

As we

dwell

in time

fold



I.

Cocoon

“Immigrant—3,000 years old.”

This is all that was recorded by US customs agents at the point of entry, according to some newspapers of the time.¹ It was September of 1949 and he had just traveled more than 3,000 miles after having been buried for thousands of years.

The traveler was a mummified man enveloped in a funerary bundle that was about to be opened at the Natural History Museum of New York.

On the day of the unwrapping, Rebeca Carrión was extremely nervous and excited. A Peruvian archaeologist and the director of the National Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in Peru, Carrión had opened hundreds of these bundles before.

But as if opening a burial bundle from a culture lost millennia ago was not enough of an event in itself, this specific opening was even more extraordinary.

1. Christopher Heaney, “Mummies Take Manhattan,” *The New Yorker*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/mummies-take-manhattan>.

Image (left): *Seeing Paracas Mummy off to New York*: Pedro Rojas Ponce, Capt M.W. Laverick, Rebeca Carrión, Moises Woll Dávila. From: “Rebeca and the Mummy,” *Americas* 2, no. 1 (January 1950).

Paracas is the name of a pre-Columbian culture that inhabited the south of Peru between approximately 800 and 100 BCE, famous for their elaborate weavings and textile work. They buried their dead in intricate bundles made of several layers of textiles, some decorated with beautiful embroideries, which could measure more than 80 feet long.

Wrapped in these bundles, the dead symbolically turn into seeds. The bundles were considered plant bulbs and the cemeteries, orchards.

The Paracas lived in a vast coastal desert between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains. The arid environment of the region ensured that their textiles remained incredibly well preserved. Covered by a kind of sand called *regosol*—which derives from the Greek word for blanket, *rhegos*—the fabrics of these bundles stayed hidden from the sun. Since natural dyes often lose their color when exposed to light or water, the enduring brightness of these 2,000-year-old textiles makes them extraordinary.



In classical historiography, prehistory is usually divided into periods according to the material remains found, such as the Stone Age and the Metal Age. This division highlights the significant role that materials played in the development of human civilization. Textiles, which were equally critical for human evolution, are often excluded from this construct as they are perishable and do not leave as many physical remains. Often ignored is also the crucial role that their creators—mostly women—played in historical development.²

In 1986, Ursula K. Le Guin wrote a brief but highly influential essay titled “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.” The essay introduced Elizabeth Fisher’s anthropological perspective that posits that the earliest cultural invention was likely a container, such as a bag, net, or pouch, rather than a tool for aggression or violence. Le Guin writes:

*We’ve heard it, we’ve all heard all about all the sticks, spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story.*³

It’s hard not to think about how much we still attribute value to “hard” materials as builders of civilizations and how “soft” materials and what they do—collect, cover, preserve, obscure—are relegated to secondary roles in the heroic theater of history.

2. Kassia St Clair, *The Golden Thread* (London: John Murray, 2018), 29.

3. Ursula Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (London: Ignota Books, 2019), 29.

Image (left): Watercolor of mummy 319, Paracas - Wari Kayan by the artist Alejandro Gonzalez Trujillo, known by the pseudonym Apu-Rimak (Abancay, 1900 – Lima, 1985). From: Julio C. Tello Archive of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima, Peru.

When, in 1925, Howard Carter finally set out to open Tutankhamun's sarcophagus, three years had passed since the tomb was first opened. By then, archaeologists had already learned to move methodically, recording and meticulously documenting their findings, so the process of getting to the main chamber had been a long one. Kassia St Clair states in her book *The Golden Thread*:

Despite this diligence it's clear that he considered the textiles found in Tutankhamun's tomb a lackluster side dish. When the sarcophagus was first opened Carter wrote that the sight that met their eyes was "a little disappointing" because the contents were "covered by fine linen shrouds." [. . .] At worst, the linens were treated as impediments, to be brushed aside and discarded like dusty cobwebs. [. . .] The shrouds, pads and bandages that had been so painstakingly arranged around his body were likely destroyed in the unwrapping.⁴

Carter had failed to understand something fundamental: that for the ancient Egyptians the linen wrappings around the body were what imbued it with powerful and magical meaning, turning the mummies into sacred beings.

4. Kassia St Clair, *The Golden Thread* (London: John Murray, 2018), 39.

One proposed origin for the word *sacred* comes from the Latin *sacer*, and links it to a root that means to enclose, protect, or bind. It is easily twinned with the word *secret*, since both refer to something set apart and out-of-bounds, which only certain people can be entrusted to handle, care for, or begin to comprehend.⁵

An age-old way to hide or protect something from view is to bury it, as the underground is not so easily accessible and is often excluded from everyday life.

