

Playing Inside the Lines: The Fold, the *Dispositif*, and the Return Home

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine a particular aspect of the communicological dynamic of play and boundaries. Working from an existential concept of play as creative, dialogic expression (and as the vehicle of new experience and new thought), I will explore the human experience of limits, borders, and scaffolds. The existence of a grammar is vital to the function of both a language and a cultural system. But, as speakers and participants, we do not learn the language from the outside in. That is, we start speaking the language before we know anything about it. As infants, we hear sounds and observe gestures and we imitate them. Within this fold, we gain consciousness of an outside. Mastery of grammars and codes enable us to enter worlds seemingly closed off by boundaries, seemingly transforming alien and outsider status into group membership and inhabitant. As such, this paper opens up the question of what it means to be outside and inside. The standpoint of this paper is semiotic, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic. To this end, the essay will closely engage with the thinking of Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, Foucault, and Kristeva.

Keywords: language acquisition, fold, flesh (chiasm), Deleuze, Foucault, Chora, Kristeva

1. The Fundamental Fold (Being on the Inside): The Acquisition of Language and the Play of Life

Although I did not know my grandfather well—he died when I was five years of age—all of his seven children told stories about his ability with languages. According to the family narrative, he could speak five languages: Lithuanian (his native tongue), Estonian, Latvian, Russian, and English. The languages I remember hearing him speak were Lithuanian, which he spoke with my grandmother, and English. The truth was that he

struggled with English. It was the last of the languages he acquired, and it was a language he only needed to speak to manage basic affairs of life: his work, which consisted of loading heavy objects onto a rail car, his limited encounters with commerce and salespeople, his neighborhood (which was largely second-generation German), and his younger children (who spoke far less Lithuanian than their older siblings).

The truth, which I learned a bit later in life, was that both my grandfather and grandmother were illiterate. My grandmother was illiterate in both English and Lithuanian, and my grandfather was illiterate in *all five* languages that he spoke. My grandfather learned all of his languages through experiential immersion. That is, he heard words spoken and then deciphered how he might speak them himself to achieve the effect he desired. Which is to say that my grandfather learned his languages in much the same way *we all* learn our first language: *from the inside out*. What an infant hears when he or she is in the fold of his or her loving family is a kind of vocal music. It enables attunement to the immediate presence of bodies—their anxieties and their delights, their faces and, of course, their eyes, their hands, their skin, their touch, all of it orchestrated by the tonality of voice.

Infant speech is a tonal doubling of the infant's relational world, which is to say: its *flesh*. The sound forms that are uttered through the infant's body, as it wills itself toward participation in this fold beyond its whimpers and giggles, beyond its shrieks and cries are a preconscious exercise of its physiological maturation. The infant joins its environment and, as such, further *becomes with* its environment by mimicking its environment and it does so in order to stretch itself against it. Merleau-Ponty (1973, p. 14), borrowing from Delacroix, proclaims: "The child bathes in language." In a sense, then, the child's first act of language is a kind of swimming. He or she feels the current of expression and makes his or own waves above and beneath the surface.

Eva Simms has observed, following the work of Merleau-Ponty and based upon her own empirical investigations: "The beat of the language sequence, the melody of consonants and vowels, and the temporal unfolding of the speech patterns are all elements of the music of language. Prior to encountering language as a referential or conceptual tool, human infants are bathed in its musical substructure" (Simms, 2008, p. 166). Language, of course, is both an extension and the fundamental code of a culture, and serves as reinforcement and reification of its dominant social patterns but, nonetheless, it is learned in infancy *from within a fold*. Simms (2008, p. 168) notes: "We know that after only a few days newborns recognize and prefer the sound pattern of the language that is spoken around them, and that by eight to twelve months they narrow down their ability to discriminate between the phonemes of all languages to just the sounds used in their mother tongue."

My grandfather learned the oral sound forms and grammar of Lithuanian the same way in which I learned the oral sound forms and grammar of English. Simply, we listened and imitated. His acquisition of Estonian, Latvian, and Russian, from what my family has told me, came from a process of secondary immersion. Based on turmoil and travel, he

heard all of the languages frequently and could discern their similarities and differences in sound and oral grammar. He spoke all of them as a peasant, requiring of them only the simplest of indicators, demands, and civil discourse. Yet, at that time, he was not—at least not statistically—an outsider to the language culture in the Baltic region. At the turn of the century, most people of that region conducted their lives as part of a, principally, oral culture. Again, he was not an outsider; he was *within the fold*. That which constituted the *outside, his outside*, is, according to everyone in my family who told stories of my grandfather, what motivated him to leave Lithuania and come to America. In America, he would be an outsider, but he was also of a belief (perhaps more of a naïve faith) that an “American outside” would not be a turbulent and terrifying void.

