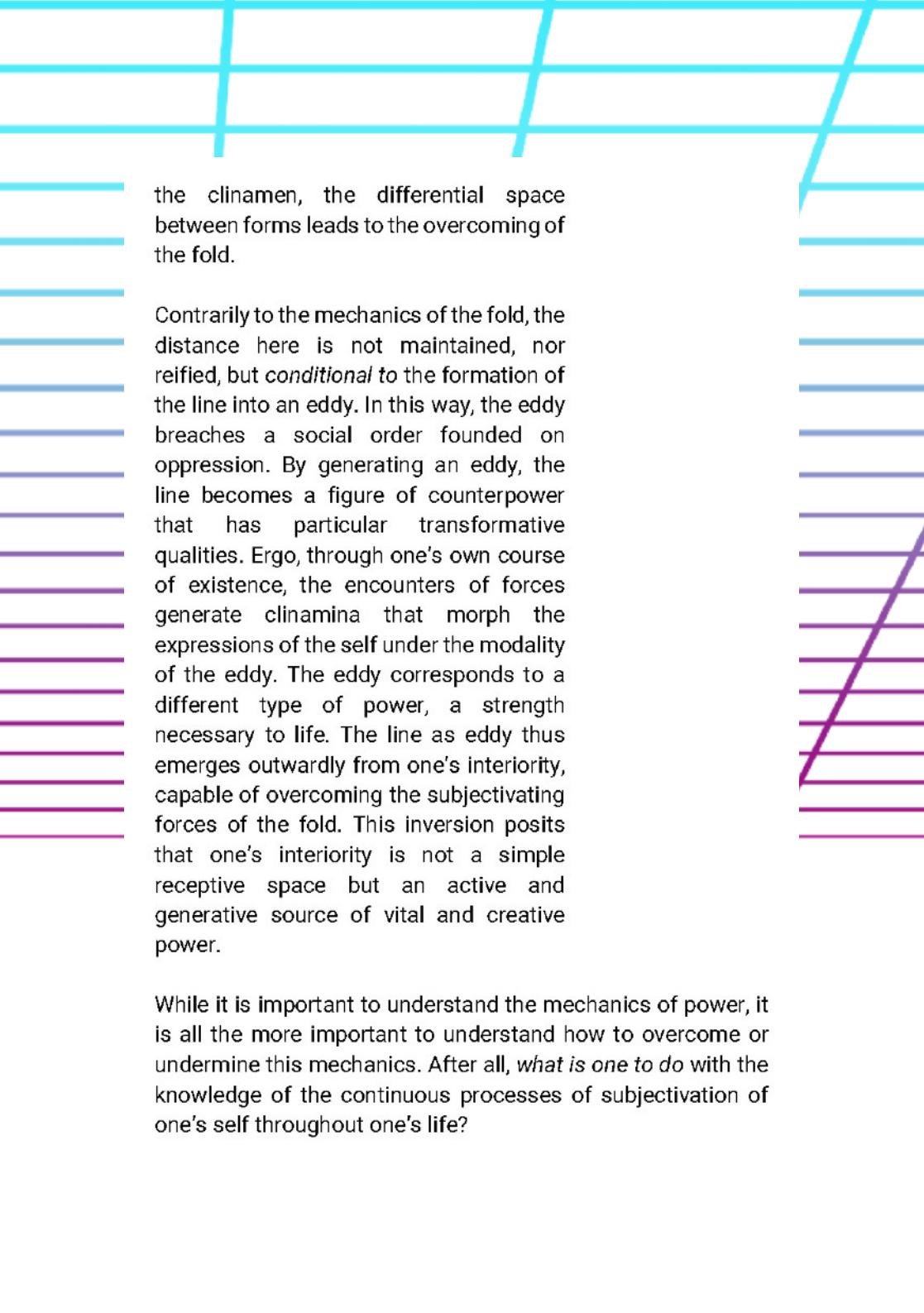
defines the typology of the forces involved. To be sure, the topology of the fold's mobility is "frontal" and follows a single linear directionality. Would it not follow that other modalities of movement proper to different forces would lead to an encounter that would produce other forms? Furthermore, the unidirectionality of the fold as resulting in the creation of a form (the self), posits the outside (virtual) and the exterior (material) as immutable entities. In my view, the conceptualization of social spaces as immutable, or as static, is an important shortcoming of this theorisation of power. I posit that a topology of counterpower affects these external "correlative agencies" in order to arrive at their mutation; this hinges upon a consideration of social spaces as mutable and indeterminate.

The strength of the model of the fold is in its manner of evidencing how one is **affected** by relations of power. The importance of this is paramount, for at their core, sociological models concerned with the question of affectations allow us to think fundamentally about how one affects and is affected by another, by cities, spatializations, institutions, objects, etc. It is important to highlight that all of the disciplines within the humanities and social sciences are fields which enable a thought of the Other, and, furthermore, the thought of a more humane configuration of society that runs contrary to that of hegemonic society (neoliberal, in our contemporary moment). This consideration also evidences the fold's

aporiae. While it shows the manner in which one is affected, it does not afford the possibility of affecting in return, nor does it have anything to say about relationality, how one is affected by others, or by one's spatial environment, etc. Taken within its scope, to resist is to suffer. Resistance is a counterreaction to force that is accounted for by the mechanics of power. In other words (and perhaps counterintuitively), under this acceptation resistance cannot be taken as exterior to the logic of power.

Does the encounter of exterior forces *necessarily* lead to their resistance? An alternative interpretation would be to consider that the encounter of forces causes a *turbulence*. It is first and foremost a *troubling* encounter. When referring to the cusp between one's self and the fold, one marks a distance – however minimal. Serres calls this distance an *écart*. Rather than leading to the inflexion of the line into a fold (the line in question differentiates between one's interiority and the exterior/outside of society), the turbulence caused by the encounter of forces can be understood as generating a *clinamen*. The *clinamen* is a disturbance caused by the bifurcation of atoms conditional to the formation of an eddy (cf. Serres). From the perspective of





the clinamen, the differential space between forms leads to the overcoming of the fold.

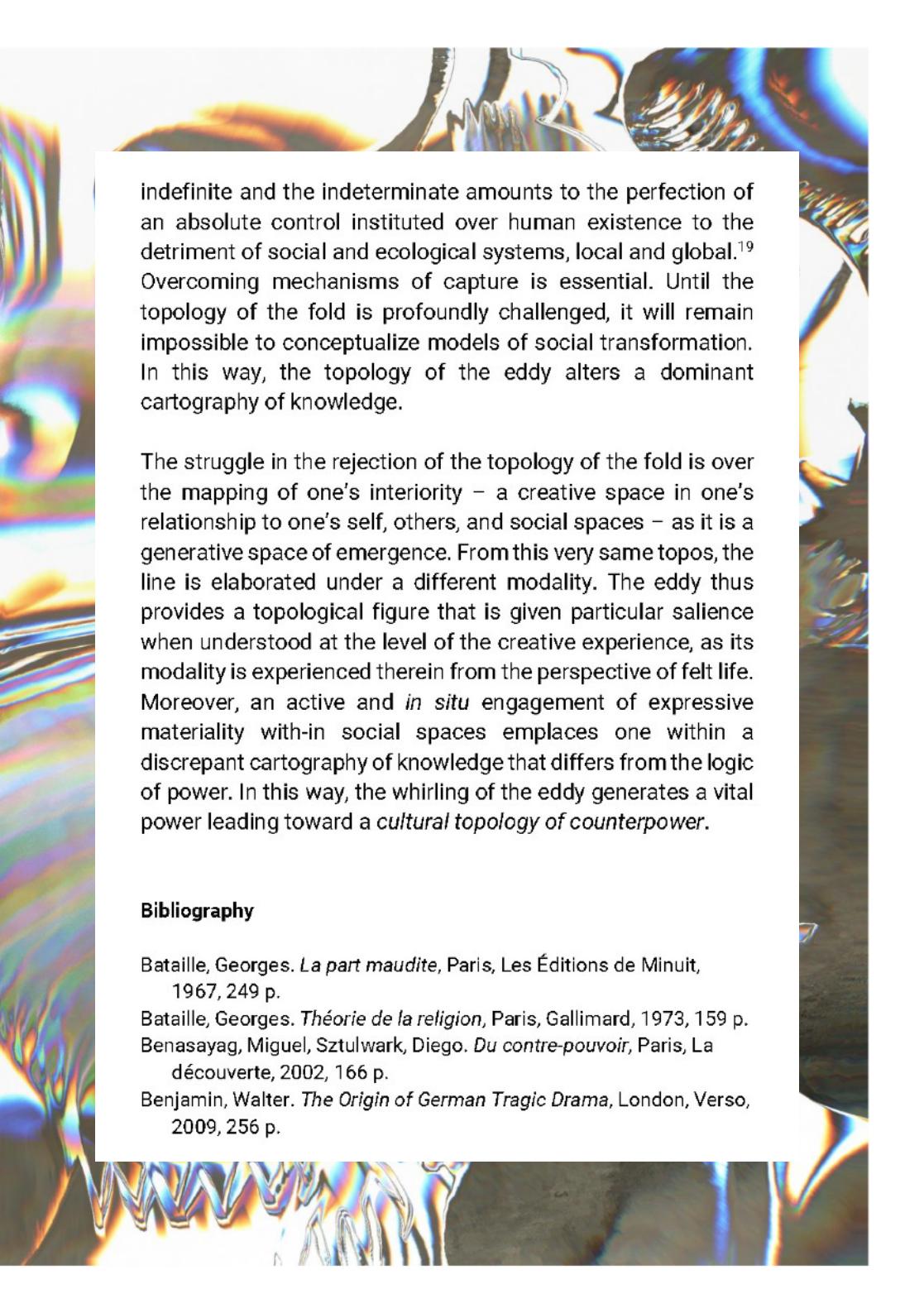
Contrarily to the mechanics of the fold, the distance here is not maintained, nor reified, but *conditional* to the formation of the line into an eddy. In this way, the eddy breaches a social order founded on oppression. By generating an eddy, the line becomes a figure of counterpower that has particular transformative qualities. Ergo, through one's own course of existence, the encounters of forces generate clinamina that morph the expressions of the self under the modality of the eddy. The eddy corresponds to a different type of power, a strength necessary to life. The line as eddy thus emerges outwardly from one's interiority, capable of overcoming the subjectivating forces of the fold. This inversion posits that one's interiority is not a simple receptive space but an active and generative source of vital and creative power.

While it is important to understand the mechanics of power, it is all the more important to understand how to overcome or undermine this mechanics. After all, *what is one to do* with the knowledge of the continuous processes of subjectivation of one's self throughout one's life?

The continuation of this pedagogical process is left out.<sup>17</sup> Once again, I recall that Deleuze situates the fold within the virtual *topos* of the becoming of the self (interiority), where *forms of exteriority* determine the self's formation. Foucault's theory of power is generally taken to follow two poles, one that is material (the exterior, the actual), and one that is virtual (the outside, *savoir*). With the introduction of the model of the fold, one sees the addition of another *virtual topos* that is also *vital* (the self). More than a model, the fold is an apparatus of power that is *directed at* the becoming of one's self in its relationship to society. Following Serres, the existent is *clinamen*-like, bifurcating from the uniformity of laws and norms. Thus, to conceptualize a model which can undermine the mechanics of power, that is, to arrive at a figure of *counterpower*, one must free this virtual *topos* for it to stand as an indefinite space of radical emergence.

As noted, in Deleuze's work on Foucault's œuvre, virtual lines configure the topological modality of power relations. Alternative configurations of these lines introduce different conceptions of power which enables one to elaborate a thought geared toward social transformation, however marginal, situational or ephemeral. This modality of thought is of great import as it is precisely that which neoliberalism seeks to eradicate, to render *unthinkable*.<sup>18</sup>

As shown above, while the *determinate* pertains to a lexicon – and to concerns – of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *indeterminate* is more appropriate to this contemporary moment. The word evokes precarity, but also harbours a radically transformative potential, as new social forms emerge from indefinite zones. These zones remain the stake of power relations. In this way, the measure of power's success in ridding social life of the



indefinite and the indeterminate amounts to the perfection of an absolute control instituted over human existence to the detriment of social and ecological systems, local and global.<sup>19</sup> Overcoming mechanisms of capture is essential. Until the topology of the fold is profoundly challenged, it will remain impossible to conceptualize models of social transformation. In this way, the topology of the eddy alters a dominant cartography of knowledge.