In contemporary society the underground has several metaphorical connotations. It is the place where all that has been repressed dwells. But to think or see deeply means to understand better, and to descend could be a movement toward revelation rather than deprivation.⁶ Also known as “the underground” are communities in which people feel safe to choose to differ from the cultural norm, experiment with other ways of living, or cultivate a fluidity, which may be limited under normal circumstances

Western tradition usually depicts hell as located underground. However, the Bible does not provide a specific location for hell, and the idea of it being underground is largely a cultural construct. Surprisingly, the origin of the word *hell* in English has nothing to do with punishment or evil. It comes from the reconstructed Proto-Germanic noun **xalijo* or **haljo*, meaning “underworld” or “concealed place,” itself from a Proto-Indo-European root **kel-* or **kol-* meaning at once “to cover,” “to conceal,” and “to save.”⁷

5. Christina Riggs, *Unwrapping Ancient Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 187.

6. Robert Macfarlane, *Underland* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), 12, 17.

7. *Ibid.*, 375.

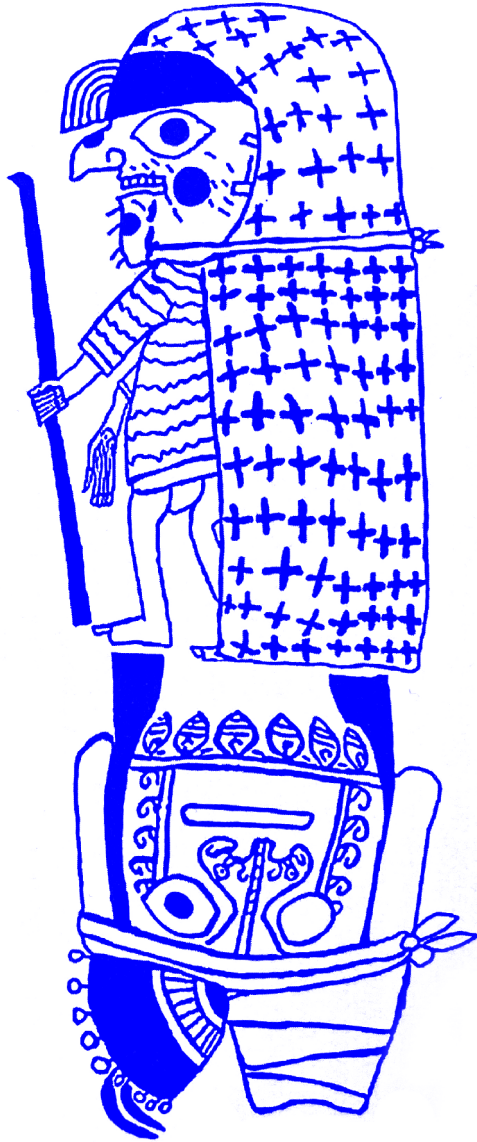
For the Paracas, as for many of the cultures of ancient Peru, the underworld had a very specific meaning. Their understanding of the universe was based on a principle of opposing pairs that operate in time, space, and society. Their cosmos was divided into two levels—the world above, Hanaqpacha, and the world below, the underworld or Ukhupacha—that were in opposition but that also complemented each other. Humans lived in an intermediate liminal space between these two worlds, Kaypacha, which was created through the interaction of opposing forces. This liminal space was necessary for the continuity of their world, and funerary rituals were performed to maintain balance and harmony between the opposing dimensions.

The Ukhupacha was populated by original ancestors and a diverse range of subterranean and aquatic creatures. Here, the dead did not rest in peace, but instead actively engaged in a complex social hierarchy. Abundant iconography depicts them celebrating and performing a variety of domestic and ritualistic activities. It is a vibrant and dynamic world where death is not an antinomy of life, but rather a phase of its cyclical and transformative sequence, which eventually leads to regeneration.

Through their funeral rites the Paracas transformed their dead into ancestors. In ancient Peru ancestors were revered as a vital connection between the community and the land, and were worshiped with great respect and devotion.

Textiles played an important role in the transformation of the deceased into ancestors. The elaborate wrapping with multiple layers of cloth was seen as a way to protect and preserve the body for its journey to the afterlife. Often decorated with intricate designs and motifs that had symbolic meaning and magical power, they served as a conduit for communication with the supernatural realm.

Image (right): The divinity of the underworld. Detail from a ceramic vase belonging to the Moche culture from pre-columbian Peru. From: Collection of the MCHAP (Museo chileno de arte precolombino) in Santiago de Chile. Published in: Jürgen Golte, *Moche cosmología y sociedad* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2009).



The caterpillar moves its body in a rhythmic dance, weaving silk threads around itself in a graceful figure-eight pattern. Each movement is deliberate, each thread carefully placed. The silk flows from its mouth, a shimmering thread of delicate artistry. The caterpillar spins until it is enveloped in a soft, silky shell, a fortress to protect the living within. Woven tightly, the silk forms a cocoon of incredible strength. The fibers, however, are not rigid or inflexible. They have a remarkable ability to bend and stretch without breaking, allowing the cocoon to adapt and change as the pupa grows and develops.

Their silk also works as a tool of deception: some of the most cunning caterpillars weave cocoons that perfectly blend into their environment to avoid detection from predators. Protected by the fiber's natural insulation, the pupa is warm, contained, secured, and ready for the passage.

What made the opening of the funerary bundle extraordinary on that September day of 1949 was not just the fact that it was happening so far away and in a completely different context from which it was exhumed.