As an illiterate, my grandfather certainly accepted the reality of written language—that is, the existence of a literate typographic culture whose grammar favored even simple sentences structured as an analog to mathematical propositions. It was not essential that he do so; one can breathe without accepting the reality of air or even knowing about such a thing as oxygen. But, even in Lithuania, writing was, in some form or another, all around him, on street signs, on shops, on money, on the occasional documents that would cross his hands and which he would fake his way around. It was that the *tonality* of this culture did not threaten him until he began to make his move in his late teens. He sought, as Foucault intoned in *The Use of Pleasure*, “to get free of himself” (Foucault, 1985, p. 8)—not to reconstruct his known existence entirely or to deceive the world that he was not in any way what he once had been, but to enter and explore a new fold and, with it, a new outside.

The language of his new cultural world was American English, which he learned mimetically and, of course, through trial and error. In this language, my grandfather was often confused and misunderstood, even as he approached his final years. Which is to say, after a certain point of basic, functional competence, his English did not improve. His intimate life and his inner life was lived in Lithuanian and, as I picture him from my childhood, often in silence.

Deleuze (1986, p. 96) notes that “Foucault continually submits interiority to a radical critique.” What is “inner” and “outer” to experience, to life, labor, and language, irrespective of who is speaking and who is subject to analysis is not an obvious matter. Deleuze (1986, p. 99) comments, again after Foucault: “the inside will always be the doubling *of* the outside.” In this regard, that which we assume to be “inner” simply because we do not know it, or do not know it yet, or have not asked the right question, is not “inner” because it is somehow hidden away, stowed beneath all that is visible. If that which remains inner still seems hidden, it is hidden in language. It is hidden in signs. It is hidden in all that we express of ourselves. It is to be found on the other side of the fold, that doubling of the same that literally ropes us or, perhaps, snags us into a thinking of difference.

Deleuze, whose particular concept of the fold (see Deleuze, 1993) resonated so fully with my initial vision for this essay, draws deeply and extensively from Foucault’s (1986) book on Rousset, Foucault’s lifelong thinking on madness, and the epistemology laid out

in the *Archaeology* (1972). Deleuze (1986, p. 99) writes: “in all his work, Foucault seems haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea. On the subject of the Renaissance madman who is put to sea in his boat, Foucault wrote: ‘he is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely [...] a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of the passage.’” In this regard, my grandfather became, in a sense, a prisoner of the freedom he associated with living in this new fold. Yet, at the same time, my grandfather did not desire “freedom” (at least understood in a philosophical sense) or liberation or authenticity. These are concepts that dwell in the domain of a literate consciousness along with the waves of discourse that replicate and recur beyond it. He was going to be a captive, an *abductee*, of a world of technological, economic, and political change that was being driven by ideas, ideas given birth in the reformed language of an enlightened authorial, authoritative culture, a culture of words dwelling in print typography prior to their embodied and repeated enunciation.

Deleuze (1986, p. 99) summarizes his reflection on Foucault: “Thought has no other being than this madman himself.” Now, I do not take this precisely as a statement about my grandfather. That is, he was not a madman. He set sail for the new world as an outsider and, for a while, unfolded into its creases and patterns. After some adventures in the Dakotas, up around the mining claims in the Black Hills, my grandfather found a mate and decided to settle down and raise children, making his home in a town near St. Louis in which there were no other Lithuanians. Then he gradually folded back into himself, into the world of his family, his fold, never venturing much further than he could walk, until he died at home in 1961. None of us were at all confident of his age. There were no birth records. In fact, none of us were completely certain of his given Lithuanian name. (We have speculated it to be Kasimir Mikilitis; importantly, however, his wife, my grandmother, never [to anyone’s memory] called him by this name.) He died, as he lived in America, as Charles Mitchell, a name given to him at Ellis Island because he could not spell the name he repeated again and again when asked of his identity. As such he lived as both an outsider and as a double. To his *younger* children, who spoke increasingly less Lithuanian by virtue of their immersion in school, church, and neighborhood, he was a mystery. To the *older* children, whose *first words* were Lithuanian, he was less inscrutable, but still not a typical American man. He confronted what he took to be an increasingly hostile and perplexing world and then, through his immersion in a culture that was beyond his reach, became an outsider—not an American but, officially, a Legal Alien—that is, an alien, but an alien who was lawful. Lawful, legal; etymologically, semantically, born under the same sign as *loyal*.