The struggle in the rejection of the topology of the fold is over the mapping of one's interiority – a creative space in one's relationship to one's self, others, and social spaces – as it is a generative space of emergence. From this very same topos, the line is elaborated under a different modality. The eddy thus provides a topological figure that is given particular salience when understood at the level of the creative experience, as its modality is experienced therein from the perspective of felt life. Moreover, an active and *in situ* engagement of expressive materiality with-in social spaces emplaces one within a discrepant cartography of knowledge that differs from the logic of power. In this way, the whirling of the eddy generates a vital power leading toward a *cultural topology of counterpower*.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London, Verso, 2009, p. 45

<sup>2</sup> The theorization of the fold in *Foucault* discussed in this article precedes Deleuze's work on the multiple acceptations of the baroque fold derived from Leibniz in *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque*.

<sup>3</sup> Bickis' analysis is conveyed through an engagement with the visual art of Goodwin, Mehretu and Kutica. Heidi Bickis. *Social Theory Encounters Lines and Bodies*, Edmonton, University of Alberta, 2014, p. 3

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17, 21

<sup>5</sup> Benasayag and Sztulwark provide a critical thought aligned with the ongoing struggles for popular liberation in Latin America in *Du contre-pouvoir*. They argue for a proliferation of creative practices as creative, dynamic and situational that break with traditional acceptations of resistance. While power relations form a neoliberal *weltanschauung* within human subjectivities – in concert with the mobilization of inhibitive and repressive apparatuses which aim to direct and deplete human vitality – creation stands as an important and novel form of resistance insofar as it is tasked to lead us to the concrete means to found an alternative social order, situationally, in the *hic et nunc* of quotidian political struggles. Power relations target the force of human vitality to prevent bifurcations from an established order. Therefore, cultivating *puissance*, in the sense of generating and liberating human vitality on a situational plane via multiple forms of practices, is essential to social transformation, as “only the development of *puissance*, the dynamic of the struggle and of creation enable a society to transform itself, so that the relations of power and their ‘beneficiaries’ may be changed”. Miguel Benasayag, Diego, Sztulwark. *Du contre-pouvoir*, Paris, La découverte, 2002, p. 27, p. 64-65. My translation.

<sup>6</sup> As noted by Collier, Foucault's approach to power in the late 1970s (namely in the lecture from *Society Must Be Defended*) shifts toward a topological approach to power. For Collier, topology focuses on the organization of spaces, their connective properties and their transformations, such that “a topological analysis [of power] focuses on the broad configurational principles through which new formations of government are assembled, without implying that they arise from some inner necessity or coherence” (p. 80). Moreover, the fold is the apparatus of power relations aimed specifically at the self, while counterpower seeks to mobilise a vital strength of the self to found an

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alternative and liberating social order via a mobilising of multiple situations.

<sup>7</sup> « Résister, plus que jamais, c'est créer ». Miguel Benasayag, Diego Sztulwark. *Du contre-pouvoir*, Paris, La découverte, 2002, p. 71. My translation.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986, p. 130

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty, commenting on Michaux's writings on Klee, remarks that the line modulates spatiality. Accordingly, Klee's line would outline the genesis of things (drawing a parallel to the generative feature of the eddy). It is also interesting to note that the inflection of the line in Klee corresponds exactly to the declination of the clinamen which, as observed in physics, generates the primary form of the eddy. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, Paris Gallimard, 1964, p. 74, 77; Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986, p. 130

<sup>10</sup> Laurie Edson. *Henri Michaux and the Poetics of Movement*, Saratoga, ANMA Libri & Co., 1985, p. 107 My emphasis. Although a fuller discussion of Michaux's pictorial work is not possible within the confines of this paper, I point to the interest of an analysis of the particular poetics of movement expressed in the mescaline drawings produced throughout the 1950s for a topology of alternative experience in Michaux.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32, 63, 72, 73, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*, Seán Hand, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 122

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*, Seán Hand, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 124

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986, p. 128

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132

<sup>17</sup> To be sure, this consideration introduces an ethical theme that warrants further considerations.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Jurjo Torres Santomé on the occurrence of this in education, leading to social exclusion.

<sup>19</sup> The implementation of the urban development projects of so-called "Smart Cities" is a striking example of this point.



## **On Rivers and Safety Pins** **Exploring Materiality Through Craft**

**Malcolm Stielow**

### **Abstract**

*On Rivers and Safety Pins* is a personalized account about connecting craft to the material world that surrounds it. It focuses around a central paradox in craft needing to be both traditional and original, and how those center in the larger creative cultural meshwork. Explored within are puissance, pouvoir, springs, flow, blobs, rocket jumps, and weaving, and how all those can be one and the same thing.

**Keywords:** Eddy, Knot, Line, Making, Meshwork

### **Introduction**

I recently completed an in-depth review of the definition of craft in a Canadian context. While the review succeeded in producing a definition of craft, there was a part of it that I felt was unresolved:

“Canadian craft is both a noun and a verb that evokes the practice and process of making objects for use, sale, or display that communicate intersectional cultural and disciplinary values of tradition, skill, and originality.”

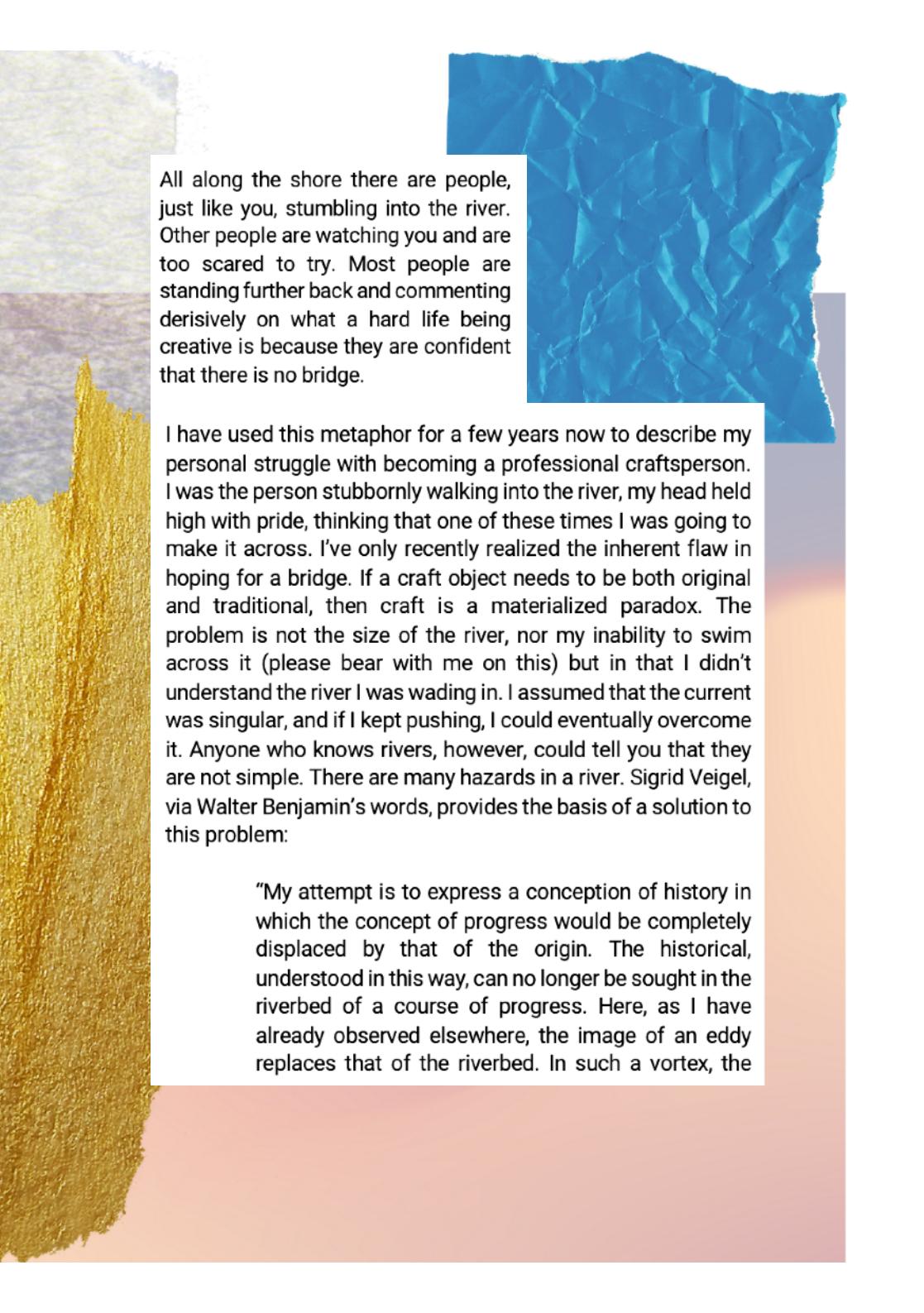
What I saw here was a paradox. An object being simultaneously traditional and original does not feel impossible, but it certainly is odd to think of the two as being capable of standing on par. As the end of my coursework in my master’s loomed, I knew

that I had to dig deeper into the paradox before moving forward with the rest of my thesis. This is the product of that reflexive process into what craft is to me, what I am to craft, and what craft is to history.

### The Tradition/Originality Paradox

Imagine a flowing, clear river on a sunny day, not so wide that you can't see across it, but not so narrow that you would think about swimming across it. The water flows smoothly on the surface but is turbulent underneath. I have often imagined this river myself. It looks calming and beautiful from the shore, but it has a strong undertow. Only the brave or quixotic dare to cross it. I have often used this river as an analogy for creative practice. On one side of the river, there are the general public and the novice creatives, on the other side are the professional creatives. I used the metaphorical construct of an invisible bridge to explain what living as a creative life feels like. When you're standing on the starting shore, you can see the successful creative people on the other side, and you have no understanding of how they got there. You assume there must be a bridge somewhere, but you cannot see it, so you stumble repeatedly into the river.





All along the shore there are people, just like you, stumbling into the river. Other people are watching you and are too scared to try. Most people are standing further back and commenting derisively on what a hard life being creative is because they are confident that there is no bridge.

I have used this metaphor for a few years now to describe my personal struggle with becoming a professional crafts person. I was the person stubbornly walking into the river, my head held high with pride, thinking that one of these times I was going to make it across. I've only recently realized the inherent flaw in hoping for a bridge. If a craft object needs to be both original and traditional, then craft is a materialized paradox. The problem is not the size of the river, nor my inability to swim across it (please bear with me on this) but in that I didn't understand the river I was wading in. I assumed that the current was singular, and if I kept pushing, I could eventually overcome it. Anyone who knows rivers, however, could tell you that they are not simple. There are many hazards in a river. Sigrid Veigel, via Walter Benjamin's words, provides the basis of a solution to this problem:

"My attempt is to express a conception of history in which the concept of progress would be completely displaced by that of the origin. The historical, understood in this way, can no longer be sought in the riverbed of a course of progress. Here, as I have already observed elsewhere, the image of an eddy replaces that of the riverbed. In such a vortex, the

earlier and the later circulate—the pre- and post-history of an occurrence or, better yet, a status of it.”<sup>1</sup>

The problem was I thought of the river as the obstacle to overcome; that craft was about crossing the river, never that it was part of the river. I realized that the river is the tradition/originality paradox. Think of the bed of the river as tradition; stable and defined, it marks the boundaries of the river and provides a path for the water to flow. The water is the other side of the paradox: originality. It is forever in motion, shifting and twisting, but moving generally in the same direction. The problem with not understanding this before is that even if there were a bridge across the river, it would only leave me in the same place I was before, just on the other side of the river. It’s a lateral move, so I or anyone else crossing the bridge won’t have moved forward at all. We would be firmly rooted in a tradition alone. The river, craft, is a dynamic entity. Even the traditions as we see them are not completely stationary.

While at any given moment, we may look at a river and see moving water over a stationary bed, the passage of time proves this to be untrue. The riverbed slowly yields to the water, changing shape as the years pass, becoming deeper and wider. It may seem as though I am positioning the river as a subservient part of craft, but I assure you that’s not the case. While the river represents the craft paradox between tradition and originality, the river also belongs to the construction of creativity as whole. I think craft exists in smaller pockets along the river.