The difference was that this unwrapping was not just taking place in front of the eyes of a few experts. Reporters, photographers, radio commentators, television camera operators, and newscasters filled the museum's education room to capacity.

The ancestor ceased to be sacred and became a naked corpse in front of the public eye.

As each layer came off, an act of care was being untied. The proximity of the textiles to the flesh throughout all those centuries was like an endless embrace that accompanied the body as the skin tissue dehydrated and withered, as the body transformed into *something else*. It was an embrace that no one else could give because that *something else* was never meant for others to see.

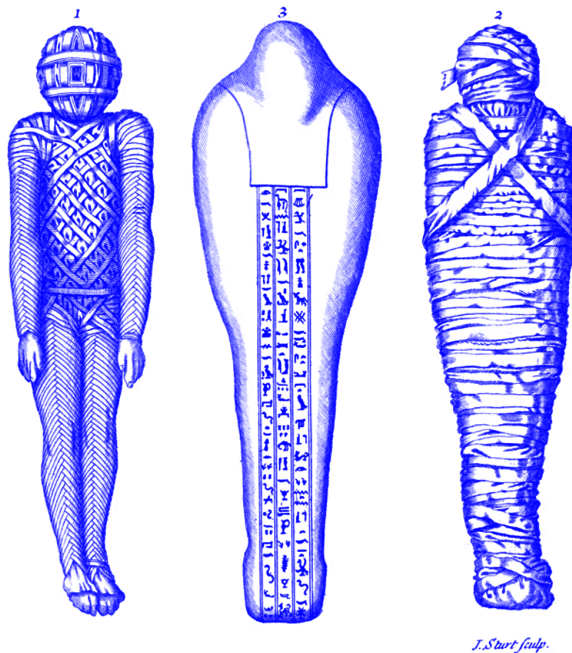
In the archaeological view a funerary bundle creates a chamber of memory; to remove layers—to uncover—is to fully comprehend our past. But when did we stop agreeing that certain things should respectfully be kept covered?

When do we turn the remains of a human being into a fascinating mummy?

When it's not us.⁸

8. Christopher Heaney, "Mummies Take Manhattan," *The New Yorker*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/mummies-take-manhattan>.

It was the act of wrapping that conferred the mummies of the ancient Egyptians their sacred nature. While preserving the bodies was a benefit of the process, it was not the sole purpose. The wrapping process required great skill, resulting in an intricate arrangement of linen strips that produced visually stunning effects. The linen was believed to possess magical and medicinal properties. The wrapping of the dead resembled that of sacred objects such as temple statues, effectively transforming the deceased into statues imbued with divinity. The wrapping served to mark the bodies as sacred, protect them from potential profanation, and keep them separate from the ordinary world. Additionally, the act of wrapping held cultural significance, representing a system of restricted knowledge that demarcated who could know what.⁹



9. Christina Riggs, *Unwrapping Ancient Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 215.
Kassia St Clair, *The Golden Thread* (London: John Murray, 2018), 53.

Image (top): Thomas Greenhill, [*Nekrokedeia*] or, *the Art of Embalming* (1705), plate opposite p. 209.
Image (right): Paul Dominique Philippoteaux, *Examen d'une momie - Une prêtresse d'Ammon* (circa 1890). Private collection.

If for the Paracas wrapping a dead body meant turning a person into a sacred ancestor while concealing it from public view, modern sensitivity reverses that process: it is the display in a museum exhibit that gives it a sacred aura. The museum—a place where visibility is a means of revealing knowledge—separates the being from everyday life, or more specifically from a quiet death, keeping it accessible for all to see.¹⁰

The pursuit of knowledge is generally seen as a noble enterprise. We are used to taking for granted the urgent desire to always strive to know more above any other consideration. We may think that this is the result of a natural and inherent human drive, but the fact that we have so internalized this quest is also the result of an agenda behind a particular historical project. Seeing further and further has been the epistemological basis of knowledge production of the Enlightenment project—a project that assumes an entitlement to knowledge, even if it violates traditional barriers that non-Western societies erect to preserve and circulate traditional culture.



Francis Bacon—a key figure in the development of the Enlightenment—recommended that researchers should dig “further and further into the mine of natural knowledge.” The ethos of extraction so fundamental to the practice of mining relates to the public unwrapping of the Paracas funerary bundle when thinking of modernity’s attitude toward knowledge. For archaeology, digging is necessary to understand our past. Archaeological excavations uncover layer after layer of strata, plucking ancient objects from the ground as if they were valuable minerals drawn from a mine. This extraction attitude shows its most harmful side when applied to the natural world, understanding it as a resource to be exploited. It is the force behind the desecration of the underground—the Ukhupacha—and its depletion of meaning. To the pre-scientific worldview, the underground was not a neutral resource to be tapped, it was a sacred entity inhabited by mythological creatures and imbued with mystery.¹¹ As Christina Riggs states in her book *Unwrapping Ancient Egypt*:

*The sanctified became secular, the hidden became visible and the past became a property of the present.*¹²

10. Christina Riggs, *Unwrapping Ancient Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 187.

11. Sina Najafi and Rosalind Williams, “Underworld: An Interview with Rosalind Williams,” *Cabinet*, no. 30 (Summer 2008).

