

Crease

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Abstract

This experimental paper proposes a shared exploration of the crease as a tactile, existential, and artistic phenomenon. It takes Roland Barthes' definition of his left-handedness as "a tenuous and persistent crease" as a basis. Hence, this phenomenon is a minor but stubborn mark on the self, a superficial matter.

In order to portray an intimate and personal approach to the subject, this paper is written in first person. This "I", though, is plural, a result of a collaboration. As part of the methodology developed to create this polyphonic voice, the paper is structured in a non-linear fashion. After each section, the reader can choose how to proceed.

The imposed choices reveal the materiality of the text - they establish points of friction and awareness for a reader; and weave different discursive lines and surfaces. The aim is to allow the format to contribute to the definition of the crease, beyond images and excerpts in the content.

Keywords: Roland Barthes, phenomenology, embodiment, touch, queer.

Crease

A polyphonic “I” exploring the tactile, existential, and artistic phenomenon of the crease, inspired by Roland Barthes.

Start: A tenuous and persistent crease [\[\[1\]\] >>](#)

If you need them, here are the [\[\[instructions\]\] >>](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

Instructions (on reading)

This essay is non-linear.

At the end of each section, you will be offered a choice on what to read next (bottom-right goes forward, top-left goes back to the page you come from. When you get to the end of a thread, you'll be offered a bottom-left option that circles back to beginning).

This choice of direction does not use page numbers, but section numbers. These can be found in the headings, in case you prefer to read the piece on paper.

When reading online, you can simply click on said number, and it will link automatically to the chosen section: this piece is not only non-linear, but a hypertext (references to specific contemporary artworks have also been hyperlinked, making less an illustration than an association that you can engage with, or not, possibly opening other links beyond the pre-designed space of this piece).

If you are curious to see the 20 possible text routes, there is a route sheet available at the very end of this document.

Start: A tenuous and persistent crease [\[\[1\]\] >>](#)

1 - A tenuous and persistent crease

Roland Barthes described the experience of being left-handed in a right-handed world in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*:

you had to struggle to be like others, you had to normalize your body, . . . A modest, inconsequential exclusion, socially tolerated, marked adolescent life with a tenuous and persistent crease: you got used to it, adapted to it, and went on . . . (2020, p.103)

The tenuous, persistent crease is an existential phenomenon that marks ways of being that are below the threshold of truly serious issues (“modest, inconsequential”), but that, nonetheless, still demand attention.

A crease is a mark, a slight change in the topography of our surface - a *superficial* issue, then - by definition.

For this project, the crease wrinkles into a non-linear narrative, led by an autotheoretical “I” (artist and scholar Lauren Fournier describes autotheory as “the practices of engaging with theory, life, and art from the perspective of one’s lived experiences” (2018, p. 641)). This “I” also bifurcates, as it is plural. Each ridge is created by the “I” reacting to itself, multiplying, as a methodology of collaboration. Can a particular self become shared through language? Does the tying and untying defy the singularity of experience and voice?

“I” may have created plenty of paths, but it is the reader that decides where to make an indent, turn a corner, fold backward, or weave the story further.

A story about normalizing the body: [\[\[2\]\] >>](#)

More on multiplicity: [\[\[14\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to the persistent crease: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

2 - Guts and water

Until my first birthday, my skin was allergic to water.

My mother discovered that to her horror, when she put me in the bath for the first time. My body turned bright red, and I started to scream. I had to be washed with lotion instead.

The doctor told my mother not to worry: after a year, my guts would get it right and stop overreacting. His prediction was correct: my body stopped reacting twelve months in, just as he had said.

Phenomenology studies how the self-aware body responds to its environment, inner and outer; how it becomes cognizant of its responses, conscious, and unconscious: turn left, turn red.

Some of these bodily responses are inconsequential, some are transient: nowadays I can soak in a warm bath for a very long time, until my fingertips are all pruney, creased. But I still can't swim.

Further into guts and precarity: [\[\[5\]\] >>](#)

Advance towards being "in touch," affected, queer: [\[\[19\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to increasing the surface of this text: [\[\[14\]\]](#)

3 - A dog-eared dictionary



M. di Giovanni, c. 1480–1485. *Saint Bartholomew*.

I like etymology to a fault. I find the prospect of opening and slicing words irresistible. I cannot bear blood, but ink? Spill it. Spill it all.

Take “crease” and wash it with antiseptic. Lay it on a metallic table, atop a crinkly, disposable, thin paper cloth. Extend a hand and say “scalpel.”

The incision, when made deep enough, reveals lengths of fabric from the late Middle Ages. As the cloths are carefully folded and unfolded, their texture becomes ridged, lined. That is the crease, a crest on a surface.

