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GROWTH IN  
THE RESTRICTION

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Photograph by Bram Prins

# MY RELATIONSHIP WITH CLOTH

The views, thoughts and impressions that you will see laid down on the pages that follow have become the final selection on a theme that has come into being through the process of writing this text.

The first round of topics and directions that I thought would build this entity that is the thesis were far grander in scale and far more dispersed. I was interested in showing how each of the definitions of the word 'space' could be realised through and in the technique of patchwork. I was drawing my topics for discussion from a wide variety of fields; from physics, to history right through to my own personal material practice.

This idea I believe still can materialise in some state, shape or form, however, keeping it relative to this rather condensed period of time I realise now that my plans were running before they could walk.

The proposal I had initially made existed in the form much like a viewing point. A space that was a very safe distance away from the topics I was tackling. I realise now that they existed on a plane of good intentioned ignorance. An ignorance that spread across all fields of my research, not just with regards to the content and the methods used to acquire, but also in the magnitude of these topics in relation to the time given. I was merely scratching plaster with my fingernail thinking this would reveal answers when what I really needed was a chisel.

Well what changed this course of action I hear you wonder. My method of research changed. Instead of floating

high above rather superficially delving into things, I went to ground level. I went on a trip.

I went on a trip to the deep south of America [Boykin, Alabama]. A trip where my goal was to go to the source of a quilting collective called the Gee's Bend. A collective that had [I must stress the past tense at this point, because this is no longer the case] produced some of the most beautiful quilts I have ever seen.\* Creations that simultaneously left me in awe and filled me with envy. This trip cleared any plans I thought I had about the thesis clean off the table. My time in America ended up being about everything other than the quilts. I was confronted with the past, the future and the now. I was literally kicked out of my comfort zone and was made to realise how very little I really knew.

It had such a prolific effect on me that I realised that I needn't have to reach for the stars to say anything profuse or worthwhile. In fact the more down to earth, more domesticated the stories and occurrences were the stronger the reverberation of interest was for me. Because what I witnessed and experienced there was real. The right here right now. I realised then that the foundations needed to be laid before building could commence.

It wasn't till on my return from this trip that I realised the plans I had made for this text had become out-dated. There are definite whispers of previously rooted ideas in the passages to come, however, these have now be tackled from a very different angle. With many ideas coming to the fore simply to be discarded

for the sake of stepping that little bit closer to this point of clarity. To getting to the crux of what it was in fact that I wanted to say. I feel I have achieved this to some extent, as much as it can ever really be achieved at any singular moment in time. It was important to me that this text was/is going to be something that keeps on evolving. It will have a moment of finalisation for the sake of the system of deadlines. However, these thoughts will continue to tick over.

My trip to Alabama taught me a great deal and will continue to do so far beyond this text and the remainder of my time at the Rietveld Academie.

Writing has proven to be a cathartic entity. Unbeknown to be me I had tucked things away that I didn't want to admit, confronting thoughts about who I am and what I am capable of doing [or not as the case may be]. These needed to be dug up in order for this piece to be written. I had to confront my own confrontation. Hiding wasn't an option.

One thing that became very clear to me was that this collection of words has become another exploration, another segment of my on going fascination and more often than not my bewilderment with how integral fabric is to life. It surrounds us pretty much at every turn. It is the go to when we are cold, when we yearn for a private moment, when we want to have a quiet sense of achievement. It is blessed with the ability to comfort yet has the ability to retain and carry such loaded stories. It is there at birth, swaddling this new child and at death holding tight the vessel that once housed

life. It is in a pocket or tucked up a sleeve when your nose needs blowing. Cloth is such a huge part of our daily lives that it often goes unnoticed, taken for granted even.

Writing this piece has really widened my eyes further to how the structures created, processes followed and mind sets that drive the textile realm are echoed in fields far beyond its castle walls. The Jacquard loom,\*\* and its system that pushed forward automated patterning, for example, finds itself present as a point of inspiration on the early timeline of computing. It is at these moments where the fire burns brightest.

During my stay in America I visited many art galleries and museums. In Richmond, Virginia, I saw my first ever Richard Diebenkorn in the flesh. Of course I had seen many a reproductions but never a real one.

I stood in front of the painting 'Ocean Park 22'\*\*\* and got Goosebumps. This was another moment of realisation. Remaining solely in the traditional idea of the textile world for me is not enough. This moment when the hairs on the back of your neck stand up does not happen to me when I am confronted with the world of craft.

It was not even evoked in me in Boykin, standing there in the birthplace of the Gee's bend quilters, talking to Nancy.\*\*\*\*

When cloth is fused with the world that surrounds that is when it becomes exciting. When its threads touch base with facets that are not immediately related. It is a medium of so many possibilities and so many fac-

es. On a purely physical level it can be hard or soft, strong or fragile, flat or three dimensional. It can house as well as be the house. It can be the verb as well as the noun.

Due to its versatility it is everywhere. It is wrapped around bike locks and catching goals at football matches. It is these tangible links that cloth makes with the world that hooks me.

Yet, I need something to kick against. To be dissatisfied with to feel restricted by. The craft world is this niggle. Why this is I do not think is of that greater importance. The not knowing spurs me on to write and make, striving for the moment of clarity, with a sneaky hope that it was never fully be revealed. The restrictive qualities that frustrate me are the fuel to the fire.

It is this feeling, this moment that has ultimately become the stimulus of this text. Restrictive qualities that become the itch that needs scratching. The textile realm is a continuous itch, however, through scratching there is the potential for new ground to be unearthed. This text contains a series of examples that ultimately hold this at its core. Without a restrictive system, framework or surrounding that is felt or seen there is no potential for friction. This grinding leads to possibility, which leads to growth, however, that may manifest.

*'Nevertheless, his sadness and the stoicism with which he bore it, became, within his poetry, even larger than the universe.'*<sub>I</sub>

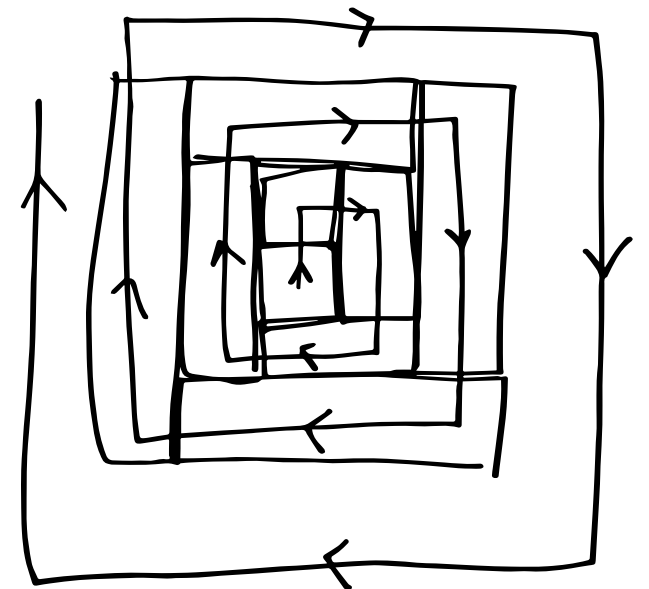


# ANGLED SPIRALS

*"...in the case of linear segmentarity, we would say that each segment is underscored, rectified, and homogenized in its own right, but also in relation to the others. Not only does each have its own unit of measure, but there is an equivalence and translatability between units. The central eye has as its correlate a space through which it moves, but it itself remains invariant in relation to its movements."* <sup>II</sup>

These are the words of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. As I was reading, only really processing half of the words my eyes scanned, I came across these lines. They shone bright out of the haze of panic instigated from a sense of intellectual drowning. I had to draw my way through these words. As John Berger said *'...the actual act of drawing...forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it back together again...'* <sup>III</sup> Drawing allowed me to make sense of the words in front of me.