12. Christina Riggs, *Unwrapping Ancient Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 27.

II.

Histolysis

*Nowhere in the world do women enjoy so much freedom, not even in Paris.*¹³

With these words the Franco-Peruvian feminist writer Flora Tristan described the city of Lima in 1830, just after its independence from colonial powers. But this freedom had nothing to do with a change of attitudes toward women in the new postcolonial era. What Tristan was referring to was the freedom—very rare for women in those days—enjoyed by the so-called *tapadas limeñas*.

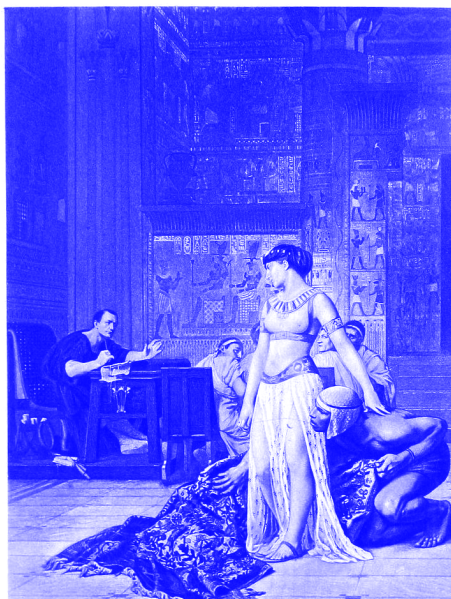
Tapada limeña was the term used in colonial Peru to describe women in Lima who covered their heads and faces with shawls, revealing just one eye. Its use began in the 16th century and spread well into the 1800s. This custom had its origins in 15th-century Spain. After the reconquest, Muslim women were forbidden from covering their faces. They were forced to substitute their traditional veil for a Castilian shawl to be worn over their hair and shoulders. They circumvented this ordinance by using the shawl to cover their face. The fashion spread to Catholic women and later to the colonies.

At a time when women's lives were limited and relegated to the private sphere, going out covered allowed them to meet people or go places that would otherwise have been impossible. Anonymity allowed them to go to clubs, political rallies, or the theater without being recognized and, therefore, without being judged. For the *tapada*, the veil was not an enforced signal of religiosity or chastity. On the contrary, it was a voluntary and self-imposed gesture that allowed the wearer to temporarily flee the scrutiny and surveillance of the public eye.

13. Flora Tristán, *Peregrinaciones de una paria* (Arequipa: Biblioteca juvenil, 2010).

*So Cleopatra, taking only Apollodorus the Sicilian from among her friends, embarked in a little skiff and landed at the palace when it was already getting dark; and as it was impossible to escape notice otherwise, she stretched herself at full length inside a bed-sack, while Apollodorus tied the bed-sack up with a cord and carried it indoors to Caesar. It was by this device of Cleopatra's, it is said, that Caesar was first captivated [...].*¹⁴

The famous story of how Cleopatra rolled herself in a carpet to meet Julius Caesar comes from a mistranslation of a passage in *The Life of Julius Caesar*, written by the Greek biographer and philosopher Plutarch a century after the memorable meeting. The actual Greek word that Plutarch used is στρωματόδεσμον (*strōmatódesmon*), which does not refer to a carpet, but rather to a large sack used for tying up bedclothes. We will never know whether the episode actually happened, or whether the epic events that followed Cleopatra's encounter would have been possible had she not briefly concealed her identity with a piece of fabric.



14. Plutarch, *Lives, Volume VII: Demosthenes and Cicero, Alexander and Caesar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 559.

Considered almost a virtue, our contemporary world places great value on visibility. We constantly strive to be seen and acknowledged, with our physical appearance, race, and gender playing a significant role in shaping our sense of self. We have grown accustomed to equating our personal identity with our visible image.¹⁵

In our world visibility signifies power and control. Even if we wanted to, it is getting harder and harder to become invisible. When we cover our physical identity, it immediately raises suspicion. Truth seems to reside in our faces, since we assume that seeing another person's face will allow us to perceive their intentions. Concealing one's face is a rebellion against the very premise of authority and control.

But where there is coercion, either covering or uncovering oneself with fabrics can become an act of oppression. The recent protests that began in Iran in 2022 challenge a longstanding history of laws that use women's bodies as symbols of political ideology. These laws date back to before the 1979 Iranian Revolution, when, toward the end of the 1930s, women's attire started to be controlled by politics rather than beliefs or traditions. The current movement represents a rejection of patriarchal conventions that have fueled both the prerevolutionary government and the Islamic Republic. During the Iranian Revolution, wearing a veil became mandatory for women, just as unveiling had become mandatory in the 1930s.

The veil has a long human history and many symbolic implications, which are often contradictory. Context is what gives significance to the embrace or disavowal of objects as symbols of submission or rebellion. Independent of context a veil does not have much meaning.¹⁶

15. Rafia Zakaria, *Veil* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 6.

16. *Ibid.*, 63.