I imagine this can be both inwards and outwards (do you have memories, too, of laying the table as a child, opening up a folded tablecloth, the checkered ups and downs stretched before you?).

A line, marked, be it indented or protruding, like the inside of your arm, or the back of your knees.

Soft materials unable to keep the secret of their movements.

On reader movements: [\[\[4\]\] >>](#)
 Extend the hand, touch the page: [\[\[17\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to the dog-eared dictionary: [\[\[3\]\]](#)

4 - Immersion, choices



Own photograph.

I don't like the choices hypertext fiction forces upon its readers.

I prefer to immerse myself into a text like into a warm bath, forget myself, and just follow a story, a line of thought like a finger that follows the lines of a hand that is not mine. Or as Georges Poulet puts it in "Phenomenology of Reading" (1969): "My consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another" (p. 56).

In her *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (2015), literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan discusses the distinction between immersion and interaction in reading.

Whenever I am asked as a reader to intervene in a narrative, to interact, the immersive spell is broken: I become aware of myself, and of the constructive nature of the text.

But that is precisely the point here: to unveil how thinking and writing about a specific phenomenon creates an environment in which I have to orient myself first, an environment that changes by my very presence, and by yours.

If language can make an environment, how can you affect it with your presence as a reader, and how does it affect you? Why do you feel a pull in a line, and not in another?

Follow the destiny lines on the palm of your hand: [\[\[9\]\] >>](#)

Merge consciousnesses: [\[\[20\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to the guts and water: [\[\[2\]\]](#)

5 – Precarity



T. Godart, 1883. Intestine showing the spontaneous cure of intussusception of the gut.

In the digital repository of the Wellcome collection, I find a watercolour depicting a section of a gut. The colour, shape and creased texture reminds me of *Eva Hesse's studioworks* (as Briony Fer calls them [Art Observed, 2010]). Crinkly, light things. Made of papier caché, not mâché, which may include tape and cheesecloth, making its texture fabric-like.

If you ever saw these, you could imagine them fluttering before a window left open. Insubstantial, as a way of being. The smallest of offerings. “Precarious” (Art Observed, 2010).

Precariousness entails dependency.

Embodiment is always precarious.

Being embodied means being dependent - on others, on the environment.

Creases are precarious in themselves, marks of proof of this dependency.

Disturb the surface: [\[\[8\]\] >>](#)

Think through embodied metaphors: [\[\[10\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to questioning the world: [\[\[7\]\]](#)

6 - Taking the world personally

If I understand queerness as a form of self-consciousness that is more or less at odds with the world (although certainly the same would stand the other way around); it becomes, too, a different contact with it. If, paraphrasing Paul Valéry, the deepest thing is skin (1932, p. 30), the resulting friction is profound, even where it does not tear, but merely indent.

In his book *Alien Phenomenology* (2012), scholar and video game designer Ian Bogost deems the correlation between consciousness and the world an epistemological error: my consciousness is only possible because it is conscious of something, and this something can only appear through a consciousness. This error, he proposes, neglects the agency and experience (human-independent) of e.g. minerals and chemicals in hard water, the bacteria in my guts.

But there might be an underlying epistemological error beneath this thinking itself. As psychoanalyst Ben Kafka points out in his “Human, Also Human” (2018), posthumanist criticism can be surprisingly reductive: “It is as if theorists were unable to expand their understanding of nonhuman objects without simultaneously narrowing their understanding of human ones” (p. 67).

The critique of subjectivity is, inevitably, subjectivity-centric.

Subjectivity is, after all, the only way we have of affecting and being affected. As Kafka argues, knowledge is firmly rooted in an intimate, subjective relation to both inner and outer environment:

To theorize is to be cast back to our earliest attempts to make sense of the world around us, and to reexperience whatever feelings of love and hate those attempts aroused in us. There is, after all, a reason we take our theories so personally. (p. 72)

I indeed take everything personally. The affects that traverse me translate into conscious emotions and moods. I use stories and images to handle the way the world touches me, like a protective layer.

This process can take a while: after all, it took my body a year to make sense of water.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to using language as skin: [\[\[18\]\]](#)

<< Back to reading Queer phenomenology: [\[\[19\]\]](#)

7 - A world in question

Poet Mark Doty defines “queer” as “not business as usual, not solid identities founded on firm grounds, but a world in question” (2010, p. 115).

A world unsteadied by questioning, by rubbing against the assumed, by wrinkling its surface, by the stubbornness of being, as I said elsewhere.

If queerness can subject the world to questioning, it begs the consideration of a self who is creased, and chafed, from the friction of being “at a slight angle to the universe” (Forster in Doty, p. 114) – but also a self that manages to affect the world itself, crease it back.