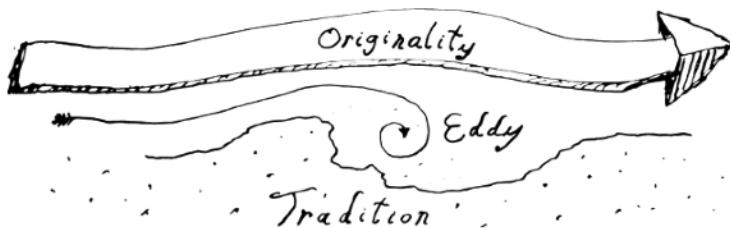
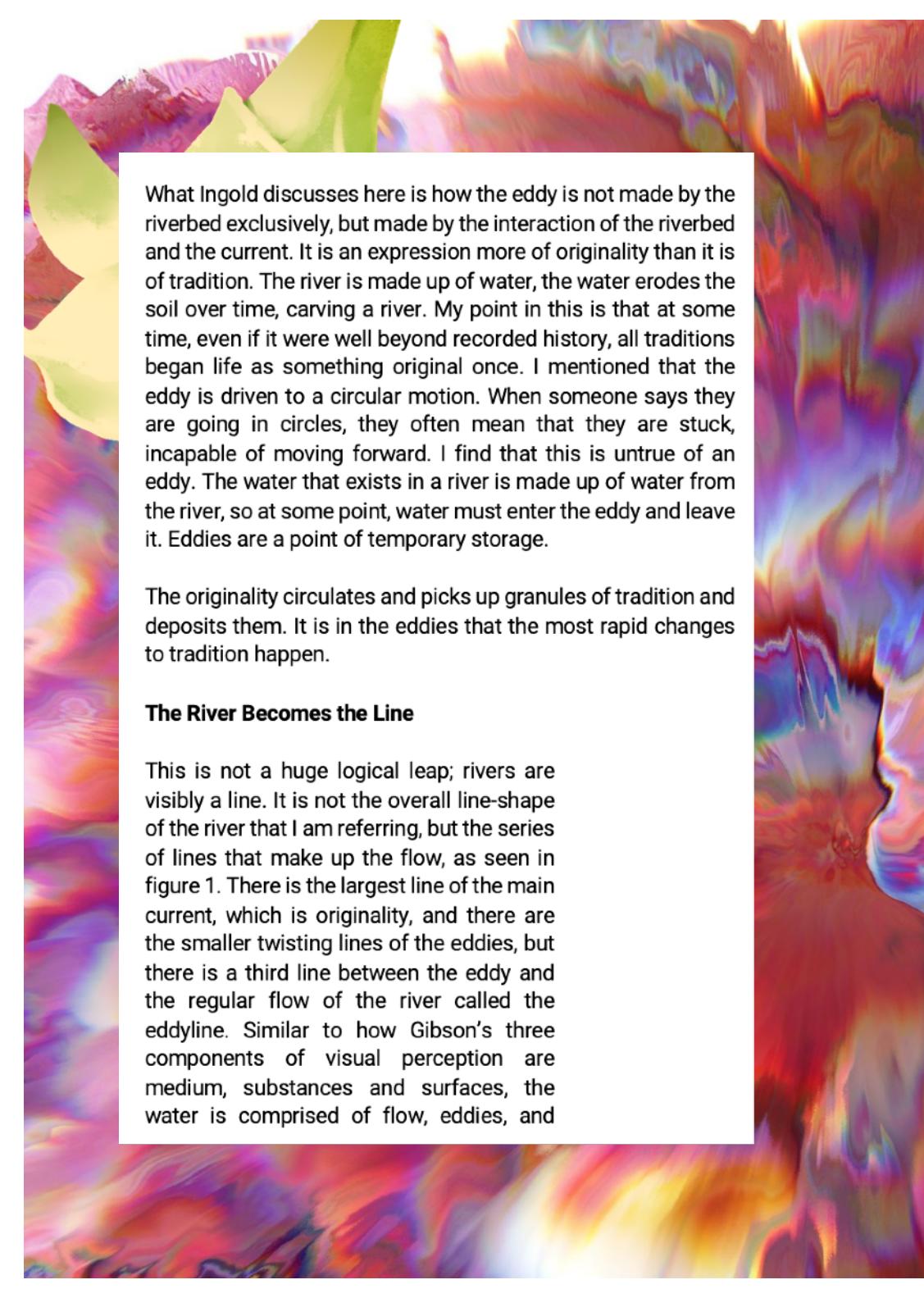


Figure 1: *The Turbulent River*: Image courtesy of the author

Inevitably, the flow of water changes the shape of the riverbed, so too does originality change the shape of tradition. When the current of originality flows over the rougher parts of tradition, as in figure 1, an eddy is formed. These eddies are where craft thrives. They are pools that exist within the bounds of tradition but are driven in their circular motion by originality.

We see that this version of an eddy differs slightly from that of Veigel and Benjamin, in that the eddy is not a replacement for the riverbed but is constructed by it. Tim Ingold, in a review of Christopher Tillery's work, has this to say about eddies:

"in a world where 'persons make things and things make persons' (p.217) [citing Tilley], no space remains for such generative movements. To suppose that persons and things, and their mutually constitutive interactions, are all there is, is a bit like saying that a river is constituted by interactions between eddies and banks, forgetting that there would be neither eddies nor banks were it not for the flow of the river itself."<sup>2</sup>

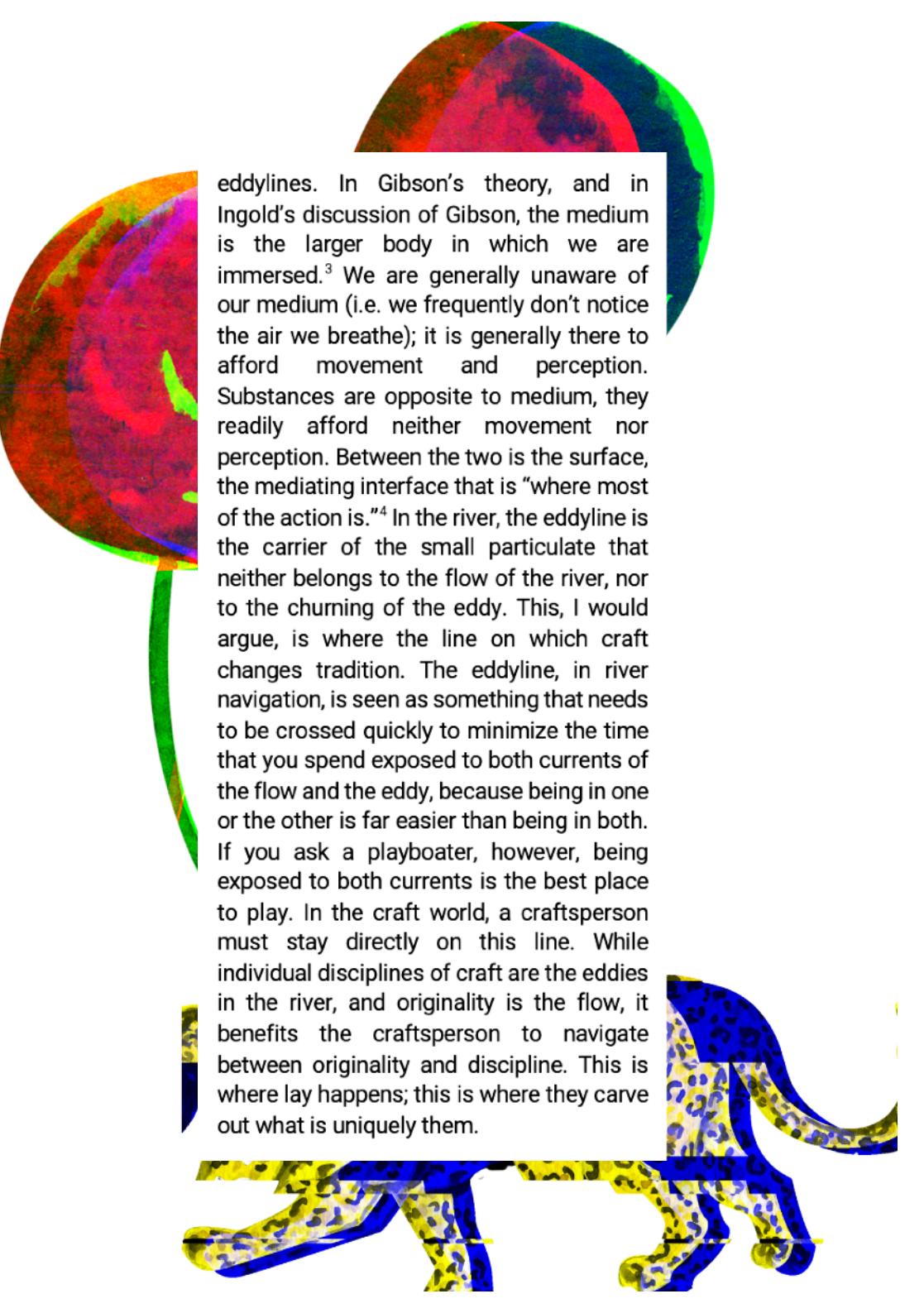


What Ingold discusses here is how the eddy is not made by the riverbed exclusively, but made by the interaction of the riverbed and the current. It is an expression more of originality than it is of tradition. The river is made up of water, the water erodes the soil over time, carving a river. My point in this is that at some time, even if it were well beyond recorded history, all traditions began life as something original once. I mentioned that the eddy is driven to a circular motion. When someone says they are going in circles, they often mean that they are stuck, incapable of moving forward. I find that this is untrue of an eddy. The water that exists in a river is made up of water from the river, so at some point, water must enter the eddy and leave it. Eddies are a point of temporary storage.

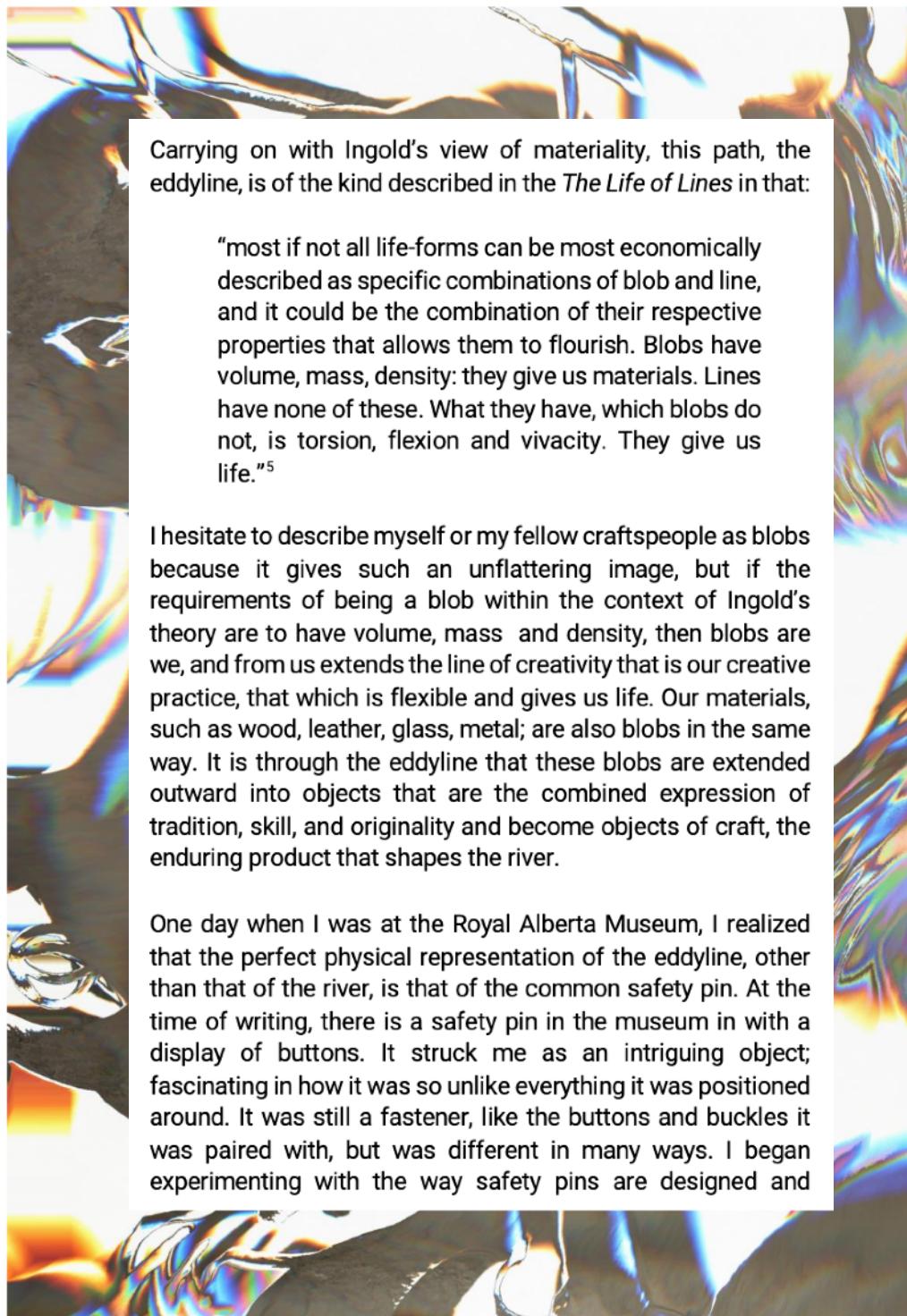
The originality circulates and picks up granules of tradition and deposits them. It is in the eddies that the most rapid changes to tradition happen.