What I found myself drawing was in fact the Log Cabin patch. I read Deleuze's words as a description of this patchwork pattern.





Negro cabin in Hale County, Alabama  
Walker Evans  
c.1935

The Log Cabin is a patchwork pattern that gets its name from exactly that: a log cabin. It consists of single blocks arranged around a central square. This is the 'central eye' Deleuze talks of. The lengths of each block increase as the pieces are placed causing the patch to grow; *'Not only does each have its own unit of measure, but there is an equivalence and translatability between units.'* Each block of fabric is different in measurement and placement from the previous and also in relation to the next; however, this difference works together to create a harmonious and balanced growth. One slots into the next, into the next... Red is usually the colour that fills the central square. It is said to symbolise the hearth of the home. The warmth, the fire.

*'The central eye has as its correlate a space through which it moves, but it itself remains invariant in relation to its movements.'* Its pure goal is to create warmth from its centre outwards. The heat is physically represented with the colour red. It is literally the start of the growth, the beginnings, without this, the patch [as a log cabin] would not exist and the warmth would not spread. Through its central placing, the square dictates the trajectory of growth. Which ever way you decide to build out it will always remain in this square format. The blocks will increase in length, with each lap, spiralling at right angles around and around, spreading outwards. Yet, Its final shape, whether small or big, will always be a reverberation of this central point. It therefore connects with as well as controls the space through which the growth happens. The square is its core but also its final edges. It is the hearth of the home.



A Patchwork is not restricted by frame, needle length or eye size. It doesn't start at A and finish at B, in other words it is not linear. It spreads. It is roundular. It grows outwards from a starting point. In this sense a patchwork holds the potentiality to expand forever.

With this in mind there are still differentiations to be found within this system of growth.

The Log Cabin for example, encompasses this potential for infinite expansion with each block slotting onto the next. However, due to the strength of the four-sided shape at its core it is an example of a more controlled growth. Its movement of growth; its trajectory is always predictable.

## **THE SCRAP**

The fragment(s) that makes up a patch

- The source of a potential  
yet the cause of interruption

Each scrap is a territory. Each consisting of bordered space, a space with an edge. Whether the assembly of these scraps has been made into a statement or skilfully hidden the eye will never be fooled. It will never be a seamless entity. The veins become the occupation. They are the lifelines of a patch-worked surface. Not only are they permanent visual tenants they are also the generation of the surface, the generation of space. Without these seams the potential for growth stops. The surface remains as big or as small as the single piece of fabric. The growth ceases when the edge is left un-joined.



**Extension** |ɪk'stɛnʃ(ə)n, ɛk-|  
noun

1. a part that is added to something to enlarge or prolong it.<sup>IV</sup>

# 43 HIGHWORTH ROAD

My Parents built a very small conservatory on the back of their Victorian terrace house. The structure itself is made from gleaming white PVC, breezeblocks with a smooth white rendering and glass. A stark contrast to the weathered red brick of the main building. The space it occupies cannot be more than two metres wide and three metres in length. It is nestled between our neighbours' fence and our back door.

There were far greater plans for the space at the rear of the house; a double storey extension to be precise. However, due to a continuous string of constraints, mainly that of the financial kind, the final outcome is this two by three metre rectangle with a glass ceiling that only really serves as a glorified corridor that has become home to the washing machine. I would like to add at this point that the extension has revolutionised how the house is lived in. It might not have been what was initially planned but none the less even this relatively small addition has been a happy one.

I look at this structure and what I see is this notion of growth in/from/due to restriction. Having dragged itself into being regardless. This structure is swaddled in it. Even though a lack of economic means was most definitely the driving force in the reduction of this grand idea to how it has taken shape today, there were also other restrictive elements at play.

Firstly the shape and growth was physically restricted by the positioning of the boundary of my parents' land in relation to the main building. This determined the width and also length of the extension. There were also

planning restrictions that impacted the materials used and the height of the walls. This extension happened despite the straight jacket of circumstances. The need for space was greater. The same way the need for warmth outweighs the lack of seamless cloth. The restrictive elements fuel the growth. It creates.

The seam-riddled surface of a patchwork, the continuous reminder that there was a lack of something, is also present at the joins of an extension.

With regards to the small annex at the rear of my parents house its status as an addition is not only acutely visible in its appearance but also in its title; *The Lean To*.

To this day we all still call it that. It is a perfectly solid structure yet its title suggests a co-dependency; without the house it could not stand up. It is a title that cements this seam. A label that highlights its youth and thus a distinction. Its seam will be forever present.

Over time, like with a patchwork these seams become a technique, a charming and even respected method of generating space/surface. The weight and presence of the restrictive factors become less because these alternative methods have become, due to the repetition of habit, acceptable. They become more of a feature as opposed to a label. Whether they charm the eye or serve as a stark reminder of the more negative, the seams will always be present. But perhaps with the distance time creates the negative connotations of the restrictions become a nostalgic entity. I would like to add

that the poverty encountered by the people who patch for necessity, for warmth is in no way comparable to not having enough funds to move to a larger house. In this sense I am comparing the resourcefulness of how this restriction is dealt with. How through this necessity, tangible growth happens. The spread was outwards. In these two examples the ways of acquiring space work as a continuous reminder that there was a lack of... [funds, warmth, space] However, through time and the repetition of these actions; patch-working and extension building, an acceptance has been formed. An acceptance that blinds the owner, maker, and viewer of where it initially came from. The seams have become a celebrated element.