2. Thought from the Outside: Family, Discipline, and *Dispositif*

Perhaps it may best be said: thought has no other being than that which is present—i.e.,

that which *lives*—on the outside. My grandfather was subject to the same sets of power relations that affected all persons of his era, alien and citizen alike. As one of the millions of 19th and 20th century immigrants, my grandfather was folded into the workforce, becoming an economic statistic. What stands out in all of the stories (as well as my brief memories) was his indifference to the tones and rhythms of the American dream as it was rolled out in the popular media of his era. As such, *as a man*, he was not immediately intelligible and was, hence, not immediately lovable, not even to his children who valued him as their father. In the lyric, rhythm, myth, and narrative of Americana that swallowed them all up in the tides of film and radio and television, they did not know him as well as they knew Jimmy Stewart or Frank Sinatra.

Again, thought has no other being than that which is present on the outside. There, on the other side of the fold, thought must be translated. It is not *familiar*—that is, at least *as thought*. It is not lovable. Thought from the outside may or may not be lawful, but, by virtue of its position outside the fold, it has no existential obligation to be *loyal*. The outside of thought becomes present to us for the first time when, as children, we begin to recognize its form in the *written word*. Children, in becoming literate, come face to face with the *outside* of the language that has already enabled them to join the chorus of their family system and neighborhood. *It is a task* to acquire this skill, and some persons, even now, get left behind. Even further, there are hierarchies and strata that must be scaled and navigated as the young but maturing reader seeks to gain entry into the discursive realms of the arts and sciences upon which complex civilizations have been constructed. This is the broad outline of the disciplinary society that Foucault diagnosed as coming into being through the Enlightenment and the Modern age.

As we assess the scaffolds of language (as *langue*, as grammar, and as discourse) as well as the tools that enabled it to have arrived at a place of prominence not just in everyday existence but in the lives of children, we take note of a range of difficulties. There are exclusions of voice, there are failures to learn, there are refusals to participate, there are acts of sabotage—and this is among those who understand, those for whom the folds need not be extensively translated.

The concept of a map, any sort of map, is always a design that comes into being by way of the outside. It is one's speculative, probable sense of what one might encounter as he or she steps into this new space. It may be nothing more than an impression, an image, much like the pictures one looks at when contemplating a new place to visit, or persons she or he might meet. Having a map of the complex psychological world in which one has been immersed since infancy enables a new encounter with this world. It shows children the outside of their oral milieu—not just that there *is* an outside, but that it has a logic and a form that is external to anything that has happened in their household. One becomes able to transcend the grammatizations of childhood experience and enter into new folds, new territories, new experience. One can develop a capacity to touch and imagine beyond that which has been excluded (for *whatever* reasons) within the fold of this deep and primary realm.

It is quite important, I think, to draw focus to a point that, in my assessment, simply has not been satisfactorily addressed in the work of Foucault and Deleuze, as well as virtually all of the writing that has converged on the concept of the fold connected with both of these thinkers. What has been missing is a clear distinction between the fold and the *dispositif*. The *dispositif* is Foucault's preferred term for that which is often translated as a "disciplinary apparatus." The fold of the family is, no doubt, a *dispositif*; at least that has been its function for thousands of years. I maintain that the fold of the family is the *dispositif par excellence*. The child, through acts of attention, affection, affirmation, and approval feels a sense of home within the family; through experiences of punishment and invisibility he or she experiences alienation. Taken together, it is the archive and museum of childhood experience; it is one's audio-visual narrative of family life.

A further differentiation should, I think, be drawn between the *dispositif* and the fold, particularly in terms of how they are experienced as much as how they have historically functioned. The former is experienced primarily in terms of boundaries. It entails commitments (and within these commitments, promises), it entails at least one level of hierarchy (although multiple levels are common), and it entails a taxonomy for judgment and the acknowledgment of transformation. (For example, in school, one passes through grades and can earn degrees; in a family, a child can feel rewarded by being called a young man or young woman, and can earn special privileges.) Foucault found all of the elements for the possible emergence of a disciplinary society during antiquity, but he saw the actual rise of a disciplinary society occur after the dawn of the Enlightenment—from the family to the school, from the school to various architectures of governmentality such as the clinic, the prison, the military, the corporation. The tools and strategy of disciplinarity even transformed the Church in its modes of governmentality, all of which, in the West, can be found in the various doctrines of the Reformation. Giorgio Agamben (2009, p. 14) offers his own definition: "I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings."