I might be creased (if not crushed) by insisting on owning my skin, but is it possible for me to disturb the surface I stand on, the surface of the others around me, the surface of what is assumed as default?

Correlate consciousness and the world: [\[\[6\]\] >>](#)

Making books with whale mouths: [\[\[25\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to being precarious: [\[\[5\]\]](#)

<< Back to licking salt: [\[\[24\]\]](#)

8 - Disturbing the surface

The crease is a phenomenon of surfaces.

Disturbed surfaces.

Surfaces that have been folded with care.

Surfaces that have been impacted with violence.

Either way, a crease is an aftermath. A remnant.

A souvenir of an event that touched us hard enough to crinkle and crumple.

A memory of a verb powerful enough for an onomatopoeia.

A crash, or a crush.

Did you see the picture of that intestine earlier on? It depicted how the gut had healed spontaneously after having folded over itself, a dangerous condition.

You can fold. You can unfold.

Adapt, refuse.

Even if you heal –

You'll always end up with a crease.

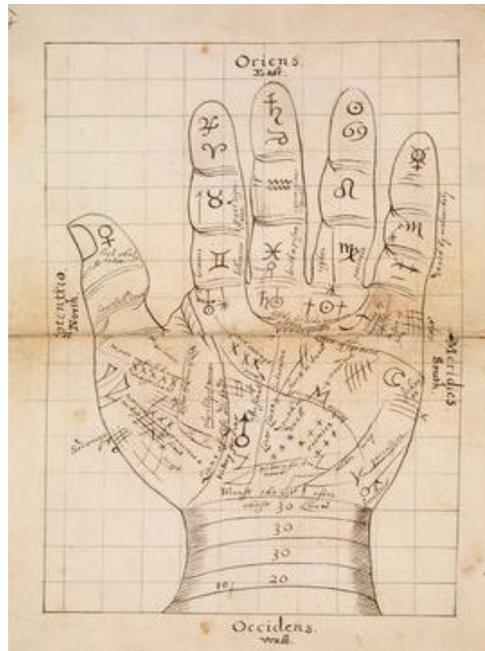
Crease as a sign of absence: [\[\[11\]\] >>](#)

Crease as “not even” a fold: [\[\[21\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to immersing yourself in choices [\[\[4\]\]](#)

<< Back to traversing the body [\[\[27\]\]](#)

9 - Reading skin



Unknown author. Hand covered in various symbols (1648).

Palmistry promises that destiny is described in one's hand creases. The inner hand as a landscape of past, present, and future experience.

If you were to ask my teenage self, there were three thrills associated to the (unbelievable) allure of palm reading:

- being seen by the friend doing the reading, having their attention on you, however fleeting (as no one I knew was ever proficient enough to spend more than a minute or two attempting any divination).

- being foreseen, thinking together what the future may hold (how else can a teen visualize life ahead if not tangible in the palm of one's hand?).

- being touched. For palm reading requires the other person's own fingers to trace the hand's creases, walk them like a path, use skin both as a page and as ground ("the goal is to touch each other's hands" (Barthes, 1969, p. 338)).

The sorcery might not be real, but the creased skin-landscape of experience certainly is.

Accept your destiny: [\[\[13\]\] >>](#)

Do not let my hand go. Let's go further into magic: [\[\[22\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to being precarious: [\[\[5\]\]](#)

10 - Embodiment and metaphor



Own photograph and work.

As Mark Johnson argues in *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (2007), to be able to think abstract concepts (like the self) one needs to link them metaphorically to embodied experiences:

It lets us appropriate the semantics and knowledge structure of a sensorimotor source domain to understand an abstract target domain. Pragmatism's principle of continuity claims that abstract thought is not disembodied; rather, it must arise from our sensorimotor capacities and is constrained by the nature of our bodies, brains, and environments. (p.179)

Even theoretical thinking that tries to go beyond the fallacy of selfhood can only express itself through these embodied interactions with the environment: the Lacanian notion of desire-as-lack; or Deleuze's attempt to think individuality as a fold, emerge from the child's disappointed exploration of the empty box, the micro-spaces created and destroyed by playing with the folding of paper.

Look out for memories, theories, artworks. Contemporary, yes, but you can also go back to the first drawings on the creased surface of the cave wall, a skin of rock, in the generative intestines of the world. Project yourself against their surface, feed from the realm of the spirits, and see how they provide you with yet another conceptual metaphor for the self: that of the crease.

The self as a creased being: [\[\[12\]\] >>](#)

The physicality of reading: [\[\[17\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to disturbing the surface: [\[\[8\]\]](#)

11 - Crease and absence

I have defined the crease as an aftermath.