I would go as far as to say that these two practices, born out of necessity and restriction have in fact come to show the opposite. The possibilities open to how high and big a building can be extended is almost limitless these days [land boundaries are still reigning]. A lot of the time they are grander than the actual building itself. These days extensions not only allow for the acquisition of space but have become a status symbol. They in fact demonstrate the amount of monetary wealth the owner has as opposed to highlighting the restrictive qualities that meant the original house was not enough. On the whole extensions these days manage to guise this and becomes this beacon of financial prosperity. Quilt and patchwork making have gone much the same way. A patchwork quilt is seen as a luxury item, especially so if it has been made by the maker themselves. It is not necessarily the material used or the size of the surface, but the time that is involved. Patching by

hand on any scale is time consuming. To have the luxury of time these days usually means there is monetary wealth. Especially now that we live in an economy where it is cheaper to acquire warmth from a pre made blanket.

The identity patchwork assimilated with hardship has also acquired a parallel with its complete opposite. It is a surface that is now able to show dire poverty and extreme wealth. It has found a new arena to sit in.





# THE REVERSE



Hanna Steenbergen-Cockerton, Potential Could,  
patched fabric, 2016-  
Photo by Bram Prins



Hanna Steenbergen-Cockerton, Potential Could, patched fabric, 2016-  
enlargement of the reverse  
Photo by Bram Prins

What the reverse of this patchwork displays is a system implemented by the maker to indicate which way they intended to be 'up' through the aid of arrows.

This was used mainly because there were no real prior plans of pattern build up or trajectory, so would instil an element structure to a generally free piece.

What has actually manifested is the display of a seemingly chaotic system. The apparatus of arrows that were supposed to be coherent in direction, are now pointing in all ways. What was purely supposed to be an aid for the maker, has now begun to shed light on factors external to the surface of the patchwork.

The maker implemented the system, never really stuck to it, yet continued to use it.

What could this suggest?

A bitty commitment to the project, a distracted focus, a chaotic mind perhaps?

It is an indication that this creation of space has been heavily affected by the systems and structure that surround.

I can say this because the maker is me. By revealing the reverse of this on-going patchwork in a conversation with a tutor I was suddenly made aware of the manifestation of this anti system.

Up until this point I had been blissfully unaware of the loss of which way is up.

It hadn't troubled me one bit.

The reverse has shown me that the piece does not stand alone, during process as well as after completion. As corny as it may sound it too goes on a journey. A journey that echoes the experiences of the maker. Its initial materialisation, it's birthing into existence, needed space. An embryonic plot needed to be allotted in the mind of the maker for this initial 'central eye' to be placed. This central point, a point which, in this case, has now been lost and will forever shift depending on its trajectory of growth. Due to there being no prior planning involved.

However, because of the time consuming nature of this particular technique, space, which in this case is defined as time also needs to be pencilled out in order to see any coherent spread. i.e. in order to see the actual surface grow in size time needs to be allocated. Time, I feel, is very present on/in the surface of a patchwork. Even the least literate can relate to the hours of labour that goes into making a surface in this manner.

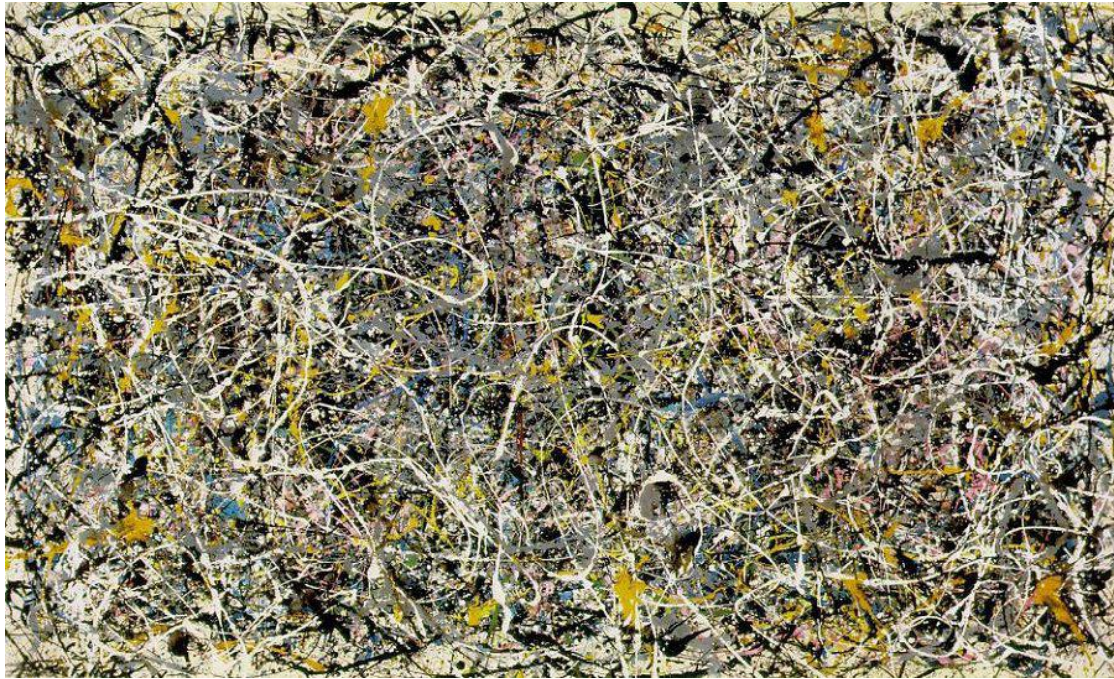
In this case due to the actual lack of surface [at its current state measuring 88cmx78cm at its widest parts in relation to how long this has been in process; 10 months] it displays a chronic lack of time on the part of the maker.

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A process born out of restriction, a technique that has managed to flip this on its head to produced growth, proudly displaying each territory, each halt in a striving for a seamless surface, can too be re-gobbled by its own source. Even once the momentum of the spread is in action it is still so acutely sensitive to the cards dealt to the hand of the maker. It's growth has the potential to be endless. Potential is key here. It 'could'.

It is interesting because I see 'finished' quilts with their external edges folded over and finished removing this potential. Why this potential never stretches any further than the dimensions of a human. Why this generation of space out of all these little segments that had so little. This rallying together. This creation of something despite all the restriction, why it has to be finished with an edge. Why this seam is left detached. Why does the energy stop?

The restriction is so intrinsic. The patchwork is birthed by it, in defiance of it grows through it, then due to further external factors, in this case more deliberate ones, i.e. the maker decides, is re-engulfed by it.

It is its genesis as well as its demise.



Jackson Pollock, One: Number 31, Oil on Canvas, 2,7 m x 5,31 m, 1950



*'...they have no focal centre for the eye to travel towards or away from. They are designed as continuous surface patterns which are perfectly unified without the use of any obvious repeating motif.'*<sup>v</sup>

I can see that on the surface there could be very little to compare. But through the words of John Berger Pollock's splash paintings displayed some distinctive parallels. Once I had become aware of not being aware that the 'way up' had been lost I also realised that I had been approaching this growth in a more autonomous way. The elements that became my decision triggers were harmony and balance of colour and form. This gave momentum for this roundular direction of growth. It was not driven by a pre-decided pattern. It was not governed by planning. That said, there is a section of the patchwork that displays a suggestion at a repeating motive [which was in fact the starting point, the 'central eye'], however, its occupation was soon pushed to the outskirts when this more organic, autonomous growth trajectory took over.