As well, I think it can be said that a *dispositif* is always a fold, but a fold is not necessarily a *dispositif*. Again, the fold of the family, a fold to which we may, at times, *not* wish to return but we will, of course, invariably return as we trace the genesis of our habits, is creased deeply within us. For the child, it is as *an envelopment*. Exit from this fold may seem unambiguously real as the young person prepares to spread her or his wings and fly away from the nest. Nonetheless, the foundational memories of this place make it much more than just an archive or a museum of childhood experience. Simply, intense feelings tied to family experiences can be neutralized by way of explication and counter-memory, but they can never be completely eclipsed. Languages and discourses can be acquired and mastered, but our learning to speak as a child—that is, entering into our mother tongue—is a once in a lifetime experience. The envelope of the family, whether open or sealed and, of course, *however* open or sealed, is the fundamental archive of the conscious mind in what Locke (1690/1969, p. 9) called "the continuity of

consciousness.”

In the souvenir memory echoing through my grandfather in his silence and, as well, in his occasional speech, are lessons learned. In the archive of his conscious reflections are voices (some faint, some his own) and the voices of remembered episodes speaking in proverb, proverbs gained not through literary encounter but through trial and error, through the process of aging—not poetry, at least not in any literary sense, but the simple truth of *bios*. One does not need a map of intimately familiar territory. One may keep account of it through memorabilia of all sorts, but souvenirs do not function as maps. A map is a strategy, it functions as an abstract device that gives an outline of both the territory and its limits, the fold and its creases, its seams, its inside and outside. Among those who have followed the linguistic turn in modern philosophy there has been a temptation to simply echo what I will call an oddly neo-Korzybskian sentiment that “the map,” as a concept, constitutes all of representation—in other words, that the map *is* language itself. A map, I would argue, is a unique function of language and representation inasmuch as the map takes us to the border of things, to the edge of the fold. A map, in other words, suggests to us (by revealing a code) what is inside the lines and what is outside the lines. The map, for those of us *outside* of a given fold, lets us know what we cannot as yet see, what is hidden, what both *can* and *perhaps does* reside within. Rather than thinking in terms of “maps and territories,” we are better off thinking in terms of the map itself *as a kind of code*. A map is coterminous with any system of rules or with any task of interpretation. As such, it is not so much a matter of our finding “the key” to liberate us if we seek an escape from the fold, it is the *mastery* of the map, that is, of the code and its composition, that *enables* our exit. So much of what constitutes disciplinarity in Foucault’s concept of disciplinary culture concerns mastering the code that is given on the outside—in other words, learning one’s world as completely as possible *from the outside in*.

3. Maps and Legends, Legends and Narrative Threads, Threads and Knots

Standing outside of *both* language and discourse describes our initial encounter with all that we do not know. We begin this encounter as children. Aside from the language (as both *langue* and as discourse) in which we are immersed—whether bathed as infants or saturated through extended experience, all of the other forms of expression are learned from the outside in. It is this awareness of the existence of a diagram of experience that produces hesitations in expression and blind-spots in perception. Working one’s way inside of a fold that one has looked at *from the outside* is a common and recurrent aspect of a child’s development. It describes our passage from grade to grade. It is the story of our learning to play a musical instrument—such an odd and mysterious object on first contact—and then earning our place in the band. The learning curve is thus always a narrative arc.

Along the way, we also learn that the rules for entry can be ambiguous and unstable.

We discover that such is not merely a factor of the personality and functions of various folds but of the arbitrariness of power. It is at the edges of the fold that we encounter a vigilance regarding who belongs, who deserves entry, who should be expelled. Within the fold is a sense of place. But one cannot declare one's right of admittance. One cannot rupture the seams or break down the entryway. Rather, one is folded in, enfolded, woven into the fabric of the relationship. In this regard, the fold is literally a *text*. That is, it is a textile; it is woven from strands that then produce the cloth. In Greek mythology, the fates are the blind weavers of a tapestry, three mature feminine presences, sisters in the fold of an eternal family, the world's family, who keep account not merely of what has happened but, as well, what is *going* to happen by virtue of that which will be woven into the fiber and fabric of the knowable universe—or, colloquially, the universe as it was known in the noetic reality of myth, fable, and proverb. Into this fabric, into this making, this development, we are all interlaced, intertwined, interwoven, folded in.