I think of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' untitled picture of his *empty double bed* (1991),
unmade, white, all creased.

I am sure you've seen it. Normally, as a billboard. An intimate image, made humongous
and public. An elegy to the beloved who died too soon of AIDS-related illness. A refusal
to be ignored, overlooked, hidden away.

An absence this large.

The absence the image portrays is a crisis, both personal and global.

The way this, as art, sears into your brain as its beholder, is a crease.

A resistant indentation of a place where the world rubs us, or where we rub the world.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to metaphorical embodiment and vice versa: [\[\[10\]\]](#)

12- Skinning the self

The self is a creased surface, the crumble zone that appears when the guts of the real crash into the symbolic order, and vice versa. The self is what emerges in this skin-crease-awareness: “We are in touch with our world at a visceral level, and it is the quality of our “being in touch” that importantly defines what our world is like and who we are” (Johnson, 2007, p. 20).

And precisely because it is a borderline phenomenon, self-awareness can feel abject, like the skin on hot milk (see Kristeva, 1982, p.2).

The very stubborn presence of a singular self, visceral, abject, even, creates friction. Friction, as a change in perspective, stimuli, consistency; creases.

The crease reveals the insistence of the self, and the insistence with which the world responds back.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to reading my skin: [\[\[9\]\]](#)

13 - Being-towards-death



Own photograph and samples.

“You” may indeed get a kick out of comparing yourself to a speck of flea shit or a solar flare. But substitute “you” for pretty much anyone else on the planet and you begin to see how dehumanizing “posthumanism” can be. (Kafka, 2015)

Being shit is not the same as feeling shitty. Being a solar flare is not the same as getting sunburned.

When you look at your hand, fate does not lie in the lines, but in the skin itself. It confronts you with the simple fact that you are a Heideggerian being-towards-death, and Annie Dillard, in *An American Childhood* (1987), renders it:

We children had, for instance, proper hands; our fluid, pliant fingers joined their skin. Adults had misshapen, knuckly hands loose in their skin like bones in bags. (...) Mother let us play with one of her hands. She laid it flat on a living-room end table beside her chair. I picked up a transverse pinch of skin over the knuckle of her index finger and let it drop. The pinch didn't snap back; it lay dead across her knuckle in a yellowish ridge. (p. 24)

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)
 Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to the tenuous and persistent crease: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

14 - Increase the surface of this text



Own photograph.

By using different voices, different characters, lifeworlds are multiplied, opened up, and not smoothed out by the iron of a homogenic discourse, the performative act of just a single name.

Literature allows for a combination of different genres, different modes of experiences. To explore the crease as a phenomenon, I traverse different semantic fields: the body, the environment, theory.

Literature does not establish a hierarchy in sensing, nor in making sense.

As you read, you may be simultaneously remembering Deleuze's fold, and scratching mindlessly the crease inside your arm, or behind your knee.

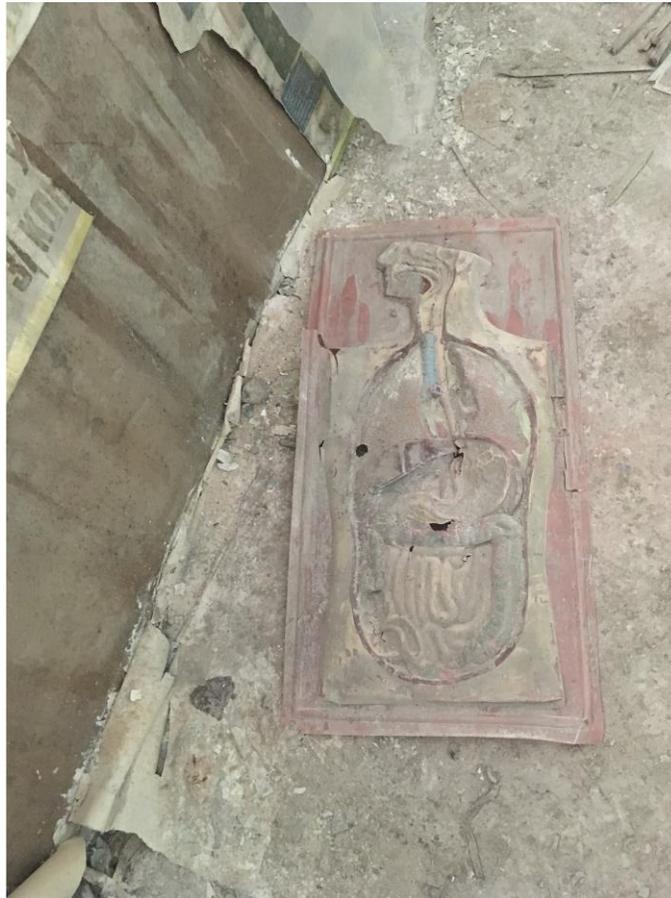
Literature makes you aware of the materiality of language, the rhythm of a sentence, the timbre of words – the body wrapping itself in signifiers, creasing them, like you do with the fresh sheets of a hotel bed.