A lot of Pollock's drip paintings were large in scale. However, the action, the movement, the flick of the wrist or the swipe of the arm was always contained and cut off by the surface on which it was painted. For a method of painting that is seemingly so intuitive, without planning and dare I say free it seems almost absurd to fence it in by a canvas. I would not necessarily say that Pollock's process, and ultimately final works were inhibited by this surface; yet the large scale of the canvas does suggest [in comparison to his early more figurative works, that were of a more digestible size] that any

boundary would have been too small. Their scale is large in relation to a human. It has this engulfing quality. Similar to the action of a quilt. Regardless of scale the boundaries are decided by the dimensions of the human; the amount of cloth necessary to keep you sufficiently warm. Enough canvas to leave an impression.

I need to connect here the moving of the centre.  
This is important because:  
a fluidity in a seemingly ridged framework  
The links this has to the more large scale city planning.  
The trajectory of growth is not a unified one, it goes step by step, which has a continuous impact on where the centre is - where the hearth is?

# 51°30'37.6"N 0°06'56.3"W



These are the coordinates of London's 'hearth'. Two years ago it was calculated that the centre of London had shifted. Originally it was situated at the north end of Whitehall [A street that is recognised as the centre of Her Majesty's Government, which is lined with numerous governmental departments and ministries] by a statue of King Charles I. Due to the nature of the growth of London this epicentre had shifted 900m down the road to an anonymous city bench.

The same way a patchwork grows; scrap-by-scrap, block-by-block, patch-by-patch, a city too expands in a gradually uneven way. Due to this, the location of London's centre will be forever changing as long as the city keeps growing. The fringes of the city are effecting, purely by their presence, the hearth of London. The definition/location of this at least. Due to the nature of the growth, a fragmented, gradual spread, this central hook is not so stable. There is a veil of fluidity floating across this expanse. With regards to the static and tangible this silent movement is not noticeable. All the distances on the road signs will remain calculated to the statue of King Charles I. Nothing will actually change.

At some point the central pin could very well float back over to its original spot.

The importance of the centre?

Past a certain scale there is none

What I liked about this comparison:

-my home town

-how it has gone from Whitehall - an epic central point to an anonymous city bench.

-the connection with the growth of the patchwork

-it will be forever changing because the city will continue to grow - maybe this is how you make an infinite patchwork? Maybe it has surpassed the medium of cloth?

-If London [or any city for that matter] were to continue to grow then in theory the landmasses of the Earth could in the end all become London. This is the patchwork equivalent to Superstudio's 'Il Monumento Continuo'\*\*\*\*\*, spreading the full surface of the globe.

I ended my trip to America in New York City. It is possibly one of the most intense places I have ever been.

The urban landscape, extending high up into the sky condensed heavily onto this relatively tiny island - Manhattan. The topography of this island is the humans occupation. Everything - the physical - beyond the human - has its trace resonated at every corner. There are layers of presence. There is the physical human - the people living, being, existing in this space and then the environment itself. It is entirely man made. This too is human. Thought up, physically built by and then inhabited by people. Humans living within a human, a womb. Yet these fluid, messy beings made up of 70% water have created this grid like structure within which to exist. It's a bit like holding a mug of tea; the liquid is contained within the vessel until you start to walk with it. The rhythm of walking causes the tea to slosh against the sides spilling over the rim. Even if the entity or environment is made by the hand of man and made to contain, order, aid or even better our existence there will always be these moments of friction. These moments of overflow. Moments caused by the presence of humans. Humans create this order yet almost instinctively disorder it.

*"...there is no homogenisation available. There is only total existence, total cacophony, a total flowing of humans, ethnicities, and tribes and beings..."* <sup>VI</sup> \*\*\*\*\*  
Manhattan and its strict grid system could almost be seen as the attractive force for the diverse wealth of people that are drawn to this place. Timothy Levitch, who in the 90's was an unorthodox New York City



tour guide talks about the grid plan. He talks about how the *'...lay out of avenues and streets in New York City, these systems...'* <sup>VII</sup> how they do not fit the people who live in them. *'We are forced to walk in these right angles.'* <sup>VIII</sup> Perhaps it is these patterns of 90 degrees, these angled spirals, this restriction that enables the potential for friction. It is this chafing that makes up the vibrancy of this city.



Screen shot from *The Cruise*, Bennett Miller, 1998

**THE SOFT  
STUFF IS NOT  
A HOMERS  
MAKE**



A space, becoming a place, becoming a house, becoming a home.

What are these factors? Initially I thought this had to do with the soft stuff but now I am realising that it is not just a blanket or a bed or a pillow. It is the location of elements and the flow through the space. It is not one single segment. It is the arrangement of these segments, these scrapes in relation to each other. To form patches that collectively create a surface or in this case a home.

I recently moved house [again]. This time I moved into a place that was under construction. It was transitioning partially from workspace into living space. Public space into private space.

The ground floor would remain workspace, however upstairs would become private, living space.

As it stands the building has all the elements one [myself included] thought would be enough to make this building a house.

That is if you go by the dictionary's first definition:  
house

noun |hʌʊs|

1. a building for human habitation, especially one that consists of a ground floor and one or more upper storeys.<sup>ix</sup>

I also failed to be aware and to some extent took for granted that there is in fact a definite differentiation between a house and a home. Up until this point the places I have moved into had already established their 'home' status. I have compiled a list of the elements

that I believe further define this entity that is a house:

Running water [warm as well as cold]

Warmth

Toilet and shower

The capacity to store and cook food

a roof

My effects

a place to sleep

I came to realise that this was not necessarily a homers make.

Before, due to the established existence of a 'home' set up, moving would be a case of me filling the space with my things, which usually involved filling it with the 'soft stuff'; mattress, quilts, pillows and clothes. In those situations the soft stuff would define 'my' space or make the space into a place in this house that would make my home. It was my imprint. Now, however, I have realised that the setting up of a home space is far more multifaceted.

It is a build up of structures that transform and define the dynamics of a space.



Thomas Ruff, Interieur 14B, 1980

Privacy was one key factor that the space I am currently living in lacks.

The bathroom room is located down stairs off the entrance hall. This in essence is not a problem. What becomes an issue is that this space is walled with windows. Windows that are on street level. Luckily there are no neighbours but never the less every morning I move from private space through public space back to private.

On reflection the space lacks boundaries. It lacks this sense of restriction. I have this need for restriction. I like drawing curtains and closing doors, cementing 'my' domain.

Instead of rejoicing in this seeming freedom, I retract. Instead of installing curtains in the space, creating a clear boundary between outside and inside, public and private; dressing gowns were purchased. This garment offered a moment of privacy when moving through this public space.