In Latin America during Spanish colonial times, a caste system was established based on a rigid racial hierarchy. The system, derived from medieval blood-cleansing statutes, categorized people by skin color and ancestry, resulting in 16 categories related to permutations of the three main races of whites, Indians, and Blacks. Offspring of a union between a “white” person and an “Indian” person, known as *mestizos*, had lower social status. The social strata became lower as the skin became darker. The system was ridiculously complicated, tracing the mix of people over multiple generations. The intermixture of races was common and occurred not only in the lower social classes but also among the elites. As a consequence, the elites’ “whiteness” was always in question.

It is in this scenario of perpetually changing categories and fluctuating identities that racial terms and taxonomies were used to create a sense of order. The terms attempted to provide structure to a system that lacked clarity and coherence. It is not surprising, then, that the tapada became such an iconic image of this period, since the only way of representing the abstract notion of racial purity was to fudge the issue.¹⁷

Under the veil of the tapada normative categories were fluid and undefined.

In a similar way, dissident gender identities were protected by the black shawl of the tapada. A documented incident—the case of Francisco Pro—describes how a man was arrested and convicted for dressing as a tapada in 1803. He was detained after he had briefly lifted his shawl during a religious festivity. This episode demonstrates that the veil allowed an intimate enclosure in a crowd, so that people with identities transgressing the norm could coexist in public spaces.

The cover of the tapada takes away physicality from the identity equation. It enables the creation of a third state of being, a limbo between presence and non-presence, in which either can be actualized but neither really is.¹⁸ Like the elusive moment just before the magician unveils the hat shrouded in a cloth, when the world is brimming with possibility.

17. Natalia Majluf, *La invención del indio* (Lima: IEP Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2022), 272.

18. Rafia Zakaria, *Veil* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 9.

Image (right): Pancho Fierro, *Saya y Manto del año 1854* (1854). Published in: Boris Lukin, *Tipos limeños vistos por Pancho Fierro. Acuarelas de una colección soviética* (Leningrad: Artes Aurora, 1979).



It's an eerie process, equal parts beautiful and terrifying. There is complete rearrangement of the internal and external anatomy. The cells secrete caustic agents that dissolve the caterpillar's muscles and organs. Its old body melts inside the cocoon and becomes a sticky juice. Not all liquefies, though. Within the goeey substance something remains: microscopic clusters of cells called imaginal discs, which will go on to form the new parts of the lepidopter.

Once the body is completely dissolved, the imaginal discs will start feeding on the soupy meltdown of the old body to build a new one, to re-form itself. Inside the pupa's shell, its identity, once fixed and unchanging, is now capable of transformation and renewal.

Imaginal, from the Latin *imāginālis*, denotes something made of images, and shares the same root with the word *imagination*. In this specific case, though, the term refers not to imagination, but to the imago, a synonym for the insect's adult stage. Still, the fact that the cells that will form the discs and propel the whole process—and were hidden inside the caterpillar all its life—are also called imaginal cells can make one fantasize about whether these cells were capable of imagining who they wanted to become all along. In a broad sense the imaginal can be understood as a field of possibilities, whether it be on a small scale, as in the life of an insect, or on a scale that may involve entire communities.

Even within a particularly oppressive social imaginary there is always the possibility of the free imagination of individuals to emerge.

There is a beautiful novel by the Peruvian modernist poet and visual artist Jorge Eduardo Eielson (1924–2006) called *Primera muerte de María*. It is structured as if we were following the striptease of its main character: each chapter corresponds to a piece of cloth she takes off. In the novel Eielson mentions the figure of the tapada—for him a representation of Lima’s phony society—as a way of questioning traditional values. He opposes the clothing of the tapada to the striptease of the main character.

Eielson made a series of performances in which textiles and the covered body were central. *Primera muerte de María* was first envisioned as a companion piece for a performance of the same name. To him, language has the attribute of an envelope that, like clothing covering a body, conceals something underneath. Poetry is that which lies beyond language. In his performances the cloth has a double role, which reminds us of the attributes of language: it gives form, but also conceals.

That Eielson makes a correspondence between textiles and language makes perfect sense, since the words *text* and *textile* share the same Latin root: *textum*, which means “weave.” Across all his work he assimilates poetry with the naked body and language with the fabric that covers it, which, by hiding it, allows it to manifest in a social context. To him, language is further removed from poetry the more overdressed it is. However, language is also nudity, an act of striptease, the promise—impossible to fulfill—of showing the body completely uncovered.

This take on language brings to mind Susan Sontag’s essay “Against Interpretation,” in which she cautions against the perils of interpreting art by rendering it into words. Sontag suggests that the hunt for hidden meaning in art risks dismembering its poetic essence, leaving us with nothing but hollow scraps. She encourages us to resist the urge to uncover a meaning beneath the work’s sensuous surface and instead to experience it fully and viscerally, on its own terms.¹⁹

19. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Penguin Classics: London, 2009), 3-14.