Slice language open: [\[\[3\]\] >>](#)

The body as field: [\[\[27\]\] >>](#)

<< Back touching and reading: [\[\[17\]\]](#)

15 – Glove



Own photograph.

You now have the surgeon's glove, you have the surgeon's scalpel. But you can't go further into the belly of this story.

Evolution has folded the skin inwards, to create an interior, and then, increased that interior surface by creasing it: from brain lobes to guts.

Language is a skin with which to touch the world: just like I cannot flay my own skin, I cannot skin my own language.

Literature is a creased language, expanding the surface with which to touch the world.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\]](#) >>

Look up [\[\[references\]\]](#) >>

<< Back to touching and reading: [\[\[17\]\]](#)

16 - Sleeve

Not all creases are painful.

Yes, a crease is still a mark, even if left by well-intended care.

But the crease is also evidence of life – including its better parts.

I am thinking of the first time I found myself sliding a finger underneath a gaping short sleeve. Knowing I could feel skin I could not see.

The thrill – not only of living, but of creasing.

The bliss of knowing my surface multiplied, tingling, the blood rush, rubbed into adulthood.

The crease left somewhere in my brain with the moment, a faint signal of change, of contact made with another and with the world beyond.

A bit of wear on your soul, you know?

Evidence of it being put to good use.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to the dog-eared dictionary: [\[\[3\]\]](#)

<< Back to metaphorical embodiment and vice versa: [\[\[10\]\]](#)

17 - Touching, reading

It is remarkable that, in his “Phenomenology of reading” (1969), literary critic George Poulet pays little or no attention to the tactile physicality of reading as an act. Reading is, after all, a way to touch bodies – bodies of skin, but also of paper.

He beautifully renders the softness of the textual consciousness, unable to conceal its movements, but forgets the softness of the medium. If he writes about sensations, they are those evoked by the words on the page, not by the page itself.

That is why reading on screen is different from reading on paper (or, for that matter, on skin: as a student of medieval Dutch, I remember the gloved hand touching a medieval parchment, as if calligraphy’s magical spell kept the organic material alive).

From some books I read as a child, I only recall the way the paper absorbed the ink, the darker tint of the unbleached pages, the way the cover was creased, the tone-on-tone of fingers sliding down the page, turning it. But Poulet does not mention the sensorium of reading. There are no allusions to the smell of ink, nor that of old paper, vanilla-like because of the wonders of chemistry (Turin and Sanchez, 2008). No fingertips experiencing the fibres of the cheap, thin paper of pocket editions.

There is a tactile eroticism in the act of reading, not only in the intimacy of consciousnesses mingling, but also in the handling of paper. This eroticism resides precisely in the margins, in the gap between the textual world and the physical object of the book itself, in the silence between the voices.

In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Barthes remarks:

In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no “erogenous zones” (a foolish expression, besides); it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve). (p. 9-10)

The glove: [\[\[15\]\] >>](#)

The sleeve: [\[\[16\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to traversing the body: [\[\[27\]\]](#)

18 - Language as skin

Language can, and does, rub.

And poke.

And press.

No-one puts it better than Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* – “Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words” (2018, p. 73).

Language can caress, yes.

But language can also scratch.

Scar.

Language can burrow beneath the skin.

It is only to be expected, then, that language can leave a crease, too, in each of us.

When words are thrown carelessly on a kitchen chair.

When words are shared between bedsheets.

When words mean to fold you into a small packet so you can be stashed away.

Being creased versus being the creaser: [\[\[7\]\] >>](#)

On creases as desire: [\[\[26\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to the guts and water: [\[\[2\]\]](#)

19 - Queer phenomenology



Own photograph.

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sarah Ahmed proposes that “we are affected by what we come” “into” contact with” (p. 2). Her understanding of existence is eminently tactile - we touch, and are touched, literally, metaphorically. This “contact” implies that embodied beings have a “capacity to be affected” (p. 9).

The affects “accumulate as impressions” (p. 9). Marks, indents, traces, yes, creases: “gestures on the skin surface” (p. 18).

Queerness as position: [\[\[7\]\] >>](#)
Creased surface and experience: [\[\[24\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to immersing yourself in choices: [\[\[4\]\]](#)

20 - Phenomenological polyphonies



Own photograph and work.