### **The River Becomes the Line**

This is not a huge logical leap; rivers are visibly a line. It is not the overall line-shape of the river that I am referring, but the series of lines that make up the flow, as seen in figure 1. There is the largest line of the main current, which is originality, and there are the smaller twisting lines of the eddies, but there is a third line between the eddy and the regular flow of the river called the eddyline. Similar to how Gibson's three components of visual perception are medium, substances and surfaces, the water is comprised of flow, eddies, and



eddylines. In Gibson's theory, and in Ingold's discussion of Gibson, the medium is the larger body in which we are immersed.<sup>3</sup> We are generally unaware of our medium (i.e. we frequently don't notice the air we breathe); it is generally there to afford movement and perception. Substances are opposite to medium, they readily afford neither movement nor perception. Between the two is the surface, the mediating interface that is "where most of the action is."<sup>4</sup> In the river, the eddyline is the carrier of the small particulate that neither belongs to the flow of the river, nor to the churning of the eddy. This, I would argue, is where the line on which craft changes tradition. The eddyline, in river navigation, is seen as something that needs to be crossed quickly to minimize the time that you spend exposed to both currents of the flow and the eddy, because being in one or the other is far easier than being in both. If you ask a playboater, however, being exposed to both currents is the best place to play. In the craft world, a craftsperson must stay directly on this line. While individual disciplines of craft are the eddies in the river, and originality is the flow, it benefits the craftsperson to navigate between originality and discipline. This is where lay happens; this is where they carve out what is uniquely them.



Carrying on with Ingold's view of materiality, this path, the eddyline, is of the kind described in the *The Life of Lines* in that:

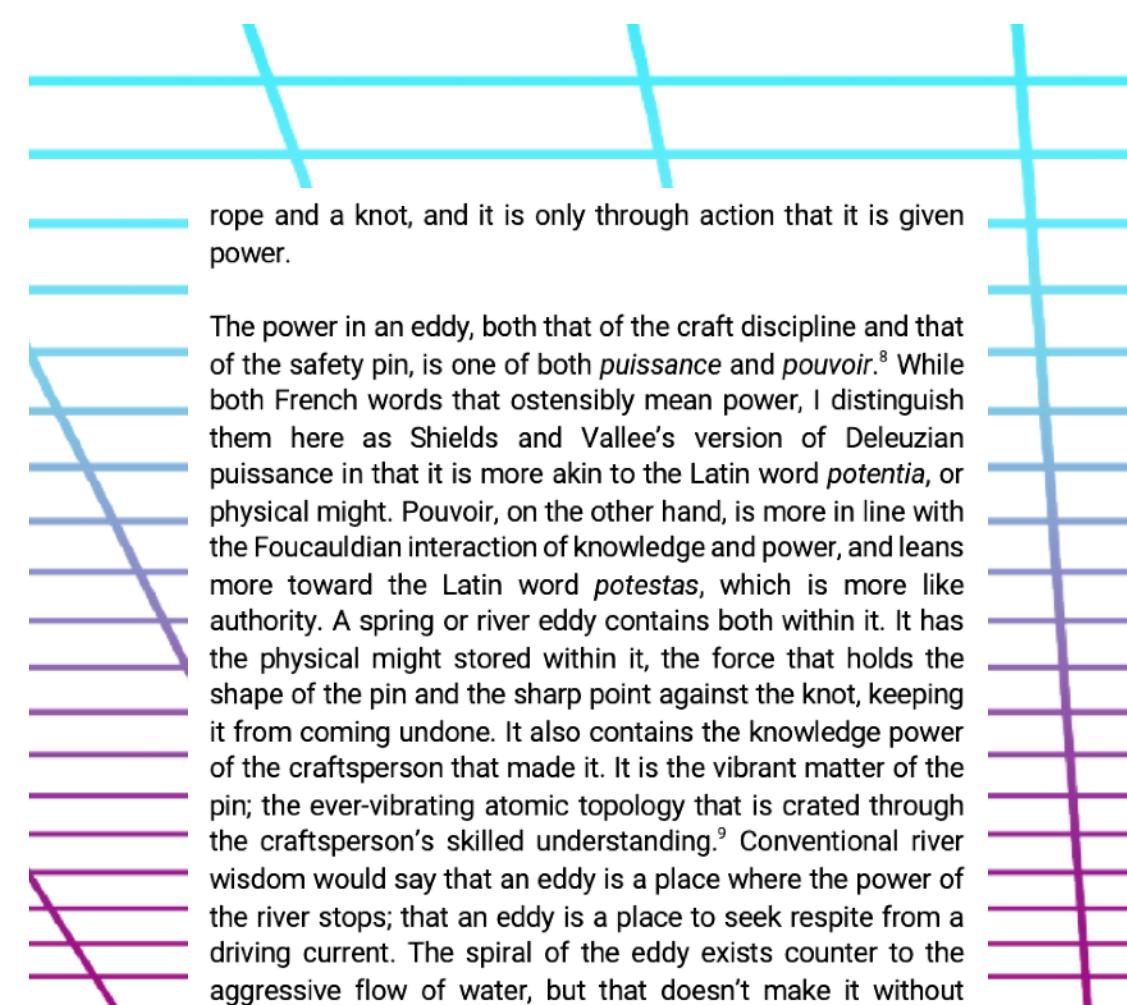
"most if not all life-forms can be most economically described as specific combinations of blob and line, and it could be the combination of their respective properties that allows them to flourish. Blobs have volume, mass, density: they give us materials. Lines have none of these. What they have, which blobs do not, is torsion, flexion and vivacity. They give us life."<sup>5</sup>

I hesitate to describe myself or my fellow craftspeople as blobs because it gives such an unflattering image, but if the requirements of being a blob within the context of Ingold's theory are to have volume, mass and density, then blobs are we, and from us extends the line of creativity that is our creative practice, that which is flexible and gives us life. Our materials, such as wood, leather, glass, metal; are also blobs in the same way. It is through the eddyline that these blobs are extended outward into objects that are the combined expression of tradition, skill, and originality and become objects of craft, the enduring product that shapes the river.

One day when I was at the Royal Alberta Museum, I realized that the perfect physical representation of the eddyline, other than that of the river, is that of the common safety pin. At the time of writing, there is a safety pin in the museum in with a display of buttons. It struck me as an intriguing object; fascinating in how it was so unlike everything it was positioned around. It was still a fastener, like the buttons and buckles it was paired with, but was different in many ways. I began experimenting with the way safety pins are designed and



constructed. The common safety pin is possibly one of the greatest examples we have of the relationship between craft and materiality. If I were making a safety pin from scratch, I would start by extruding an ingot, or blob, of metal into a wire. That wire, a line, can be bent into a knot, twisted into and eddy, and filed down to a point. When you look at a coiled safety pin, it is easy to forget what part of it is truly the most important. We get so concerned with the sharp point, and with concealing it away, that we forget that the power of the safety pin comes from the coil, not the point. The coil is an eddy. It is both a memory of the work that has been exerted on it in the way that Schlunke describes eddies as memory, and a source of power, as Deleuze describes power.<sup>6</sup> We focus on the danger associated with the sharpened point, and on the knot that that protects us from the point, but we rarely consider where the true source of the thing-power of a safety pin.<sup>7</sup> While the point makes it dangerous and the knot makes it safe, it is the eddy, and the eddyline that extends from it, that gives life and form to the pin. If we were to carry out the same steps for making a safety pin with rope that we just did with wire what would result is a noose. In form, they are only very minorly different, but in function and affect, they are quite separate. Returning to Deleuze's conceptualization of power, insofar as power is the potential to affect others, both items carry their power very differently. Not only in their common associations (the noose with death, and the safety pin with new life) but also in more structural ways. The noose, being made of malleable rope, cannot hold the eddyform of the spring that the safety pin can, being made of hardened metal. The spring is the powerplant of the safety pin. When open it resists being closed, and when closed it constantly seeks to drive itself open. The noose doesn't have internal power. It seeks to do nothing but be a



rope and a knot, and it is only through action that it is given power.

The power in an eddy, both that of the craft discipline and that of the safety pin, is one of both *puissance* and *pouvoir*.<sup>8</sup> While both French words that ostensibly mean power, I distinguish them here as Shields and Vallee's version of Deleuzian *puissance* in that it is more akin to the Latin word *potentia*, or physical might. *Pouvoir*, on the other hand, is more in line with the Foucauldian interaction of knowledge and power, and leans more toward the Latin word *potestas*, which is more like authority. A spring or river eddy contains both within it. It has the physical might stored within it, the force that holds the shape of the pin and the sharp point against the knot, keeping it from coming undone. It also contains the knowledge power of the craftsperson that made it. It is the vibrant matter of the pin; the ever-vibrating atomic topology that is created through the craftsperson's skilled understanding.<sup>9</sup> Conventional river wisdom would say that an eddy is a place where the power of the river stops; that an eddy is a place to seek respite from a driving current. The spiral of the eddy exists counter to the aggressive flow of water, but that doesn't make it without power. Its *puissance* stems from its *pouvoir*; its power coming from the knowledge and memories it contains, pushing ever outward against tradition and originality. In so many ways the addition of an eddy disrupts, and improves, almost any line. The river becomes playful rapids, the rough edges of traditions are smoothed into new ones, and the noose is crafted into the infinitely better safety pin. The German word used to describe craft work is *handwerk*, the word "kraftwerk" means powerplant. While I think this is likely just a linguistic coincidence, I also like to think of the eddy as the source of

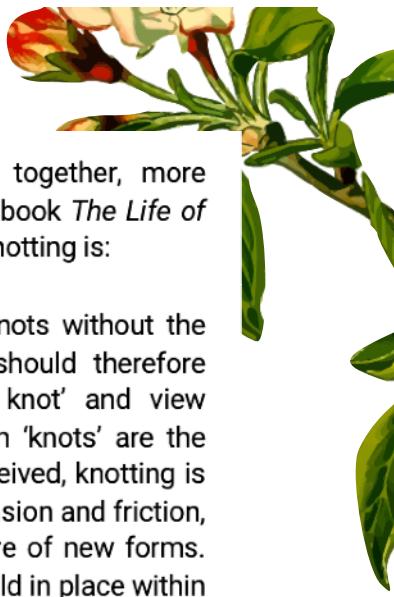


power, or powerplant, of change. Perhaps even that craft work is the powerplant of creativity.

### Weaving into the Meshwork

During a seminar I was recently leading, I conducted a brief workshop on a making activity. I came into the room with a few balls of coloured twine and a half-dozen pairs of small snips, and not much else. I handed out the snips and the twine and told each person to take three lengths, preferably of a couple different colours. I gave them very little context to their exercise, only told them that they would be doing a technique called "finger weaving" and then gave them a very simple demonstration on how to get started. I provided almost no tools and no designated space to work in. I hardly even provided them with enough technical knowledge of what a woven structure was, much less an adequate procedure of how to complete one. Some people took up the process immediately, grasping the nature of the weave quickly. Others required more help to understand, but as the class went on, everyone began to get a little better at the weaving as the skills began to sink into their muscles. When I added a picture from a book, a traditional source knowledge, a couple students found it helpful, but their weaving did not immediately get faster, in fact, most slowed down and checked their work frequently against the image. It wasn't until they resumed working without looking at the picture constantly that the good weaving happened. The students who were the fastest were the ones who understood the tradition but were determined to make it their own procedure.