It was in Plutarch's works that we find the oldest source of the story of Cleopatra and the carpet. Plutarch also introduced the allegorical artistic motif of the veil of Isis. In his work *On Isis and Osiris* he described the seated statue of a goddess in the Egyptian city of Sais that bore the inscription "I am all that has been and is and shall be; and no mortal has ever lifted my veil."

Illustrations of Isis with her veil being lifted were popular from the late 17th to the early 19th century. The image proved to be a powerful metaphor in the Age of Enlightenment, in which it came to represent the triumph of science and philosophy uncovering nature's secrets.

This personification of the natural world implies a contrast between an outward appearance and an unseen essence, or between a surface and a depth of nature. Two attitudes follow from this premise: either nature opposes man and must be conquered and tamed, or on the contrary—since nature chooses to hide—the pursuit to discover her secrets can unleash unforeseeable consequences, putting humanity in danger.

The iconography of a submissive Isis, representing nature as an object of observation, experimentation, and scientific calculation, slowly vanishes as we come to realize that we are inextricably linked to the natural world.²⁰

20. Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 317.

Image (right): Frontispiece to the book: Gerhard Blasius, *Anatome Animalium* (1681). Engraved by Jan Luyken.



AMSTELODAMI. Apud Viduam Joannis a Someren Henricum et Viduam Theod. Boom. 1681.

The new James Webb Space Telescope has the ability to observe the infrared part of the electromagnetic spectrum penetrating dust and gas clouds, which usually obscure visible light observations. It captures the formation of stars and planets in the early universe, as well as the atmospheres of exoplanets.

Ultrahigh-field MRI can reveal structural details of the brain at the level of individual cells. It allows the visualization of the mesoscopic organization of the human cortex at the functional and structural level without the need to cut at all.

Scientists working at the US National Institute of Standards and Technology have created a unique radar system that relies on microwaves and can produce real-time images of objects that are behind walls or are traveling at hypersonic speeds.

Nothing stands in the way of our eagerness to see.

Yet, transparency has a dark side, which has to do with a lack of mystery, shadow, and nuance. The laudable aim of heroic transparency, with its goal of ripping apart veils, laying bare all truths, and shooing away any darkness, often comes at a steep price. For in its wake, we frequently find the seeds of violence. As Byung-Chul Han notes:

*Transparency is an ideology. Like all ideologies, it has a positive core that has been mystified and made absolute. The danger of transparency lies in such ideologization. If totalized, it yields terror.*²¹

How, then, can we also give value to what dwells out of view? How can we seek to understand while accepting the impossibility of complete and comprehensive knowing?

In his book *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant argued that transparency through definition and clarification ignores the aspects of self that are difficult to grasp. Opacity, instead, simply accepts that what makes us into who we are cannot be understood completely. He beautifully used the image of woven fabrics when explaining his views:

*Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures.*²²

21. Han Byung-Chul, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), viii.

22. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 190.

III.

Eclosion

Tinku is a word in Quechua—an Amerind language spoken by people living in the Andes—that means “encounter” or “meeting.” The concept of *tinku* has an ancient origin, and in pre-Columbian times it was used to describe the meeting point of the opposing pairs that give form to the universe: the sky and the underground, the dry season and the wet season, female and male, light and darkness.

In this context *tinku* is the symbolic union that expresses a bond of unity, distinction, and reciprocity, which represents a third unit formed through an interlocking principle. This new third unit, in turn, emanates power, energy, and reproduction.

A common way to represent the *tinku* in pre-Columbian iconography is through two staggered pyramids facing each other. The one with the base parallel to the bottom of the image represents the underworld; the one upside down represents the upper world. In some artifacts we just see one type, with a spiral coming out from the pyramid, extending and trying to reach the other side: one world is trying to connect with the other. When they appear interlocked, the *tinku* has taken place.

Among today’s speakers of Quechua, when two rivers converge into a larger one, they are said to *tinkuy*. Likewise, a sprouting seed is said to *tinkuy* when it splits into twin leaves emerging from the earth into the sky.



Image (top): Ceramic cup with tinku symbols. From: Collection of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. Published in: Jürgen Golte, *Moché cosmología y sociedad* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2009).

Linus van Pelt, a character from Charles Schultz's comic strip *Peanuts*, is rarely seen without a piece of fabric—a blue blanket—which becomes a transitional object from which he never transitions.²³ In the context of psychoanalysis, *transitional object* is a term coined by British pediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott. It serves as a “bridge” between the child's inner reality and the external world. The object is not just a physical thing but rather represents the child's relationship to the caregiver. It is seen as a way for the child to cope with the anxiety of separation and to develop a sense of control over their environment. Transitional objects are soft, they give warmth and have texture, they are able to move like a child's animated companion. The child cuddles with it and, in doing so, doesn't feel herself but the other.

Linus and his blanket were created before Winnicott developed his theory. In 1955 he asked Schultz's permission to use Linus's blanket as an illustration of a transitional object. Even though Charles Schultz had no training in psychology or psychoanalysis, he created the blue blanket as an aid for Linus in his progress from infancy to childhood. He intuitively understood the potentiality of fabrics as objects, which facilitate a transition and help us navigate through two states of being.