Privacy was the restriction I yearned for. The need for privacy was bought to the closest level; touching the skin. The fabric on my skin became in some sense my home.

There is this saying '*...nothing but the clothes on his/her back*'.<sup>x</sup> It emphasises the having of nothing, however, I also read it as when everything else is lost, fabric is the one thing that remains, stays with you. It is the last loyal thing you have. It is the

thing that houses the body. It attempts to accommodate, keep private, shelter its inhabitant. It provides the same functions as a house. The only real difference is the space between its surface and the skin is fractional.

When the walls of brick or stone that surround you are not yours, fabric becomes your domain.

fabric is your defence

your privacy

your warmth

your shelter

your home.

So I go back on my words and say the soft stuff is very much a homers make.

growth = life

restriction feeds growth

we need restriction in order to live.

# 'SOMETIMES WALLED IN LIKE GARDENS' <sup>XI</sup>



Wolfgang Tillmans, Blushes # 3, 2000

We as humans exist in continuous states of restriction. This runs from a fundamental biological level [a level that is beyond our control] mortality, the surface of the earth, gravity, to the self-implemented and very complex social structures we have developed. Systems of restrictions are not necessarily negative. In more cases than not we are blissfully unaware of our embracing of them.

What they do is structure the worlds we live in. We love to build walls, create boundaries, draw lines, put things in boxes. Hell we LOVE Ikea!

I would like to introduce you to Skubb.\*\*\*\*\* It is 'a box with compartments' that 'helps you organise socks, belts and jewellery in your wardrobe or chest of drawers.'<sup>XII</sup> In other words we are organising within organisation. Ikea is the Matryoshka doll of storage. We spend our days off choosing to wander around the maze of prefabricated and prescribed lifestyles. Everything you need squeezed into these little bays.

We love to create contained areas in which to exist. Even the spiritual plain has on countless moments in history had to be annexed. 'They created enclaves of the beyond...these enclaves resembled hiding places; they were often kept private.'<sup>XIII</sup>

But they still existed. Restriction does not stop us from making new spaces in which to exist.

It is not only the act of creating a new space [metaphorically or not] that could, as the quote above states,

allow for actions to commence that are prohibited within a system. But it is also at the peripheries of these sites, these walls, these lines where a potential resistance could occur. At this boundary, the edge, where the juxtapositioning of two ecologies collide houses the potential to generate something new.

This notion of creating systems, one might argue are intrinsic notions that make up us as humans.

*'Segmentarity is inherent to all the strata composing us.'*<sup>xiv</sup>

It runs through our veins. It is our veins. All these little lines, tubes and vessels construct the layers that make us [humans]. In the fabric of the human body there are separate systems working individually as well as simultaneously to create this walking, breathing, functioning human being. The mind I feel is separate from this. Yes it is a system and it is part of the body. However, the biological networks that connect within the body is exactly that; contained within this anatomical figure. The mind is almost the 'enclave' that allows us to break, find the crack, the seam in the restriction. It takes it beyond the body. Externalising this compartmentalisation that constructs us. It finds the edge.

By the joining of edges one creates a space within. A space that can offer protection as well as be protected. *"In all these spaces, resistance to the outside is meant to become absolute, the boundary fending off human interaction"*<sup>xv</sup> However, in its very presence one creates intrigue; what is on the other side of the wall? Its very presence creates a question, creates a friction. On a very tangible level it

Patch-working is born out of a restrictive grasp. For the main part a restriction of economic means; the inability to afford one whole piece of cloth coupled with the need for warmth. Its surface is littered with the tiny scars of poverty where small limitations of material are joined together attempting to create a stretch long and large enough to keep the cold at bay.

It is a surface that not only exemplifies this transformation of restriction into growth [or at least the potential for that] but also becomes a vessel through which the contextual chokehold is also emitted.

prevents movement, therefore causing a deviation of path. The mind has to be creative. Therefore, spurs on new thought, generates the new. It is literally something one can kick against.

There was a journey.  
A journey to the southern states of America, to Boykin  
Alabama.  
I went to find the quilters and quilts of the Gee's  
Bend.  
I went to find the Quilts that had inspired me for all  
these years.  
When I got there I realised that this was not an arena  
I could just walk into.  
I did not share the same heritage, upbringing, skin  
colour as these ladies.  
Further along on my journey I met another group of wom-  
en, white women.  
As lovely as they were, I found them infinitely less  
interesting but I feared we shared more in common.  
I wanted to connect with the ladies in Boykin. I wanted  
to have things in common with them.  
I learnt very quickly that the scars run deep.  
I can appreciate, admire and fawn over the beautiful  
quilts that have emerged from that place.  
But I don't think I will ever truly understand.

I am not sure that I should.

# A QUALITY OF MIXED FEELINGS

Patchwork is difficult. It encompasses mixed feelings. It yearns to some extent for being a seamless stretch of fabric. It yearns for the situational circumstances that would allow for a smooth, crack free surface. The context of a better life. Yet the entire technique and aesthetic would not exist [or at least how it has taken form today] if it were not for poverty. Lack of income and a necessity for warmth meant that the maker had to be resourceful. A survival instinct kicked in. Unknowingly this has loaded the simple action of attaching two scraps of fabric together with something special. Something I cannot fully grasp. A quality that would be absent if there was enough money to buy a single length of cloth. Yet the people who patch for this reason; out of necessity, strive for being in a situation where financial means would allow for the purchase of this single stretch of material, or better still a pre-made blanket covering or quilt.

The privileged find it endearing, intriguing and copy it. They buy lengths of fabric only to cut them up to stitch them back together. Little piles of pre-cut squares are bundled together by ribbon, arranged by colours and size, ready to be assembled in a paint by numbers fashion. The maker needs not to think, just do. In essence the process remains the same; pieces of fabric re-joined together to create a larger surface. My argument here lies not with the act of deconstructing in order to reconstruct but with the meaning this brings to the process. It floods it with a whole new

energy. If fabric is in abundance then the reason for creating a surface is no longer for necessity, i.e. warmth, it is for a new reason. It has been adopted into a new arena. A coliseum where its heritage has no place or understanding.

The birthing of this technique came from no initial surface. The scraps that were used came from places that could no longer fulfil their function and through a collective effort were given a new lease of life. A role that was crucial for survival.

Standing then from this viewpoint the idea of cutting up a perfectly good piece of cloth is absurd. It comes from a completely different way of thinking. You are no longer working in or with restriction i.e. limited cloth.

In this new arena you just buy more.

What is funny is that the quilters I have come into contact with who exist in this second arena, the arena of endless cloth, they utilise this wealth of surface in a very safe fashion. They copy existing quilts; work loyally from the dictionary of patchwork patterns, regurgitating a language that already exists. They see something they like and they make it for themselves. This is not to say that skill is not present. Regardless of motive the labour involved in patching is intensive. However, you would think when unlimited resources are available that the boundaries of tradition would be more readily pushed against.