The process by which textiles are made, and which was highlighted through the exercise of finger weaving, is twisting



lines together in a way to secure them together, more commonly known as knotting. Ingold, in his book *The Life of Lines*, presents an ontological view of what knotting is:



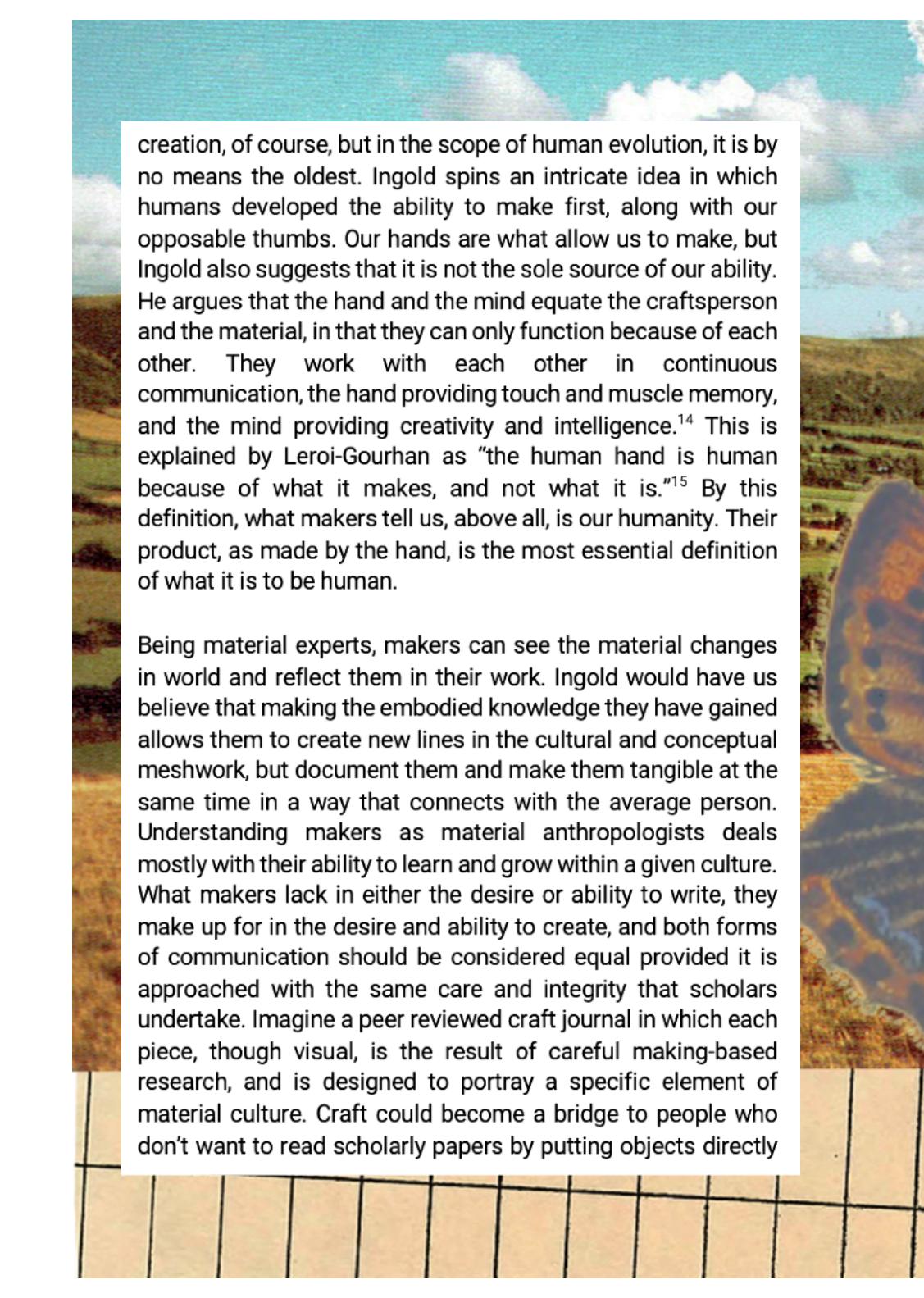
"There can, of course, be no knots without the performance of knotting: we should therefore commence with the verb 'to knot' and view knotting as an activity of which 'knots' are the emergent outcomes. Thus conceived, knotting is about how contrary forces of tension and friction, as in pulling tight, are generative of new forms. And it is about how forms are held in place within such a force-field or, in short, about 'making things stick'. Accordingly, our focus should be on forces and materials rather than form and content. Knotting, then, registers in a number of domains of thought and practice by which patterns of culture are sustained and bound into the interstices of human life. These include: the flows and growth patterns of materials, including air, water, cordage and wood; bodily movement and gesture, as in weaving and sewing; sensory perception, especially touch and hearing, perhaps more than (but certainly not to the exclusion of) vision; and human relationships and the sentiment that infuses them."<sup>10</sup>

In this understanding of knotting, it comes after the line. What starts as a blob, evolves into a line, which is then knotted with other lines to produce a meshwork.<sup>11</sup> Meshwork refers to the term as conceptualized by Ingold across many of his works, but most importantly in *Making*. It is the intertwining of lines to form knots, which in turn forms a mass of line. It is different

from a blob, as a blob is more of a congruous whole. Blobs are a foundational part of a mesh; the mesh itself is infinitely more complex. All textiles are expressed through knots, and knots are a fundamental element of ontological perceptions, which Ingold notes should focus more on the forces that form the knots, as opposed to the knots themselves. For Ingold, all things are interconnected through knots, and so to study the formation of a knot is to study the formation of both the material and the virtual. Ingold also affords other forms of making with the same powers he gives to weaving, likening basket weaving to a carpenter's joinery. The connection of the two:

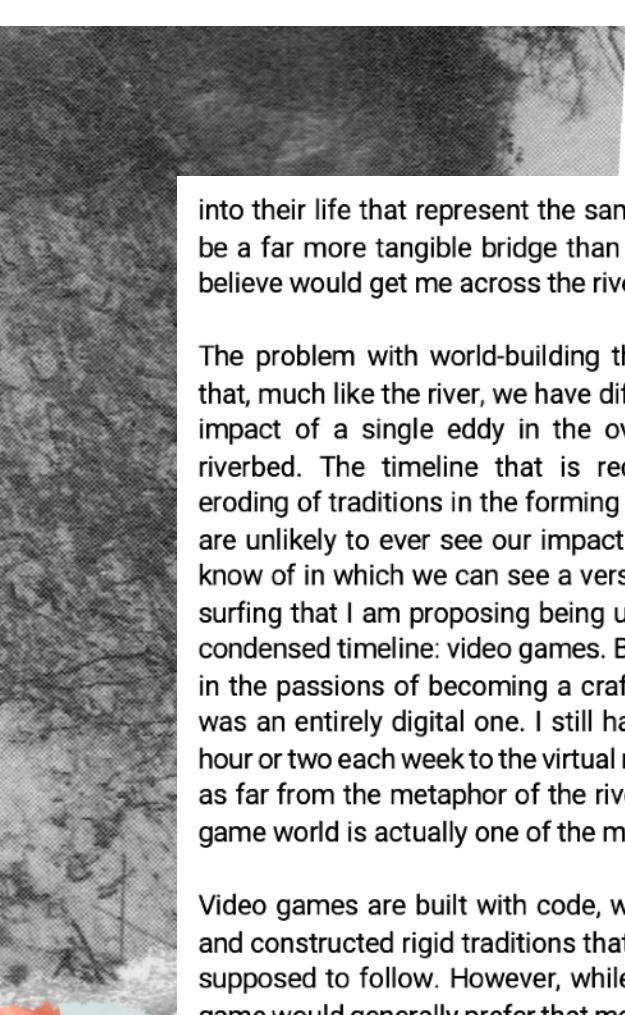
"touches on the more fundamental question of what it means to make things. The carpenter and the weaver are equally driven by the imperative of making, and for both, there can be no making without joining. However, the necessity of the knot is not a brittle one that allows for freedom only in the spaces left between, but a supple necessity that admits to movement as both its condition and its consequence. That is to say, it is not the necessity of predetermination, whose antonym is chance, but a necessity born out of commitment and attention to materials and to the ways they want to go. Its antonym is negligence."<sup>12</sup>

Here, Ingold is connecting the two through the application of specific and learned skills. These subsets of committed skills related to specific materials are disciplines, the eddies in the river. In his other book, *Making*, Ingold connects skill to the in the performance of any discipline, with the construction of the meshwork he portrays humans, makers, as "world-formers".<sup>13</sup> Putting pen to paper for the written word is one form of



creation, of course, but in the scope of human evolution, it is by no means the oldest. Ingold spins an intricate idea in which humans developed the ability to make first, along with our opposable thumbs. Our hands are what allow us to make, but Ingold also suggests that it is not the sole source of our ability. He argues that the hand and the mind equate the craftsperson and the material, in that they can only function because of each other. They work with each other in continuous communication, the hand providing touch and muscle memory, and the mind providing creativity and intelligence.<sup>14</sup> This is explained by Leroi-Gourhan as "the human hand is human because of what it makes, and not what it is."<sup>15</sup> By this definition, what makers tell us, above all, is our humanity. Their product, as made by the hand, is the most essential definition of what it is to be human.

Being material experts, makers can see the material changes in world and reflect them in their work. Ingold would have us believe that making the embodied knowledge they have gained allows them to create new lines in the cultural and conceptual meshwork, but document them and make them tangible at the same time in a way that connects with the average person. Understanding makers as material anthropologists deals mostly with their ability to learn and grow within a given culture. What makers lack in either the desire or ability to write, they make up for in the desire and ability to create, and both forms of communication should be considered equal provided it is approached with the same care and integrity that scholars undertake. Imagine a peer reviewed craft journal in which each piece, though visual, is the result of careful making-based research, and is designed to portray a specific element of material culture. Craft could become a bridge to people who don't want to read scholarly papers by putting objects directly

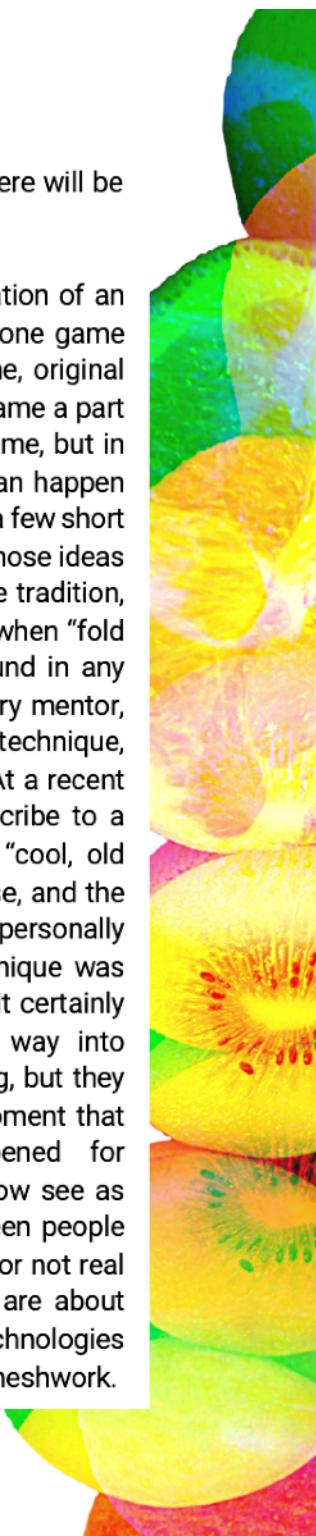


into their life that represent the same scholarly ideas. It could be a far more tangible bridge than the invisible one I used to believe would get me across the river.