It was a *semiotic development* that, in the myth of the Edenic Garden, constituted the *most* profound sin—the sin that resulted in our separation from the unspoken world of natural gesture (the gesture of *bios*) to the verbal gesture of creatures who, having devoured the fruits of *Gnosis*, found themselves on the outside of Paradise—forced for eternity to name things for themselves, to speak in a language that struggles between the forms, colors, and tones of light and dark, that simultaneously conceals as it reveals in its articulation. It can be said, at least in *that* sense, that the world of the *human* speaker, the human storyteller, begins outside of the fold, just as the world of mature adult life begins, often furtively, away from parental gazes and glances, once we realize that, yes, we are *each* doing *this*—whatever it is—on our own.

The map of the fold has its legend. The legend of the map is a special code. It is a code that consists of signs that explain symbols that are not as yet fully understood as a familiar language. This is to say, semantically (and in the historical hermeneutic that is the etymology of the word), that the “legend” of the map is its “lesson.” (Both stem from the Latin *legere*, meaning to read or to choose.) The map of the fold has its legend. And, so, the map of the fold has its lesson. The lesson offers us a path to a place in the world. It shows us the boundaries, it teaches us the law of entry and exit, and in its articulation, it produces a tonality of expression circulating through the fold.

The fold is, in short, a *style* of being. It is premised on the dyadic nature of consciousness. That is, beyond the monad with which philosophy wrestles up through Leibniz, the awareness of the existential other as not just a situation or a figure of one's being but a participant in the event of consciousness brings us to the realization that *one cannot engage the world as a perception of objects by oneself*. Just as one person alone cannot follow a rule and one person alone cannot speak a language (or follow a map), one person alone cannot visualize an object. Leonard Lawler (2003, p. 41) writes:

It is well known that Merleau-Ponty, before Foucault, used the image of the fold ... and, indeed the chiasm itself implies a fold, a four-fold. What we must conclude from our

discussion of the chiasm is that, for Merleau-Ponty, the visible and the invisible, words and things, are interlaced, folded tightly together. Indeed, archeology for Merleau-Ponty questions back into this tightly woven knot.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Foucault's archeology constitute attempts to loosen (if not unravel) this knot. They do so by problematizing the relations of words and things and, hence, of maps and the spaces they attempt to delineate, especially by way of their legends. It is an attempt to both restore and re-story vision to a world of objects that can no longer be accounted for *objectively*. Lawlor (2003, p. 42) writes: "According to Foucault, this discontinuity in which we now have two separate domains ... allows for an upsurge of the human sciences. Man [the human being] occupies now the fold between words and things." Foucault (1970, p. 342) comments as well: "[This gap, this interstice] is nothing more and nothing less than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think."

The distinction with regard to this space, this opening, this particular *mi-lieu* of flesh is really a matter *not* of entrance and exits as absolute points clearly mapped but, instead, a matter of how tight the knot is fastened around the threads and elements of experience. In this regard, it is a *personal* matter. That is, it involves persons, not spaces, just as it is persons who recognize the tonality of whatever fold they occupy. Allow me to be more specific: The fold is the site of human communication. More specifically, it is the site of communication at all four levels specified in Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson's (1951) seminal text. (Merleau-Ponty called the chiasm the four-fold; Ruesch and Bateson constitute another way of seeing this quadrilateral relationship.) As such, it can be lived and perceived as continuous and without clear boundaries. It is quite true that we are born into a fold—a fold that is also a fundamental *dispositif*. But in other cases we can set limits from the moment we enter. Or we can identify and discover a boundary at any point at which we have had enough or too much of the other person or persons with whom we have folded together (at which point then we loosen the threads and unfold away).

It is here that communicology, as the human science field exploring the experience of human communication, articulates *its* signs and its own legend. The study of discourse, after the thinking of both Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, is both historically and psychologically necessary inasmuch as the human propensity to loosen the threads on one another is (and has been for some time) *ironically* matched by a competing propensity to hold fast to certain legends, certain keys, whose patterns and connections govern the consciousness of a psychological order, an order that finds itself knotted to fixtures of culture that conflate the lesson of the map with the memory of experience itself.