For Georges Poulet, the act of reading is the merging of two consciousnesses: the consciousness that resides in the text, and the consciousness of the reader.

But philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, in his discussion of the polyphonic nature of novelistic fiction, and especially the work of Dostojevsky, makes clear that the literary text consists of multiple, autonomous voices that cannot be reduced to a single instance of utterance, the author (see Bakhtin 1984). Bakhtin was influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, and it is important to stress that for him novelistic characters are more than just an effect of the text; they are the appearance of different experiential worlds in their own right, independent of the author's (see Pape 2016).

Polysubjectivity created by different characters and voices is there beyond the level of the Poulet-esque consciousness of the text. The consciousness of the reader is also a polyphony of voices, a combination of different worlds, conjured up by own memories and memories, images from others ("Even when I am *on my own* and look at my reflection in the mirror – 'I am *not alone*'" (Pape, quoting Bachtin, emphasis Pape's, p.285)). This generates an inner polyphony which, not unlike a non-linear text, also lacks

a single direction. In a way, such multiplicity of voices, selves, and directions only makes explicit what happens in every act of writing, or of reading.

Literature allows not only to speak in the first person, but it also reveals the different lines that emerge within this “I”. It creates a multiplication of perspectives: autobiographical, theoretical, fictional. That is, precisely, why phenomenological analysis could benefit from literary writing as an artistic research method: these voices are part of my consciousness as a reader, but at the same time they come from many other consciousnesses, supplementing my experience.

My mother telling you about my baby skin, Barthes telling you about the left-handedness of love, Rogier van der Weyden showing you the creased surface of suffering: what I tried to do here is using the specific hybridity of literary language and artistic practice as an instrument to explore a phenomenon – a polyphonic phenomenology of the self as a creased surface.

Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to disturbing the surface: [\[\[8\]\]](#)

21 – Disappointment



Own photograph and work.

I am back with Barthes.

It seems inevitable.

The way all paths lead to Rome, all creases lead to Barthes.

Non-ironed king of the bothersome without being lethal.

In “To the Seminar” (1989), he pin-points “not even” as “the formula of disappointment par excellence” (p. 334).

The crease is “not even” a fold.

The crease is a disappointment of the surface.

A disposition, rather than a disaster.

Sagging or cresting, maybe.

But not splitting, nor tearing.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to reading my skin: [\[191\]](#)

22 - Phenomena of Materialization



Photographs from a séance with Eva Carrière, 1913.

The crease detoured into the materiality of language, the way its surface swells and undulates, like a wet finger.

There is plenty of skin here, yes, but mostly because I fail to materialize the soul (in case you are wondering, I did go to Catholic school).

Since I am already reading your hand, I thought I might interest you in a séance. Let me dim the light.

In *Phenomena of Materialisation* (1923), Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, baron, physician, psychiatrist, attempts to document the veracity of the spiritualist performances by medium Eva Carrière (Carrière was a second identity, as she tried to wash an already-tainted reputation for fraud (Public Domain Review)).

His photographs, though, rather than being the ultimate proof of Carrière's ability to transform thought and spirit into matter, show instead magazine cut-outs, bits and pieces fabric, string, and paper.

But there is something that feels pitifully adequate about the images. In one of them, for instance, a hamster-like Carrière is spitting out some paper she had clearly stuffed into her mouth earlier, all chewed up, and yes, of course – creased beyond recognition. That my spirit might be a wrinkled collage dripping with drool sounds about right. We are, after all, not much, sensitive, often repugnant, always affected, and sometimes affecting.

Carrière failed again to convince experts she was the real deal. A 1913 article (Public Domain Review) laid out her methodology, more arts and crafts than mysticism: it mostly involved adding hair to pictures of well-known personalities to render them unrecognisable when she produced them in the darkness. The article, though, reveals how the trick failed – “in spite of all her endeavours, she could not obliterate certain characteristic lines” (Public Domain Review).

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More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to licking salt: [\[\[24\]\]](#)

23 - Crease as the background of Passion



both: R. Van der Weyden, c.1460. *Crucifixion Diptych* (details).

In the background of a Rogier Van der Weyden *Crucifixion Diptych* (c. 1460), a carefully hung piece of bright red cloth reveals a perfectly checkered surface. All creased, in and out, from having been carefully folded and unfolded.

In contrast, the fabrics worn by St John and the Virgin are an exuberance of folds. Drama. Pathos. The weight of it all, taking shape. Gravity making itself present.

But I always wonder – that piece in the background. I know it's painted, of course. But in that universe – am I to imagine someone carrying it, a tight red square in their hands, climbing onto something like a stool, and hanging it, careful to align its lines with the edge of the wall, all in preparation for the Passion?