The problem with world-building through craft disciplines is that, much like the river, we have difficulty conceptualizing the impact of a single eddy in the overall shape of the future riverbed. The timeline that is required to understand the eroding of traditions in the forming of new ones is so long, we are unlikely to ever see our impact. There is only one arena I know of in which we can see a version of the kind of eddyline surfing that I am proposing being used to create changes on a condensed timeline: video games. Before I was fully embroiled in the passions of becoming a craftsperson, my first passion was an entirely digital one. I still have been known to lose an hour or two each week to the virtual realm. While this may seem as far from the metaphor of the river as I could get, the video game world is actually one of the most similar.



Video games are built with code, which are a set of imposed and constructed rigid traditions that the users of the game are supposed to follow. However, while the people who code the game would generally prefer that most players go with the flow, many of them are intent on creating eddies; often in the form of exploiting glitches or loopholes in the code. This is broadly termed as “emergent gameplay”, and in the case of the players who break or exploit the code, it is usually considered unintentional emergence.<sup>16</sup> In cases of unintentional emergence in games, I have seen players use a traditional framework, such as explosion physics in first person shooter games, and exploit the physics of their own explosions (which don’t damage them) to propel their avatar across the map. This is commonly referred to now as a “rocket jump”, and it is likely



that if you refer to it as such on a gaming forum, there will be no need to explain yourself.

The significance of this is not only in how the creation of an eddy in the game affected the community of that one game tradition (the shore nearest the eddy), but over time, original thought carried the eddyline down the river and became a part of the tradition. Not only the tradition of the one game, but in the greater meshwork of gaming tradition. If this can happen for something like the rocket jump in gaming in only a few short years, then how long will it take for craft to acquire those ideas which are now seen as eddies not connected to the tradition, like 3D printing? There was a time not so long ago when "fold forming" was not a technique you would have found in any jewellery or metalsmithing books. When my jewellery mentor, Charles Lewton-Brain, coined both the term and the technique, it quickly worked its way into the craft meshwork. At a recent craft event, an aspiring jeweller was trying to describe to a small circle of craftspeople, myself included, the "cool, old technique" they found. It was fold forming, of course, and the three of us standing there who knew Charles personally exchanged smiles before explaining why the technique was indeed cool, but not nearly as old as they thought. It certainly had taken longer for fold forming to work its way into metalsmithing than the rocket jump did into gaming, but they both did so relatively recently. I realized in that moment that once upon a time the same thing probably happened for casting, soldering, and many other practices we now see as traditional metalsmithing. There may even have been people who considered the new techniques to be cheating or not real craftpersonship in some way. Craft and creativity are about riding the eddyline; pushing emergent styles and technologies until, through making, they become woven into the meshwork.

## Conclusion

I am writing this conclusion from a nondescript café in Edinburgh, wondering how one concludes a paper about craft, and rivers, and safety pins, and video games. I have no idea how I got here. I don't know this city, or its cafés, or its roads. I know where the hostel is where I began, and I drew a line out from there. I walked through the streets along with many other people, many of whom were going my way, and when I saw a place that seemed to my liking, I ducked out of the current. From there I wrote this conclusion, had a cream tea, and got ready to step back into the flow on the street. Blob, to line, to eddy, to line again, woven in and out of every other person in this city doing the same thing in different ways. Edinburgh is a city of great tradition; there are buildings in the new part of town that are older than Canada as a country, but in this great tradition, it is the new things that emerge that give it its true character. This café wasn't here ten years ago, but it gave me the push I needed to conclude this paper. It is a line between the old and the new, a mediating surface, on which I can project my existence in this medium. It's windy outside today. The large safety pin I made before I left Canada and now wear as a scarf pin will come in handy, keeping the scarf I wove from flying away with the current.

Perhaps this paper is just a list of all the connecting lines that brought me here today, and the blobs they brought me from. Maybe it's the river, or maybe it's the meshwork. Honestly, I don't know for sure yet. I feel like I'm walking on the eddyline right now. It will be a while yet before I know how the riverbed has changed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sigrid Weigel, "The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images: Walter Benjamin's Image-Based Epistemology and Its Preconditions in Visual Arts and Media History," trans. Chadwick Truscott Smith and Christine Kutschbach, *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (January 2015): 344–66, doi.org/10.1086/679079.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Ingold, "Comments on Christopher Tilley: *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* . Oxford: Berg, 2004., " *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 38, no. 2 (November 2005): 124, doi.org/10.1080/00293650500359078.

<sup>3</sup> James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Psychology Press, 1989), 16; Timothy Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," *Arcaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (2007): 4, doi.org/10.1017/S1380203807002127.

<sup>4</sup> Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Katrina Schlunke, "Memory and Materiality," ed. Susannah Radstone and Rosanne Kennedy, *Memory Studies* 6, no. 3 (July 2013): 253–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698013482864>; Rob Shields and Mickey Vallee, *Demystifying Deleuze: An Introductory Assemblage of Crucial Concepts* (Ottawa: Red Quill Bokks, 2012). Specifically I am referring to the way in which Shields and Vallee describe how Deleuze describes power.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Thing-power as described by Jane Bennet throughout the first chapter of her work.

<sup>8</sup> Shields and Vallee, *Demistifying Deleuze: An Introductory Assemblage of Crucial Concepts*, 144. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (Random House, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Ingold, *Making / Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Routledge, 2013).

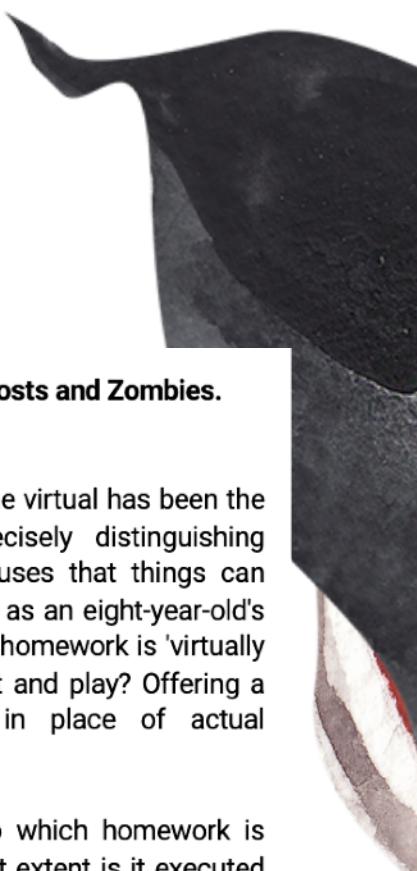
<sup>12</sup> Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Ingold, *Making / Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 113. Quoting Martin Heidegger 1995, 117.

<sup>14</sup> Ingold, 117. Intelligence as referring to technical or gestural intelligence and the mnemonic aspects of technicity as described by Ingold.

<sup>15</sup> Leroi-Gourhan as quoted in Ingold, 115.

<sup>16</sup> Shields and Vallee, *Demistifying Deleuze: An Introductory Assemblage of Crucial Concepts*, 59. This relates back to the Deleuzian concept of emergence, mainly as "the way in which something new comes into the world".

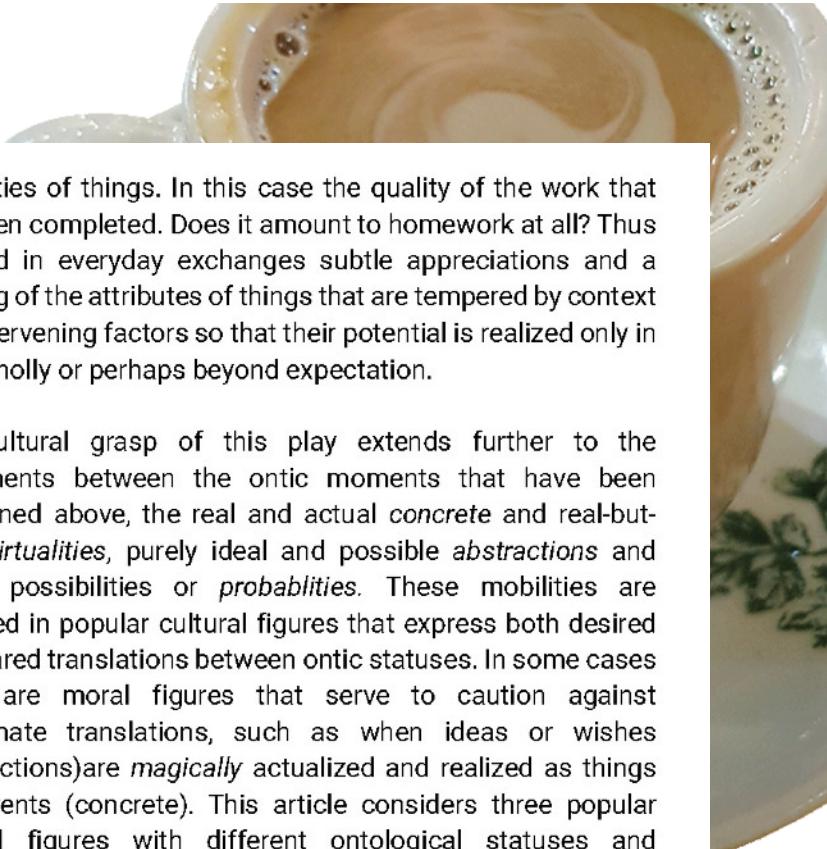


### **Three Figures of the Virtual: Angels, Ghosts and Zombies.**

**Rob Shields, University of Alberta**

One of the discoveries in research on the virtual has been the acuity of everyday language in precisely distinguishing between the different ontological statuses that things can have. This is exemplified in cases such as an eight-year-old's response to a parent's inquiry that their homework is 'virtually complete' so they can then now go out and play? Offering a virtuality, an as-if-complete status, in place of actual completion is a classic language game.

One is left to ascertain the degree to which homework is actually, concretely finished and to what extent is it executed with attention and quality? Some may also reflect on the importance of homework as a both a regimen and symbol of discipline. Such musings pass in a flash without analytical comment. However, there is a common incisiveness to any response to the child's proposed substitution of and play between ontic statuses. The play of the virtual 'as if' against the actuality of materials and situations reaches further to embrace – or to defy – the symbolic, representational qualities of things that abstracts from them elaborate connotations and symbolism. Homework as discipline. In addition, this game is not only linguistic but also actual, for it must include questions concerning the performative actualization of the various



capacities of things. In this case the quality of the work that has been completed. Does it amount to homework at all? Thus we find in everyday exchanges subtle appreciations and a juggling of the attributes of things that are tempered by context and intervening factors so that their potential is realized only in part, wholly or perhaps beyond expectation.

The cultural grasp of this play extends further to the movements between the ontic moments that have been mentioned above, the real and actual concrete and real-but-ideal *virtualities*, purely ideal and possible *abstractions* and actual possibilities or *probabilities*. These mobilities are captured in popular cultural figures that express both desired and feared translations between ontic statuses. In some cases these are moral figures that serve to caution against illegitimate translations, such as when ideas or wishes (abstractions) are *magically* actualized and realized as things and events (concrete). This article considers three popular cultural figures with different ontological statuses and qualities. In popular culture, angels, ghosts, zombies and others preside over specific ontic translations.

Ghosts and apparitions are virtual (they are reputed to be real but have no material substance). They cross into actuality as manifestations that have actual effects (hauntings). Angels appear in dreams to foretell the future (probable-virtual). Angels as messengers, witnesses and guardians provoke chains of actual events, connecting the divine and concrete. To this day, Europeans perceive outlines of Greek mythical figures abstracted in the constellations (concrete-abstract). The figures of Fate and Time preside over secular, modernist mythologies of

progress. And the almond-eyed silhouette of the Alien has moved 'creatures from outer space' from being fantastic (abstract) fictions into figures of the probable, beings whose existence is debated as much in the virtual mode of recovered memories of 'alien abduction' as in the fictional television series *X-Files* (Dean).

#### **Angels: 'Besides creating concepts philosophy creates characters'**

As Michel Serres notes (Serres and Latour 1995:74), in Adamic religions, angels serve to deliver divine judgment, to deliver spiritual messages and accompany and guard persons. They appear to explain the miraculous or to give voice to the divine. They are figures of the crossing over or *realization* of the abstract idea into the virtual. They relay a message by taking on human form, as if they were human. These figures become real but are not actual in the sense of flesh or of actual humanity. Thus they do not convey any message whatsoever, but only divine messages – the word, *logos* – and their destination is always the human via a virtual as-if-ness. They are figures of transmission: they link spheres or worlds, do not create, they are invisible and intangible, disappearing into their message as pure transmitters (Kramer 2015; Serres 1995).