The text of the human connection is multiple, doubled repeatedly both within and outside the chorus of voices encircling us from birth. A *chorus*, etymologically is, literally a dance, a movement in a circle. (This is to say: before the *song* and its lyric, was the *body* and its movement.) The Greek chorus enters so as to encircle, to envelope the voice of the characters, it encircles and entwines the literary movement of the play. All of

the intertwined threads of human movement are looped through one another. A knot is, literally, an intertwining of ropes, cords, yarns, strings, thread. In the opening lines of his book, *Knots*, R. D. Laing (1970, p. i) writes: “In these pages I have confined myself to laying out only some of those [patterns] I have actually seen. Words that come to mind to name them are: knots, tangles, fankles, impasses, disjunctions, whirligigs, binds.” Laing is thus examining human relationality at the level of fiber and strand. By the end of his book of reflective poetry, he zooms out to consider a larger web, beyond the warp and weft of personal choice and relational gaming. But mostly he is concerned with patterns in the fabric, not with the tapestry itself. He writes: “The patterns delineated here have not yet been classified by a Linnaeus of human bondage. They are all, perhaps, strangely familiar” (Laing, 1970, p. i).

4. Encompassing, Encirclement, and Homesickness

There is a chorus entwining vision, expression, and thought even in the silences of contemporary life or, rather, what are all too commonly taken to be silences in everyday life. This chorus bears a vital semiotic relationship to the concept of *chora* taken up by Derrida and Kristeva, each in their reflections on Plato. Plato uses the notion of *chora* (as *khôra*), broadly speaking, to designate a space outside of everyday commerce, the space surrounding the city, that encircles it, representing, conceptually, an in-between space, an interval outside of the affairs of normal business. For Derrida (1995) the *chora*, briefly summarized, designates the site of a passage, a space that serves as the setting for an experience that we have undergone but either cannot (or cannot quite) or do not wish to remember. It, then, is conceived as a site of return. For Kristeva, particularly as she interprets it in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva, 1984), the *chora* constitutes the wordless but phonic, tonal space between infant and mother. It is a place of relationality without expectation.

Irrespective of whatever other sort of site it might also be, it is the site of infancy and, as such, is the site of our first perceptions, our first love, our first words. We conceptually “revisit” this place to the extent that we *must* have been there before. We witness children in this fundamental mode of development and project ourselves back into and through its stages and movements. Critically, for both Derrida and Kristeva, the *chora* is not a space that should be romanticized. For when we return, we do not enter silently and without Self. No, we very much tend to return with words and, as well, with habits. Kristeva (1984, p. 26) writes: “Our discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it.”

The chorus of 21st century life has become ever increasingly encompassing. This term, *encompassing*, is employed by Jaspers (1971, pp. 15-30)—in German as *Das Umgreifende*—to designate the indefinite boundaries of *Existenz*; as we experience it, these are boundaries that envelope and suffuse all there is. What I have in mind as I reflect on the interpenetrating and encroaching chorus of sound and image is a deepening

sense of alienation in the folds of the encompassing limit conditions of communicative experience in an era defined by digital media. As we now reflect on the notions of citizenship, alien being, and the “law” in the context of the states of shock brought on by this new political era in the West, perhaps it might be wise to think about the character and performativity of alienation, of being foreigners in a world whose map is coded with a legend given in a language that feels increasingly distant from us (despite its noise and redundancy).

We have entered an era in which everyday human communication is experienced as some domain of performance. Unless a radical philosophy of communication (as *communicology*) teaches them otherwise, students in the classroom have come to assume all communication is, ultimately, encompassed by a logic of “public relations”—that Selfhood, essentially, entails managing one’s identity as a product and/or service on a premise of economic exchange. Human agency, thus, is performative value. As the fool observes in *As You Like It*, all the world has become a digital stage and a scene of imagistic performance and all the women and men upon it “merely players.” The play is conducted on stages (or platforms) through which the players continuously manage their profiles. Mere play, mere performance, is to move and express one’s bodily *Existenz* in harmony with the chorus, which now occupies the starring role in this drama and threads the fabric of the play with *its* memorable lines. The encircling, encompassing chorus does not so much fold us in as make it difficult (though not impossible) to move against the current, to step out of rhythm, to sing in one’s own voice.

Moreover, the ostensibly “new” movements of expression—the graffiti, the tattoos and piercings, the outsider voices of urban music, the gesture and performance of “hacking” (both of codes of all sorts and of everyday life), all seeming expressions of the *outside*—have become the familiar voice, movement, and image of popular culture. The outside is “in.” Even by the end of the 1960s, as Thomas Frank (1998) noted in *The Conquest of Cool*, the images and music of “youth culture in revolt” had been quietly commodified and were effectively used to sell cosmetics and household appliances.