This demonstrates that the presence of restriction

triggers the need for the 'enclave'. It forces the hand into a new space.

Does this mean there are two types of patchwork? Is it the technique itself that defines its title or is it in fact the situation/circumstance in which it is made that dictates its title?

Or is it its purpose for being?

Why do I feel this need to put this in a box, to define it? I make quilts not necessarily for warmth or because it is a tradition that runs through the veins of the women in my family, or for the learning of skills.

I do it because:

I love cloth

I love how this object is both practical and aesthetically focussed

I love its domestication

I am fascinated by its fight for survival, its underdog status.

I love how it frustrates me so.

Yet I crave this need for seeing more. Wanting there to be this higher plane of existence. A reflection on *what the hands can do*. Why they do what they do. From the horses mouth. A quality that is absent in Boykin.

So in which of these two arenas do I fit? The response: neither.

I have never needed to make a quilt for the purpose of warmth. In that respect I grew up in the second arena.



However, purely the act of making aesthetically pleasing compositions also does not interest me. I have access to unlimited cloth, however, make a deliberate decision not to make use of that.

The circumstances from which I have come from; my background, my heritage form stronger correlations with the white women. As I too have had a privileged upbringing. Yet my inspirational source comes from the latter; the black ladies.

I have this twinge inside me that feels that deep down there is a link. I want there to be a link. Maybe that is it. I am manifesting something that isn't there purely because I want it to be. Because I can. But I now know that I will never fit. It is the round peg in the square hole. We do not share the same heritage. We do not share the same necessity. It encompasses a quality of mixed feelings.



Rene Maltete, La Cordonnerie, The Shoemaking, 2015

A scene devoid of people  
Residues of the human action emitting from what is  
draped over the windowsill,  
the only part of the whole composition that allows the  
viewer in.  
It is the real life  
It is the intimate life  
Private space being boldly exposed in the public  
domain.  
Perhaps on this day of the week there is no public.  
Cloth is easily overlooked.  
The mundanities of life  
The relate-ability, the understanding, the reassurance,  
that comes from another mans bedding  
that is emitted through an image on a postcard.  
Universal actions  
placed anywhere, anyhow.  
domesticity doing its thing  
simply being there.  
The wanting for fresh comfort,  
the need for airing  
All I am doing is writing about the thing I didn't want  
to write about  
I wanted to highlight it through not talking about it  
I want it to end on the bedding being hung out of the  
window

La Cordonnerie

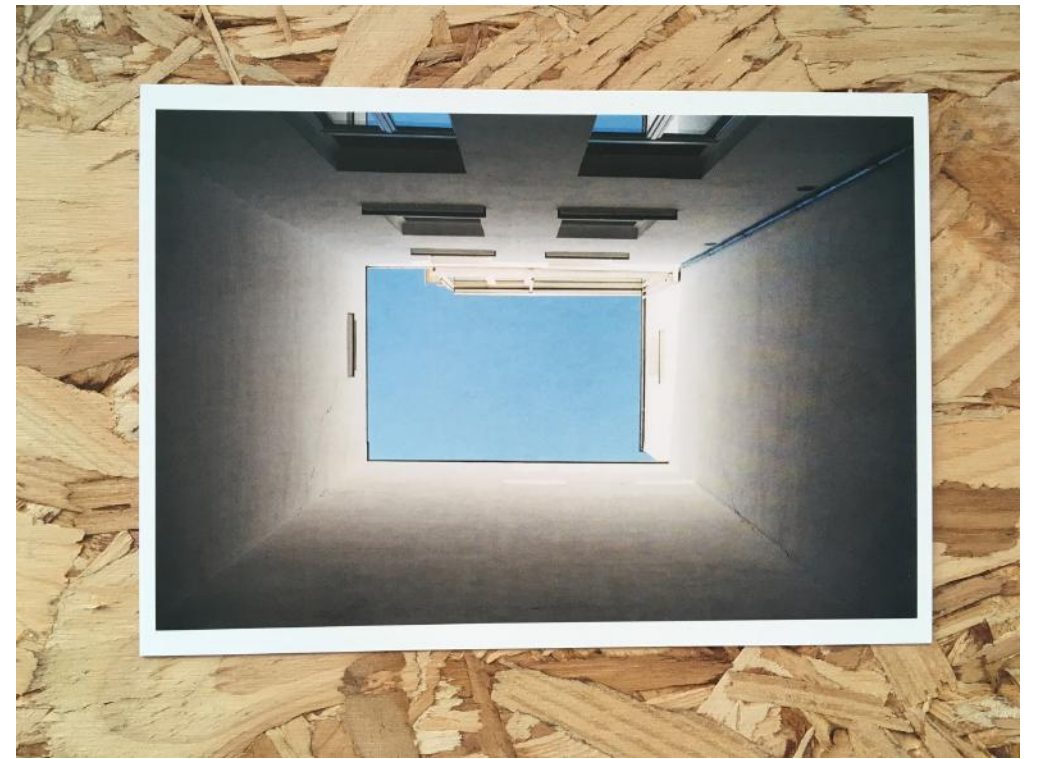
# HOW TO END



This is tricky when the thought or process in question has from the start been labelled as 'on going.' Or when the thought or process is larger than the parameters of the given structure. I feel that this entity, this body of words has become a clarifying collection that is now only really ready to start. The surface has for a better word only been scratched. Having said that the space and in that sense the time writing this paper has given me has meant that all these loose strings that have been dangling in my mind have finally started to come together. I needed to feel a restriction of a deadline to kick-start and assimilate what it was in fact that tickled my fancy.

I have realised that what I do is so heavily entangled with gaining an understanding of this being that is me. All that I come into contact with, where I go, whom I meet, what I see is all ultimately a quest to get a grasp on who I am. A conclusion in this sense would not be fitting. It would mean then that what I do had come to this ultimate point of clarity where there is no need to continue. Although I will continue to strive for this moment, I do hope it will never come.

This idea of growth coming about because of restriction, this quiet clashing of opposing forces does indeed make my eyes widen. This notion that the existence of one spurs the other. The good and bad existing as one. Without the Joker, Batman has no purpose. The same way growth [in which ever way this may manifest] would not exist without a situation that gives you the urge to expand. Forces your hand at. Back you against the wall.



Wolfgang Tilmans, Himmelblau, 2005

The quilts that came out of Boykin I believe would have not have taken the form they have if it was not for the dreadful circumstances that surrounded them. If these people were not taken from their homes, their lands sold into slavery and then forced to live in extreme poverty, even today, this fight for survival, fight for identity would not have resonated not only in the act of making but also on the surface of these truly beautiful pieces.