The angel is an allegory of the message. Angels are sent: *Missus est Gabriel ángelus* (Luke 1:26). The Greek *angeloi* derives from the *angeréion*, the ancient Persian term for attendants of the postal relay. Augustine notes that they are never merely present but are active and constantly in motion between the divine and human (Kramer 2015).

Michel Serres (1995) and Bruno Latour comment on the communicative role of angels as envoys who also 'observe more subtly than we can' (1995:74). Angels are figures of information. Angels create proximities between categorically separated states and bodies such as persons and the divine. These interventions change the cultural topology and conceptual landscape of belief by drawing separated categories together. As metaphorical figures, angels are restless troublemakers for cultural and philosophical categories, always in boisterous motion (1995:118). This is better said by a contributor to *Villes-Noires* online who comments on the angels of Nigerian Fulani's:

For centuries, Fulani angels (Ikabwa) have been crossing the world on both volitional and forced journeys. Unless subjected, they neither sow nor reap. Rather, they tend to gatherings of all kinds. In the most obscure or deteriorated situations, where things seem to veer out of control, come apart, they gather up the leftovers, the discordant and discrepant, into bundles that refuse value or usefulness. Inexplicable ties, the coming into existence of things that don't belong, together, at once. How many assemblies do their work unnoticed? Angels lend an image, a body into situations without them, when there are no means for what is present to hang together, to know what they are or what they could do (Simone 2011).

Known only through their effects (Massumi 2002:255), angels open up the virtual to direct human perception. For Walter Benjamin, it is his *angelus novus* who gazes backward from the present toward the trail of wreckage that is the past, all the while being blown backward into the future. Condensing the

division of past, present and future (Chambers 1994:135), the angels announce history as becoming and as the once actual but still real past from which the present emerges.

Today, exposed to and assimilating information ever more quickly, in placing our faith in our online cyber-identity we become ciphers of ourselves, tattooed with information (Kroker 1994); we become like angels, ontic messengers passing information between widely separated territories.

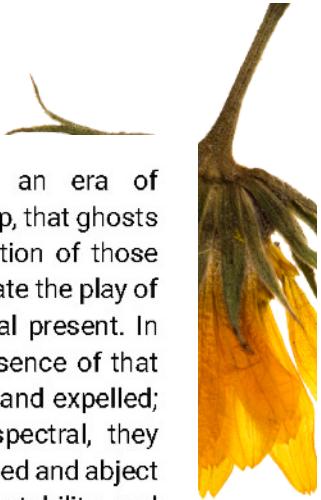
Angels illustrate the concept of mediality because their embodied manifestations facilitate communication with God while at the same time implying the impossibility of direct communication between heaven and earth. The connection between God and humans thus remains unidirectional, and it is only achieved through the process of embodiment, as angels can only communicate with humans in so far as they themselves also assume human form (Kramer 2015:15).

	Real	← Realisation      Abstraction →	Possible
	<b>Virtual</b> (intangibles, spatialisations, 'as if')	← Realisation Angels	<b>Abstract</b> (representations, maps, place-images, borders)
↑ Idealisation  ↓ Actualisation	<b>Virtualisation</b>	↖	↗
	<b>Syncretic Zombie</b>	↖	↘
	<b>Actualisation Ghosts</b>		
<b>Actual</b>	<b>Concrete</b> (tangible objects, constructions, material)	← →	<b>Probable</b> (statistical %, risks, political economics of values)

Tetralogy of the Existing: Three Figures of Passage across the onto-epistemological fields

**Ghosts 'Have a politics'**

Ghosts, it seems, have a politics, and it should

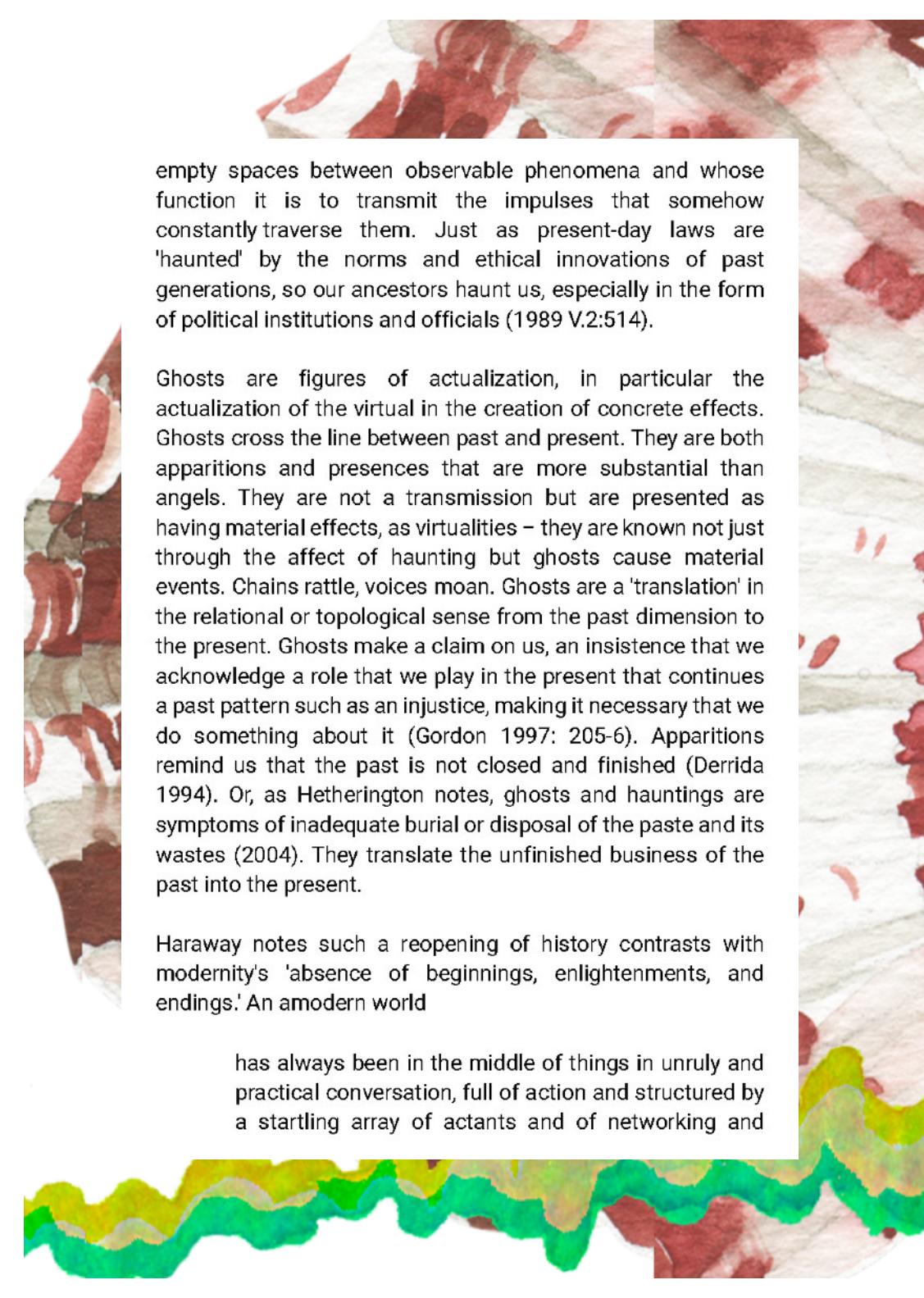


therefore come as no surprise, in an era of decolonizing and anti-colonial scholarship, that ghosts have increasingly occupied the imagination of those who aim to trouble, uncover, and interrogate the play of the colonial past in this ongoing colonial present. In recent writings ghosts allude to the presence of that which has been excluded, marginalized, and expelled; although themselves immaterial and spectral, they gesture towards the materiality of colonized and abject bodies. Ghosts unsettle the assumed stability and integrity of western temporalities and spatialities and seem to embody the mismatch between the ideal and the real, the present and the absent (Cameron 2008:384).

'Ghost stories are never just reflections. They are social critiques camouflaged with cobwebs; the past clamouring for redress. The writer Philip Ball has described traditional ghosts as social conservatives who enforce norms – the visitors to Ebenezer Scrooge, for example' (Sehgal 2018). King Hamlet, murdered father of the Danish prince in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, demands vengeance and justice. Juan Rulfo's 1955 novel *Pedro Paramo* (1994) in which the entirety of mythical Comala is haunted by the murmuring of the dead exploited by the hero's father (De León 2018). Thus, to quote Sehgal again, 'In the modern ghost story, especially the American kind, something different occurs. Ghosts protest... norms that killed them (2018).

'Modern man' [sic], says Spencer in his *Principles of Sociology*, recognizes influences that are 'usually intangible, inaudible, invisible; and yet which he regards as operative upon him' (1898 V.3:159). For Spencer, it is ghosts who inhabit the problematic





empty spaces between observable phenomena and whose function it is to transmit the impulses that somehow constantly traverse them. Just as present-day laws are 'haunted' by the norms and ethical innovations of past generations, so our ancestors haunt us, especially in the form of political institutions and officials (1989 V.2:514).

Ghosts are figures of actualization, in particular the actualization of the virtual in the creation of concrete effects. Ghosts cross the line between past and present. They are both apparitions and presences that are more substantial than angels. They are not a transmission but are presented as having material effects, as virtualities – they are known not just through the affect of haunting but ghosts cause material events. Chains rattle, voices moan. Ghosts are a 'translation' in the relational or topological sense from the past dimension to the present. Ghosts make a claim on us, an insistence that we acknowledge a role that we play in the present that continues a past pattern such as an injustice, making it necessary that we do something about it (Gordon 1997: 205-6). Apparitions remind us that the past is not closed and finished (Derrida 1994). Or, as Hetherington notes, ghosts and hauntings are symptoms of inadequate burial or disposal of the past and its wastes (2004). They translate the unfinished business of the past into the present.

Haraway notes such a reopening of history contrasts with modernity's 'absence of beginnings, enlightenments, and endings.' An amodern world

has always been in the middle of things in unruly and practical conversation, full of action and structured by a startling array of actants and of networking and

unequal collectives. The much-criticized inability of structuralist devices to provide the narrative of diachronic history, of progress through time, will be my semiotic square's greatest virtue. The shape of my amodern history will have a different geometry, not of progress but of permanent and multi-patterned interaction through which lives and worlds get built, human and unhuman... (Haraway 1992:305).

Ghosts offer not only an ontological challenge to the categories by which we parse being or the existent. By implication ghosts offer an epistemological challenge to the closures placed on our understanding. Hauntings open uncanny lines of relation and relevance that have been denied or repressed by contemporary relations of power and knowledge. The foundational violence of modernity has long been whitewashed. Ghosts are figures of challenge.

While ghosts open up time and challenge historical closure, they not only bring the past (what was once material and is now real-but-ideal) into the actually real. Ghosts are largely tied to places. They haunt buildings, forests, sometimes specific people. This spatial immobility limits ghosts. The living may flee elsewhere and avoid haunted houses. In the case of such hauntings, topophobia is a solution to other historical phobias and temporal anxieties of repressed memory, unresolved conflicts and injustices. De León (2018) describes ghosts as presences we know are there but which we can't touch but also places that are enchanted, magical, reputed but lost *Xanadú*. However, ghostly places are not just 'lost' but forgotten and waiting to be rediscovered, like the fourth century Greek navigator Piteas's *Thule*, the farthest island north of the British Isles and west of Scandinavia, reputed lost for centuries but



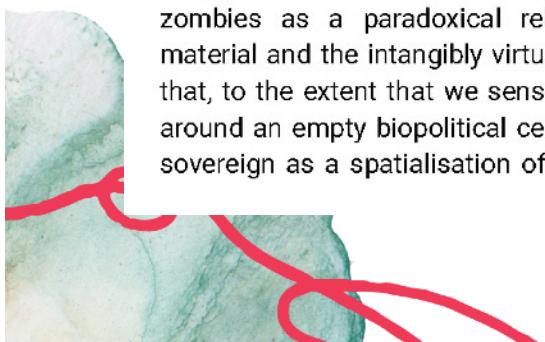
rediscovered as the Faroe Islands and hence defined as 'a place beyond the borders of the known world.'