None of this, of course, describes a *law* of contemporary citizenship. It is not a matter of legality. But, as a symbolism of the all-too-familiar in popular culture, it has become a matter of *loyalty*. The *forms* of non-alien, non-outsider being are given in the conventions of popular culture, which have become a legend of “con-formity.” The loyal conformist does not necessarily have an active consciousness of any level of alienation. So, it is in this particular context that I can offer an additional reflection on the *dispositif* of the contemporary technics of connection and meaning: The upside of the development of a disciplinary society—that is, of the modern governmentality of self and others—is that the hypothesis of such a being as an “Enlightened Individual” *can* be given a narrative path of evolution and becoming. Such notions as craft, beauty, art, knowledge, and discovery will, of course, be discussed and debated at length, but they will also be recognized and taught. The downside of this apparatus—discussed as a matter of “deterritorialization” by Deleuze and Guattari (1987)—is that the means and devices of observation and

expression transform simultaneously into modes of surveillance. Which is to say: people are swept up into the vortex of the emergent constellations and *assemblages* and get lost not in “the fold,” but within multiple folds, within bafflements and labyrinths of folds, the boundaries of which are simultaneously messages and codes. In this context, the image, (not just the “word”) literally, becomes the *thing*.

As infants and children we gain selfhood within the fold. (To quote Merleau-Ponty once again: “We are bathed in language.”) It is in this fold that we first learn to play, to swim in these metaphorical waters (creeks, rivers, lakes, oceans) of signs in order to connect the semiotic to the symbolic. The primordial symbolic for each of us is that *chora* which Kristeva describes in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, that special fold within the general fold through which we embody our deepest sense of home. Unlike the apparatuses and *dispositifs* outside of this fold, we *achieved nothing* to gain this seeming acceptance, approval, affection, and affirmation.

5. Finding a Home and Playing Outside

In his poem, “The Death of the Hired Man,” Robert Frost (1917) writes: “Home is the place where, when you go there/They have to take you in ... I should have called it/ Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.” But when we return to this fold that we call “home,” wherever and whatever that place happens to be, with our habits and our words, we are at a distance from this fold even when we are convinced we are standing in its midst. Novalis (1989, p. 56) famously remarked that “philosophy is essentially homesickness—the universal impulse to be home.” In this regard, we will inescapably seek a habitat for our habits. “Home,” however, is never anything more than a symbol. But even as a symbol, it is not the *chora*. The *chora* is a site of transformation—of wordlessness (and, hence, namelessness) and undoing and, then, rebirth. To enter the *chora* for purpose of transformation, we must let ourselves become speechless again. To enter, we let go; we loosen the knot. But we must also let go of the legend. If any of it *is* or *was* true, it will return to us as we return to this fundamental place, this wordless, embodied imaginary wherever and whenever we feel ourselves in it.

This, as I take it is the essence of communicology as a semiotic phenomenology. The knots upon which R. D. Laing reflects in his now classic text, he continually emphasizes, are mere illusions. Nonetheless, when the knot is tangled and tied tightly around our capacity to live and to play, we are simultaneously folded in and folded out, and until we see ourselves differently, that is exactly where we are. People are happy when they like where they are, both in space and in time. Given the violent and panicked rhetoric of this era, one need not go out on a limb to say that this is not a time of contentment. It is a time of precarity; it is a time of refugees of all sorts seeking asylum. Bernard Stiegler (2014, 2015) describes this age as one of “symbolic misery.” It is an age simultaneously of nostalgia and hopelessness. And it is increasingly becoming “home” to only those who refuse to see beyond whatever legend gives order to their map.

In a time of crisis, our habits and practices seem increasingly disconnected from familiar outcomes. When we face the “tomorrow of experience” as *yet another* exteriority and, thus, do not feel ourselves comfortably folded into the heart and soul of any sort of cultural embrace, we come to view life as a constant experiment rather than a narrative path drawn from familiar certitudes. That this is, simply, the inescapable condition of life, which has been the position of philosophy since (at least) the dawn of existentialism (and, perhaps, since Socrates) comforts only an intrepid few in any culture. Nevertheless, from childhood onward we come to expect boundaries of all sorts. We just want to know where and what they are and, as well, we want to be able to find entry points that enable us to be, at various times, *inside*, at home, and belonging to a world at least equal to our curiosities.