It is also interesting how through time these restrictions can become a not so heavy burden. How economic, political and social situations change the accessibility and even necessity of our responses to the walls that once stood. Patchwork has almost become an action of luxury now as opposed to a vital tool needed for survival. It seems to be so intrinsically sensitive to the world beyond its surface. But like this veil that floats above the centre of London that due to its continuing growth has relocated its hearth, it could one day fall back on its original spot.

This notion of opposing forces living on extreme ends of the spectrum yet without each other would not even exist creates this nuance. This sphere of interdependency can be found in all areas of life, I have just chosen the technique of patchwork as a vessel to visualise this. It is a fluid entity that is so complex and layered that comments or assertions are only really valid for a blink of an eye.

In that sense rounding up this text would almost seem wrong. However, credit must be given when due. Without

the constraints of the system I am currently in; one must write a thesis in order to graduate, this collection of words came into being. This piece came about because my hand was forced.

These systems of restriction are present in all facets of our lives. They allow us to be walking, breathing, thinking, active beings. They give us fire in our bellies. They highlight the good things and make life worth fighting for. For this I am reluctant to finish with an edge. I do not want to fold the fabric over just yet.

# ADDITIONAL

\*

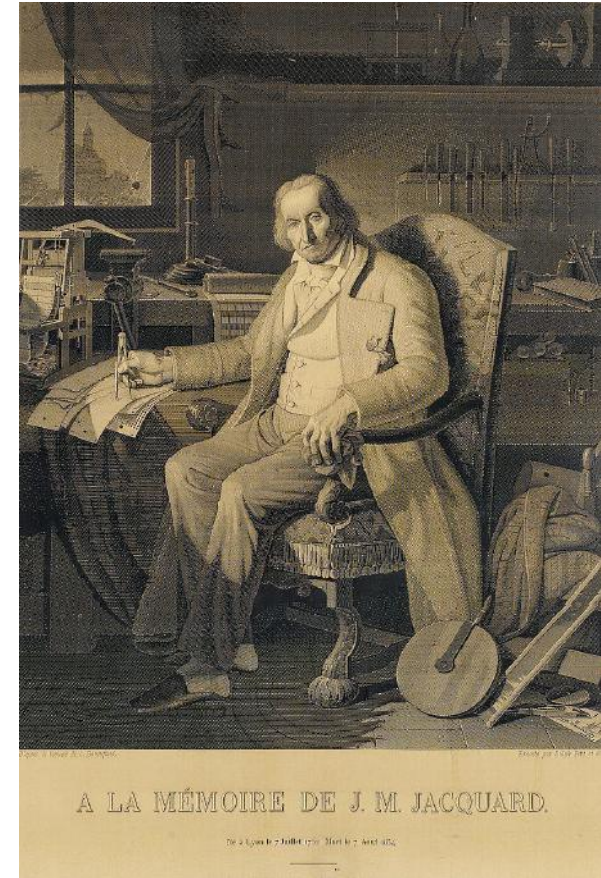


'Housetop', Log Cabin variation,  
Mary Elizabeth Kennedy, cotton and  
rayon, 84 x 79 inches,  
c. 1935

\*  
\*



'Housetop' single-block, 'Courthouse  
steps' variation, Jennie Pettway,  
corduroy, 80 x 64 inches, c. 1945



Portrait of Joseph Marie Jacquard, Michel-Marie Carquillat,  
woven silk on a Jacquard loom, 85 x 66 cm, 1839

Charles Babbage [mathematician, philosopher, inventor and mechanical engineer who was the originator for the concept of a digital-ly programmable computer.] owned one of these portraits; it inspired him in using perforated cards in his analytical engine.



Richard Diebenkorn, Ocean Park No. 22, oil on canvas,  
236.2 x 205.7 cm, 1969



Nancy Pettway holding a mini quilt she had made outside the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective, Boykin Alabama. 2016



- \* *'The image makes me think of this conversation with this woman the other day.*
- \* *She was a fastidious judaic type woman, in very sexual slacks and we were talking about the 'grid plan' and I made the comment about how, you know, the grid plan emanates from our weaknesses, this lay out of avenues and streets in New York City, these systems, 90 degree angles.*

*To me the grid plan is puritan homogenising, in a city where there is no homogenisation available. There is only total existence, total cacophony, a total flowing of humans, ethnicities, and tribes and beings and gradations of awareness, and consciousness... and cruising. And this woman turns to me and she goes; oh I never even thought of that, she goes; I can't imagine it, everyone likes the grid plan?*

*And of course the question is, like who is everyone? I mean its just what I had said and I mean who ever that is under the white comforter, cuddled up between 34th street and broadway existing on the concrete of this city, hungry and dishevelled, struggling to crawl their way onto this island with all their imagined rages and hellishness and self orchestrated purgatories, I mean, what does that person think about the grid system plan? Probably much more on my plane of thinking, my gradation of being which is, lets blow up the grid plan and re write the streets to be much more self portraiture of our personal struggles rather than some real estate brokers wet dream from 1807.*

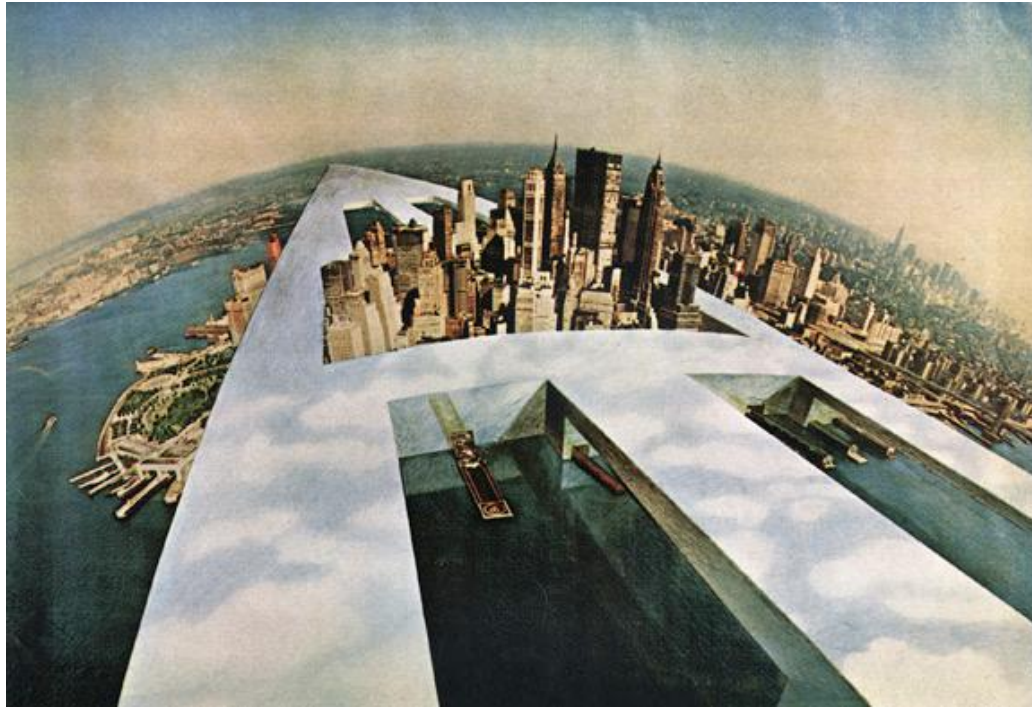
*We are forced to walk in these right angles. I mean*