The crease, you see, is never the main event. In fact, philosopher Tamsin Lorraine, discussing Nietzsche, describes an event “as a configuration of unfolding forces” (p. 121); and life, as “the forms [the phenomenological unfolding force] . . . creates as it unfolds.” (p. 122)

So no, the crease is then never the main event, the main unfolding force; nor its resulting form. In fact, it is not even an event at all, but its consequence; the tactile remnants on the unfolded life. Always, somehow, still there, lingering, as Barthes said, persistent.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\]](#) >>

Look up [\[\[references\]\]](#) >>

<< Back to reading Queer phenomenology: [\[\[19\]\]](#)

24 - Lick the salt in the ridges



Own photograph.

The crease often follows a fold. But it is not, in itself, as dramatic.

A crease only indents a surface – the alteration is simply that, a slight modification, a trace (you can use creased bed sheets to sleep in, but you cannot use them folded).

But creases and ridges can also amplify a surface, make it plural, multiply it. That's why crinkle cut potatoes exist – each crevice increases the tongue's experience.

That's why your fingers get all pruney after a bath (the increased surface of the creases helps with grip, makes skin less slippery despite being wet). And that is, too, how brains allegedly work – their creases, called sulcus, seem to be extra surface for data.

The first high-school dance with someone you liked to the very worst Christina Aguilera song.

The lizard phobia.

Your email password.

All stored in creases.

But also all the artworks you've ever seen, all texts you've ever read – all seems to be there, like monosodium glutamate.

The crease as what is left behind: [\[\[8\]\] >>](#)

The crease, behind, in the background of an artwork: [\[\[23\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to questioning the world: [\[\[7\]\]](#)

25 - The Creaser



A. Gentileschi, 1614–1620. *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (detail).

Have you ever seen those scoring tools bookbinders use? Most are a rather simple flat stick with a pointed end. What has always fascinated me is that they are made of bone. Bone!

“Library lore” (Hadden, 2002) holds that their materiality is due to their origin as corset busks: “they were made from baleen, a cheap bone-like substance taken from the mouths of whales and used for corset stays, rulers and other functions, very prevalent during the 19th and early 20th centuries” (Hadden, 2002).

From the brush-like mouth of whales, to straightening and tightening women’s bodies, to creasing (and, smoothing, too – the same tools reinforce a fold or flattens a surface) pages of books.

Creases are not only inevitable, but necessary, a part of training, learning, and becoming.

These days, some creasers are made of teflon, instead.

(Sometimes I joke with my partner, “you are made of teflon!” Nothing digs deep into his soul, his self’s surface elastically bounces back, unaffected.)

Baleen densities to slippery surfaces, but pages still need creasing.

Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\] >>](#)

Look up [\[\[references\]\] >>](#)

<< Back to using language as skin: [\[\[18\]\]](#)

26 - Desire Paths



Own photograph.

Writing about being left-handed, the persistent crease I started with, requires doing what you are writing about – typing predominantly with your left hand, or even, holding a pen with it.

A crease is a mark, but it is also a well-trodden path. A naturalized gesture. Being left-handed might require you to “struggle” to be like the right-handed default, but at the end of the day, for you to express this frustration, you’ll ease into writing with your naturally predominant hand.

I first heard of desire paths in a podcast (Mars, 2017). I find the term mystifyingly beautiful. It designates the improvised, “crowd-sourced”, if you will, paths that appear in public spaces, eroded into existence by citizen’s “desire” to go from point A to point B in the way they see fit, rather than the pre-designed routes.

A crease is a desire-path on the skin – it is where the tissues flex and work. But it is also a desire-path on one’s being – yes, the world is designed for those who are right-handed, but here is a scruffy dirt path I find myself making just because, for me, the best way to get where I want to be is through my left hand.

<< Go back to the beginning: [\[\[1\]\]](#)

More on the [\[\[practice\]\]](#) >>
Look up [\[\[references\]\]](#) >>

<< Back to increase the surface of this text: [\[\[14\]\]](#)

27 - Traverse the body

There is a topographic overlap between one's body and one's language. Barthes' left-handedness made the perfect mark for the words to describe the difference it implied to fit in it.

The creases in my experience might trip language, trick images, trap the expression that matches their shape, length, depth, form.

The crease, irritant but not terrible, is an opportunity for correspondence.