Intrusions into the present and known are unwelcome category violations that we are often unprepared to deal with in the cultures of Western modernity. Ghosts are kept at bay, propitiated, by offerings and rituals that demonstrated the continued attention and respect of the living for the dead. This is an active but non-nostalgic relation to the past and the other and ahuman.

### ***Zombies 'are more terrifying than the settlers'***

Those most soulless and modern of monsters, zombies, the living dead are oxymoronic transgressions of both the actual and ideal. Their impossible nature, or rather their fusion of nature and artifice, gives them their horrifying quality. They may be fantasies and thus imaginary fictions but zombies mark the virtualization of the material body. Apparently without subjectivity, the zombie is a body without soul or conscience. They are animated corpses who spread their condition to the living like a plague. To be animated but dead is to be 'as if alive.' Staring without comprehension, in their Hollywood treatment, zombies are much more 'as if alive' than 'as if dead' although this could be altered as a matter of stress in a given novel or cultural work.

Themes of contagion, death, soul, mechanical automatic responses, colonialism and identity are often associated with zombies as a paradoxical relation between the tangibly material and the intangibly virtual or ideally-real. Minea notes that, to the extent that we sense our alienated lives spinning around an empty biopolitical centre, the absent and obsolete sovereign as a spatialisation of central power, we live in the



condition of zombies. The state has lost its historical biopolitical mission of defining life for bodies. That is, we are without a definition of what the human is. What is a life worth living? (Minea 2007:79). The zombie is thus the human reduced to the status of the beast in a monstrous mob that is not even organized to the level of a pack, the social form of wolves, nor as a pride, the social form of lions (Cano-Hila 2020).

Zombies express a contemporary abjection, they are wretched figures, to borrow from Fanon. Such a status arises from being located paradoxically askew ontic categories. The alienated, unclaimed person is both alive and dead, both actually living and yet spiritually and intellectually dead. They have passion but no politics in as much as both principles and ethics are lacking. As such, the reanimated dead are inassimilable (see Tourneur 1943).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon describes the 'petrification' of the rural Algerian peasantry under French colonialism using the image of the zombie (Fanon 1965:61, 73, 87). Resistance to colonization by adhering to tradition leads to a fascination with old superstitions, 'terrifying myths' (Fanon 1965:43) and rituals as outlets for frustration, they effectively distract themselves from the hard realities of colonialism to the benefit of the colonizers: "Believe me," Fanon (1965:40) says, "the zombies are more terrifying than the settlers; and in consequence the problem is no longer that of "Keeping oneself right with the colonial world and its barbed-wire entanglements, but of considering three times before urinating, spitting or going out into the night" (Fanon 1965:40 cited in Ficek 2011:76).

Petrification, to turn something into stone: 'The organic

becomes inorganic; the dynamic becomes static... petrified objects are entirely what they are, and no longer what they are not which is to say that they are *unfree things*' (Sartre 1992:100). In the colonial world, according to Fanon, 'the colonized are denied their freedom and thus relegated ontologically to the status of things—things like stones. They are denied their dynamism; they are forced violently into an unfree and inhuman "zone of nonbeing." (Fanon 1967a:8 cited in Ficek 2011: 76). This loss is an estrangement from virtuality and materiality at one and the same time to be caught in a liminal zone betwixt and between actual and ideal with neither the demonstrative satisfactions of haunting nor the reception of angelic tidings.

Fanon's zombie is a subaltern figure, drawn from his experience in the Caribbean. Although the idea can be found in many mythologies, the best known originate from Haïtian voodoo (Sheller 2003) where the zombie might have expressed the tragic labour of enslaved Africans in the form of a catatonic hysteria (e.g. St. Mery 1797: 52). Stratton (2011) has pointed out the Agambenian 'bare life' shared between slaves, zombies and 'illegal migrants' – actually refugees of war in the Middle East and North Africa – on European borders. They are all portrayed as potentially or actually laying siege to a place identified as a refuge of the human and, since Romero, the bastion of social norms and relations (Browning 2011).

Gunn and Treat locate the 20<sup>th</sup> century zombie in relation to the lumpen proletariat, interpellated by ideology into a state of false consciousness. This modern mass does not follow the conventions of polite society nor the tastes of elite culture. They are not amenable to reason but are possessed and vivified by an un-human nature.

In Hollywood films such as *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968) masses of zombies terrorize a survival of the fittest type of individual, alienated from this anti-social mob. They multiply by contagion. There are similarities with the notion of the angel as a figure of transmission but in the case of the zombie there is no message, just death, noise, static. An isolated individual experiences the horror of loss of social connection in a siege mentality panic.

Zombies are plural, a multitude that forecloses the future and the possibility of hope. As a negative force, the inexorable aggression of the undead in popular cultural works presents a black mirror to society. A merely destructive and consuming but directionless mass is a negative collective form that stands not as a critique but as a cynical hopelessness in the face of mass consumption and sustainability. The zombie is a body with only basic, animal drives rather than the complexity of the subconscious or the Symbolic. As a result, the zombie personifies the Real, a kind of natural state of all encompassing, violent consumption.

We can reverse the zombie figure as a mirror to anxieties of the State, elites and cultural orthodoxy posed by mass phenomena beyond their control. Thus the zombie changes historically from the labouring slave figure of the Haitian African zombie to the mindless and ravenous mass consumer and to refugee flows driven by war and climate change. These latter are white zombies who assail white and European and American privilege and spaces of privilege.

### **Figures of the Virtual**

These three figures of transmission,

translation and transgression draw the virtual into the ontic life of otherwise entirely static objects, on the one hand, or insubstantial imaginings, on the other. They are figures that put different aspects of existence into play and are foundations of experience. As such they embody key phenomenological operators. This is to contend that ghosts, angels and zombies are ontological figures, not merely rhetorical or linguistic tropes that are confined to language games. They affect both the understanding of the object by colouring the situational ethos and reception of every entity. They furthermore contribute to aspects of its very existence.

Both angels and ghosts open up the present by folding time and space to allow new presences, the ghost from the past or the angel from another sphere. Zombies frustrate the separation of the Real and Ideal by confounding our understanding of the Real and of the forms and limits of life. All three are figures of passage. They relate and represent the dynamism of the ontological that exceeds the ontic categories such as the Concrete or Abstract. Those are merely points of rest. In everyday experience, these categories are never available purely. Hence the entire phenomenological project to isolate them and cut them from the motility of lived



experience and perception. However, these figures transcend both the categories of the tetralogy and also their relations, as illustrated in the Table. They open new dimensions or axes in which the categories are drawn into exchange and into play where one status might pose as another or mask the truth nature of a situation. This opens new lines of investigation into other ontic figures of passage in popular culture: witches, magicians, aliens, vampires, superheroes, even the figure of the expert. And beyond these figures, returning to the child we started with, what are the political and rhetorical games and manipulations that are possible? Even the false or masked is part of this ontic play. This opens up the manipulation of not only the present but of the past as remembered and the future as anticipated.

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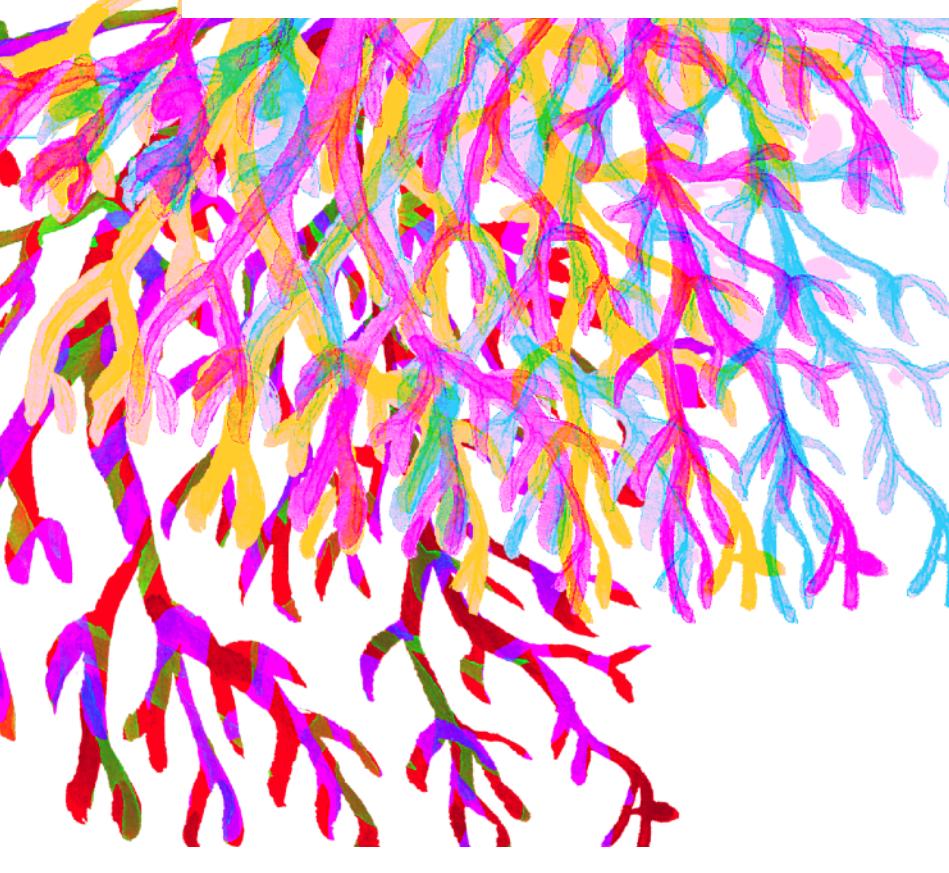
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# SOCIOLOGICAL HOROSCOPES

ARIES

commit to honesty.

TAURUS

possibility

consider the

GEMINI

You

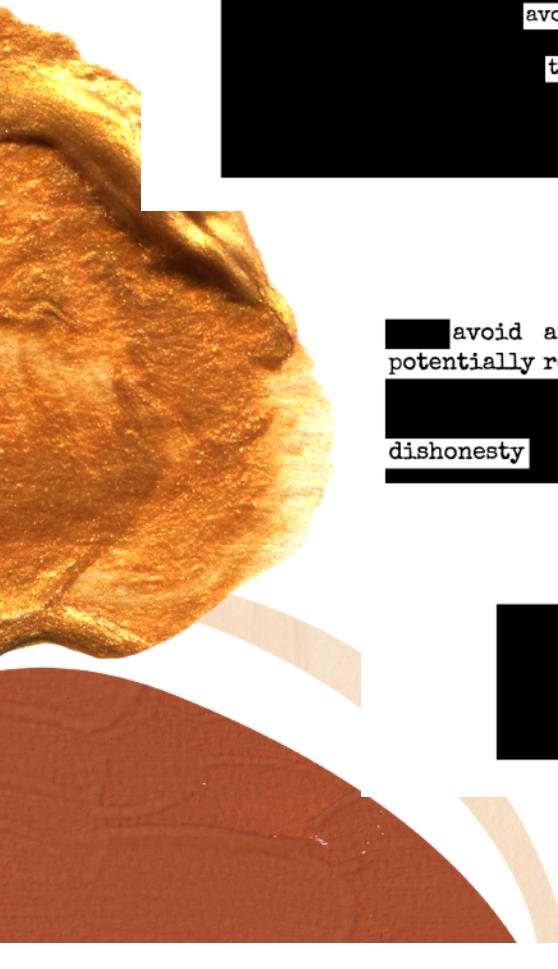
are responsible

CANCER

imagine it  
important,

is relevant and

From the 2019-2020 syllabus of "Material and Virtual Culture" at the University of Alberta, by Rob Shields



## LEO

expect  
an 'intervention'

**SOCIO  
LOGICAL  
HOROS  
COPES**

## VIRGO

avoid  
the  
doubt

## LIBRA

avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in

dishonesty

## SCORPIO

do not tolerate  
that  
person

# SOCIOLOGICAL HOROSCOPE

## SAGITTARIUS

discuss it

## CAPRICORN

ware that [REDACTED] be  
[REDACTED] dubious and unreliable  
[REDACTED]  
Heart

## AQUARIUS

If in doubt,  
ask

## PISCES

memory, is  
essential for reconciliation.

Keen to contribute?

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Benjamin's critical  
experiments with fiction

Benjamin reminds us that  
“the facts, alone, will  
not save us”

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