This private place—as with any home, however nurturing—will inevitably bore us and necessitate our flight into the relative chaos of new narratives. The exterior of the Self should remind us that, yes, the boundary of who we are in our conscious existence is like an envelope folded and sealed and placed at a remove from those who come to wonder about the mystery of the contents contained within. From the other side of the fold, we are just as curious about that which is at a remove from our own consciousness—not just the mystery of the other person (always foreign, always a stranger regardless of our intimate contact), but the mystery of our own subjectivities, our own minds, our own possibilities. What we think we know when the world slows down and the legend is stable is not the secret of what is hidden beyond view but, rather, the symbolic figures on the horizon lurking beyond the threads of the narrative path on which we find ourselves. We want to see our habits linked to this horizon. But the stability of this relationship is as much an illusion as the horizon itself. Simply there is no ideal destination given in the horizon in precisely the same way that there is no perfect place that constitutes “home.” Deleuze (1993) reasons (by way of Leibniz and the strategy of baroque architecture and design) that the Western attempt to deal with the problem of exteriority (and the mysterious otherness of a world that seemed to multiply before our eyes) was to fold, pleat, enclose, and scaffold exorbitantly, if not aggressively, as a mechanism of control. A seeming infinity of detail (because it is ornate) is imposed upon a simple, finite matter: the body.

In the face of such a baroque logic, the choices are, seemingly, to either learn the code (and all of its details) or to feel baffled and speechless in its presence. There is, I would argue, a similar effect to the “symbolic misery” engendered by the rise of digital media and the immersion of communicative experience in the multiple—and, inevitably, arbitrary and contradictory—folds and bafflements of a hyperindustrial market economy of technology and information as ends in themselves. The technics of electronic communication, beginning with the telephone, made us, suddenly, present to one another without *presence*. That is, we were engaged with one other with ostensible immediacy without the lived-reality of an interconnected, intersubjective, co-experiencing *flesh*.

Nonetheless, within this complex and highly unstable matrix, the chiasm of communication has remained the same. The essential means by which we gain mastery over unfamiliar tasks—learning these disciplines from the outside in—has remained the

same. The world that is gained by the *dispositifs* of disciplinary commitment is a world that is simultaneously experienced and *read*. Unlike the world in which my grandfather was able to make his living and raise his family, the codes of understanding now demand our confident mastery of the bafflements of literacy as a feature of both work and play.

And in this regard, we can begin to see, if we look closely, a thread connecting the philosophical projects of Jaspers, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Deleuze, and Kristeva. Thought—and with it, all of the play of meaning and existence, as well as the works that derive from this encounter—must begin from the outside. Where Jaspers seeks a transcendence of artificial boundaries, Foucault and Deleuze celebrate the freedom that begins on the outside of this fold—embracing the position of the intellectual and cultural pariah rather than finding strategies to tailor his or her existence, as a performative parvenu, to the proper order of things. Kristeva (2001), in her meditation on Arendt, sees the choice—pariah or parvenu—quite starkly. With regard to the situation of the Jews in Europe, Kristeva notes that “in the end, assimilationist universalism and enlightened philo-Semitism are more dangerous than the hatred and the national religious wars of the past” (Kristeva, 2001, p. 128).

Merleau-Ponty seeks a language of reflection adequate to the wordlessness that inheres in new experience, a language that finds its voice solely in art and poetry given that it, too, must approach this *chora* only by unfolding itself into it—as we once unfolded our innocent interiority into the music of the fold that gave us our voice and the initial forms of our speech. To this end, the play of life is *not* performance. As James Carse (1986, p. 4) observes, she or he who *must* play *cannot* play. Performative expression occurs because of a felt obligation to say something, *anything* (hopefully something clever) so as to continue the play, to keep the network of the game undisturbed despite the reality that its artifice serves few of those still playing along. When the “territory” of experience no longer offers anything of value, adding details to the map (with folds) and retelling its legend becomes the petitioning performance of the parvenu. As such, playing inside the lines is not the same as playing within the fold. The lines, the threads, after all, are continuous—threads that, although often knotted and sometimes invisible, have the potential to point us toward things that we’ve never seen. The fold, on the other hand, offers all the comforts of home, however truly comfortable that makes us. If we are lucky, home offers us a place to sleep. Again, if we are lucky enough to enter it, the *chora*, is where we awaken.

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