Unfurl your hand, let me read your skin: [\[\[9\]\] >>](#)

Rub your language: [\[\[18\]\] >>](#)

Practice (on writing)

In “To the Seminar”, Barthes describes seminars as a learning environment that produces tentacular “practices” (1989, p. 336), reactive and kaleidoscopic:

Either someone works, seeks, produces, gathers, writes in the others’ presence; or else all incite each other, call to each other, put into circulation the object to be produced, the procedure to compose, which thus passes from hand to hand, suspended from the thread of desire like the ring in round games. (p. 337)

Similarly, the two names on the cover of this text become a multiple-I, inciting circulation as a way towards composition. I created a first-person singular voice that is not so much a collaboration, but a current. I make a transmittable self. I pass the pronoun back and forth, generate a ring-like persona, travelling, skipping, involving the other at each turn, branching out further:

there is only an initiating figure, whose role – it is only a gesture – is to put the ring into circulation. Then the metaphor of the round game ceases to apply; for henceforth it is no longer a chain we are concerned with but an order of ramifications, a tree of desires: an extended, broken chain (...). (p. 338)

I write four-hands (did you also spend a significant part of your childhood learning to play the piano?). I begin in a shared Google document, an open mess of theoretical reflections and personal memories. In the live immediacy of the page, these are offered up, consenting to reactions and redactions. They “blend and clash” (Barthes, 1977, 146) to the point where it very soon becomes unclear which part of this multiple-I wrote what: every pass from the ring leads to another passage, another image, another memory. As I go, the text branches out through these responses, each touch creates an imprint (“to reproduce that life can feel like a physical ‘press’ on the surface of the body” (Ahmed, p. 17)).

Eventually, all the material is sorted in another shared, live Miro board, converted into movable, virtual post-its (so much for discussing skin, I had to create tactility elsewhere). These become the base for a smarter program specialized in non-linear texts, Twine, that, for all its innovation, does not seem to allow for collaboration. So, once the architecture of the piece (very much like a house of cards) makes some sort of sense, I return to the first live document (and well, here I am, typing).

The resulting hypertext relies in these small units of meaning, which, in an anachronistic twist, are named after Barthes:

hypertext provides multiple paths between text segments, now often called “lexias” in a borrowing from the pre-hypertextual but prescient Roland Barthes. With its webs of linked lexias, its networks of alternate routes (...) hypertext presents a radically divergent technology, interactive and polyvocal, favoring a plurality of discourses over definitive utterance and freeing the reader from domination by the author. Hypertext reader and writer are said to become co-learners or co-writers, as it were, fellow-travelers in the mapping and remapping

of textual (and visual, kinetic and aural) components, not all of which are provided by what used to be called the author. (Coover, 1992)

This reconsideration of authorship, paraphrasing Foucault, creates alternative modes of existence (1998, p. 222), less hierarchical, more spontaneous and potentially more diverse.

As a result, the ideas of presence and gesture structure not only the content, but its interface, both as materiality and as surface. If a crease multiplies a surface so that more can occur in a given dimension, then the practice of this collective I is precisely that, too: writing not only as a transmission of sorts but as a superficial transformation. And yet, this writing practice is, too, in itself, only a surface, a façade. It is fair to say that this is, first and foremost, an exercise in (phenomenological) reading: words, yes, but also images, spaces, bodies. Ultimately, this practice is a tannery: a way of making something out of skin.

If you've ever been to a Moroccan tannery, you may have been offered a sprig of mint to bear the smell. Granted, there is nothing to sniff, here, but every branch (see what I did, there) you have accepted with a click has become a gesture that marks you as the visitor-reader. So, I keep passing the ring, eventually write six-hands, forcing you into becoming a co-creator (non-linearity is as playful as it can be aggressive, disagreeable). You are a creaser as much as I am, pleating in your choices, creating a mark. And if you allow me to imagine you as a multiple, too, the creasing gesture grows exponentially, creating an invisible map of readership. This practice passes hands, trespasses, becomes a place for trespass: "there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader." (Barthes, 1977, p. 148) By offering my anecdotes and readings I am, in a way, inviting myself to yours. All your memories, your moves, your margin scribbles – all are unknown to us, and yet, integral to the existence of this piece, and dependent on you existing and engaging. One gets under the spell of the other, even if one cannot spell it out

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- 3 - di Giovanni, M. (c. 1480–1485). Saint Bartholomew. *Museum of Fine Arts Budapest*.
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- 5 - Godart, T. (1883), Intestine showing the spontaneous cure of intussusception of the gut. *Wellcome Collection*. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/cswjkv5k>. Public Domain.
- 9 - Hand covered in various symbols (1648). *Wellcome Collection*. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mxr8r6sk>. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).
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- 25 - Gentileschi, A. (1614–1620). *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (detail), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemisia_Gentileschi#/media/File:Judith_decapitando_a_Holofernes,_por_Artemisia_Gentileschi.jpg. Public domain.
- 4, 10, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 24, 26 - Photographs and any works featured by Maria Gil Ulldemolins.

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