*doesn't she find it infuriating, by being so completely illusioned to the grid plan?*

*I think most note worthy is this idiom I can't even imagine changing the grid plan, she is really aligning herself with this civilisation. It's like saying I cant imagine altering this meek and lying reality that rules our lives, cant imagine standing up on a chair in the middle of the room to change perspective, I can't imagine changing my mind on anything, in the end cant imagine having my own identity that contradicts their identities.*

*When she says to me after my statement everyone likes the grid plan, isn't she automatically excluding myself from everyone? How could you not like the grid plan? So functional, take a right turn, and a right turn and a right turn and then there is a red light and a green light and a yellow light, its so symmetrical. By saying everyone likes the grid plan, you're saying I am going to relive all the mistakes my parents made, I am going to identify and relive all the sorrows my mother ever lived through, I will propagate and create dysfunctional children in the same dysfunctional way that I was raised, I will spread neurosis through out the landscape and do my best to recreate myself and the damages of my life for the next generation.'*

Transcript of Timothy Levitch talking about the grid system in New York City  
Timothy "Speed" Levitch, The Cruise, 1998



Superstudio, 'Il Monumento Continuo' [The Continuous Monument], photo collage, 1969

Superstudio were a group of Florentine architects. This particular project 'Il Monumento Continuo' was a commenting on globalisations swamping effect on the world. This monolythic structure covering the surface of the earth and through its engulfing nature stripping away elements of cultural identity creating a generic entity.



SKUBB  
Box with compartments  
Black  
44x34x11 cm  
£6

# READING LIST

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Foam, International photography magazine, issue 46, 2017

# QUOTATIONS

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- VI Timothy "Speed" Levitch, The Cruise, Bennett Miller, 1998
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- VIII Timothy "Speed" Levitch, The Cruise, Bennett Miller, 1998
- IX Oxford Dictionary of English
- X English saying- no definite origin found, other than the words of my mother.
- XI Selected Essays of John Berger, John Berger, Edited by Geoff Dyer, Essay, The soul and the Operator, p. 572, 2001
- XII IKEA website; <http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/products/small-storage-organisers/clothes-organisers/skubb-box-with-compartments-black-art-60210552/>
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- XIV 1000 Plateau's, Micropolitics and Segmentarity, Gilles Deleuze, p..., 1980
- XV The Craftsman, Richard Sennet, p. 228, 2008



# SPECIAL THANKS GO OUT TO...

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Joke  
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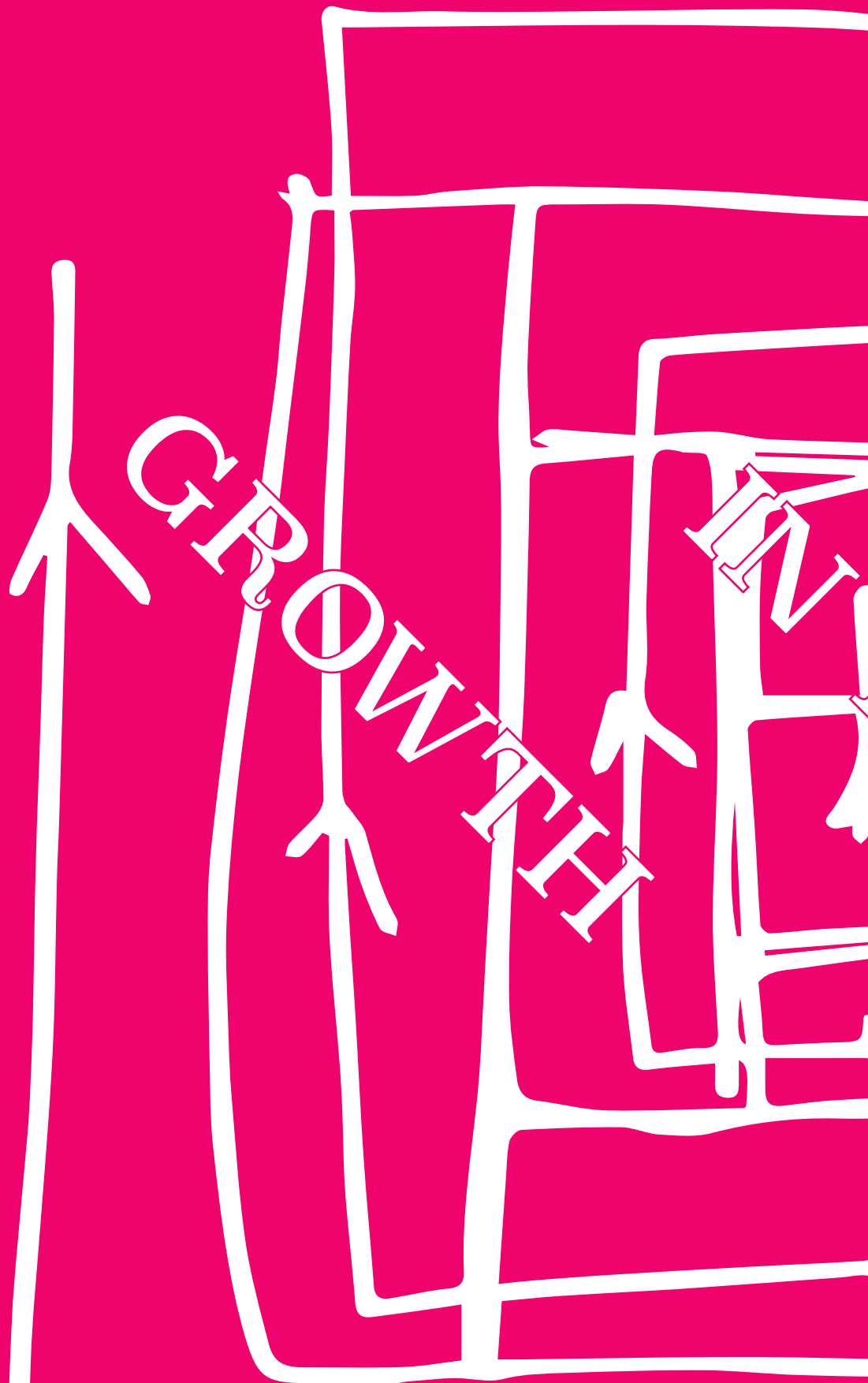
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