23. Kara Thompson, *Blanket* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 88.

Fabrics can work as preservation devices—of the body, of identity—when they envelop it, but they can also function as aids to transcend bodily limits when they expand from it.

Sufi whirling is a form of physical meditation, which is performed primarily by members of the Mevlevi Order rooted in Islamic Sufism. During Sufi whirling, the practitioner stands in one spot and spins their body around in a repetitive circular motion while focusing on their breath and chanting sacred phrases. The spinning motion is believed to be a conduit for the divine energy that flows through the universe and represents the journey of the soul toward spiritual enlightenment.

The turn is built from the feet, which are the channels of communication with the earth. The palm of the right hand is turned upward, capturing the energy that descends from the celestial world, while the left hand is turned toward the ground, transmitting to the world the energy received from above. These hand gestures seek to connect heaven and earth.

At the beginning of the ceremony the practitioners take off their black woolen cloaks, symbol of the coffin in which the human body rests, and appear in the hall covered by long white skirts. On their heads they wear conical caps that stand for the tombstone. The long and wide skirts represent the white shroud that, in the funeral rites of Islam, covers the body of the deceased and is made of the same cloth that Sufis are buried in. The rise of the skirt as the dancer's body moves represents the death of the ego. While wearing the skirt, the whirling practitioner feels lighter in aerodynamic terms, which helps prevent dizziness.

In this practice the layers that symbolically wrap the body in the funeral rites open and unfold, and, through the bodily motions that animate them, connect the world above and below in a moment of spiritual transcendence.

Picture a piece of cloth in motion. Imagine the folds that constantly form through the movement. For brief moments the folds create an enclosure, one side of the fabric becomes the inner wall that encapsulates space. The fabric keeps moving: the skirt of someone walking, the sheet covering a couple while they sleep. The fold formed a moment ago unfolds, a new fold is formed on the other side of the fabric. By a very easy bend, what was once pure interiority is now the exterior face. The surface of the fabric is a space of encounter where one relation is always involving the other.

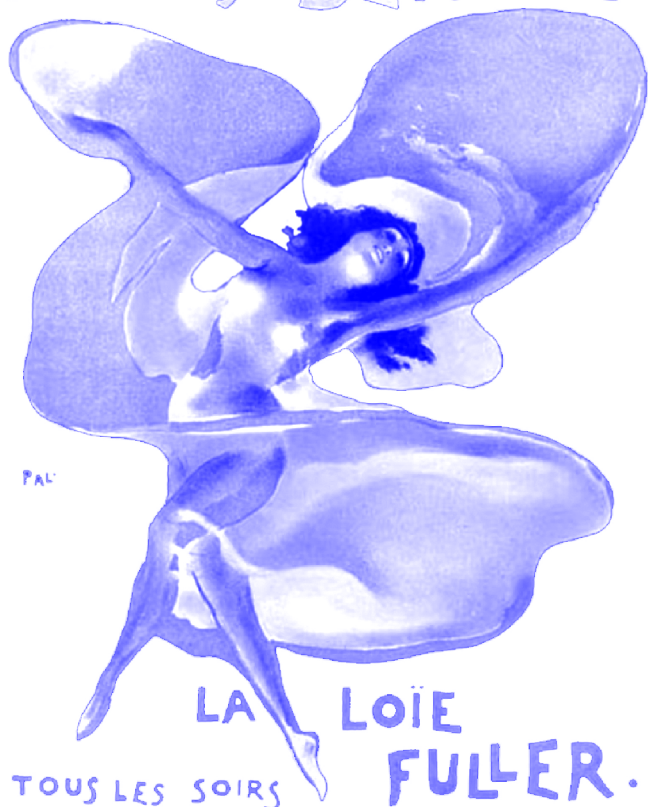
Gilles Deleuze understood the world as a continuous fold, where reality is made up of layers and dimensions folded upon each other. This conception is a critique of typical accounts of subjectivity—those that presume a simple interiority and exteriority (appearance and essence, or surface and depth)—for the fold announces that the inside is nothing more than a fold of the outside. The fold is a dynamic and creative force that opens the subject up to a process of infinite becoming, an action of continuity rather than completion.²⁴

According to Deleuze, *to unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce, to withdraw into the recesses of a world.*²⁵ Through folding movements the world constantly expands and contracts. The fold, with its ability to flow between realms, is more than a mere figure of transition. It invokes the simultaneous occurrence of opposing states. Just like a butterfly, delicately folded within a caterpillar, waiting to unfold.

24. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

25. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

FOLIES-BERGÈRE



PAL

LA LOÏE
TOUS LES SOIRS FULLER.

In the winter of 1892, the Folies Bergère, a prominent Parisian music hall, was abuzz with anticipation for a new act. Loïe Fuller, an American dancer, was set to debut her latest work.

As the curtains parted, the audience was greeted with an otherworldly spectacle. Fuller, dressed in a flowing silk costume of her own design, stood at the center of the stage, illuminated by colored lights. As the music started she began to spin, her body twirling and undulating with the fluidity of water. The effect was mesmerizing. The silk of Fuller's costume caught the light and transformed into a kaleidoscope of colors, creating a hypnotic visual experience that left the audience breathless. The Serpentine Dance was an instant sensation.

The poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé was among the astounded audience. When he wrote about the performance, he chose—not unintentionally—to call the crepe of her dress a veil, and stated that it displayed the potential of a body by hiding it. He saw it as the supplement that the body gives itself to allow the creation of new forms by going beyond its own boundaries, transcending its own limitations. The unlocatable body creates a series of apparitions that endlessly metamorphose. For Mallarmé this was “bodily writing” in which the creator of the poem was simultaneously the poem itself.²⁶

Mallarmé saw in Fuller's dance an embodiment of Symbolist ideals, which emphasized the use of metaphor, suggestion, and allusion to convey elusive and subjective states of being:

*The body dissimulates its own form in the display of veils sketching flight rather than the bird, the swirling rather than the wave, the bloom rather than the flower. What is imitated, in each thing, is the event of its apparition. [. . .] The lilies drawn by Loïe do not symbolize purity any more than butterflies are a figure for lightness, or flames for passion. What they symbolize is their potential for deployment and flight.*²⁷

Using fabrics as an extension of her body, Fuller's dance blurred the traditional separation in ballet between choreographer and dancer. She inaugurated a way of conceiving dance that is an overflow of dance itself, going beyond the narrow limits of physical bodily movement and technique, to get lost in the twists and turns of materiality. Her performances evoked mood and situation rather than denotative description or imitation: a sensuous surface in constant transformation.

26. Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis* (London: Verso, 2019), 93-109.

27. *Ibid.*, 100-101.

Image (left): Jean de Paleologu, *Poster Folies Bergère Loïe Fuller*.

Once, we kept a reverential distance from the sky. Our bodies were never intended for flight; still there came a day when we decided to explore its expanse. We were not totally reckless, though, since on the way to perfecting our endeavor, we invented devices to decelerate a possible fall—a safety net that depends entirely on the correct folding of a piece of fabric. How did we end up entrusting our life to a fold?

It was a summer day in 1893 in Nuremberg, when a 25-year-old German woman in harem pants got into a balloon and took off into the sky with the man she loved. They were performing a joint exhibition jump when his parachute failed to deploy. Startled, she watched him fall to his death.

After the tragedy, Käthe Paulus retreated from public life for almost a year. She eventually returned to exhibition jumping, but the accident weighed heavily on her mind. She resolved to design a better parachute and came up with a way of folding it so when deployed the threads wouldn't tangle. The fabric could fit in a small bag, compressed until it was barely recognizable as a parachute at all. During World War I, Paulus registered a patent for her invention, and Germans equipped their balloon crews with packed parachutes, saving countless lives.

The German patent and trademark office web page has an entry dedicated to Paulus. It states: “She came up with the idea of artistically folding the parachute.”²⁸ There is no explanation of what is meant by the term “artistically.” Still, it is not hard to imagine that years later, with the worldwide expansion of parachute production during World War II, the careful movements of hundreds of women folding huge parachutes around long tables would have looked like a beautiful choreography. For in this, as in all great performances, there was no room for error.

28. “Käthe Paulus,” German Patent and Trademark Office, n.d., https://www.dpma.de/english/our_office/publications/ingeniouswomen/kaethepaulus/index.html.

Image (top): General view of the Parachute Packing Room at Netheravon showing members of the WAAF repacking parachutes following a training exercise. From: Air ministry second world war official collection (UK), photo: Clark N S.

Image (bottom): WAAF parachute packers at the Parachute Training School, RAF Ringway, Cheshire, England, (UK), 1944. Photo: B. Bridge.



Textiles are pliable objects, unruly forms until one folds them: into shape, into language. But folding only accounts for one moment in the rhythm of movement; it is complemented by unfolding.

To unfold is to invite expansion, to open and spread, to allow revelations to emerge, to blossom. In the act of unfolding, we connect with what lies beyond ourselves, embracing what once lay hidden, obscured from view. It is an encounter with vulnerability, an offering of exposure, like the spiral coming out from the single pyramid searching for the tunku, extending to reach the other side and to connect worlds.

However, we must resist the temptation to assign ultimate significance to the act of unfolding alone, as if it were the pinnacle of our endeavors, the ultimate goal to be reached. The dance of folding and unfolding defies such linear notions of progression. It does not adhere to a straightforward path, but rather twists and turns, repeats and duplicates, changes course in unpredicted ways. It is a movement that oscillates, embracing both directions equally, as if engaged in a sensuous caress.

After eclosion the life span of a lepidopter varies considerably according to each species. The case of the monarch butterfly is special, since it carries out one of the most extensive insect migrations. Monarchs generally live five weeks during summer months, but the winter generation "Methuselah"—the one that migrates—can live up to eight months.

Each fall, millions of monarchs leave their summer breeding grounds in the northeastern United States and Canada and travel 3,000 miles to reach warmer grounds in the south. They arrive in Mexico during the months of October and November, and their appearance is interpreted as the soul of the dead returning for the celebration of Día de los Muertos. This interpretation is not unique. *Psyché*, the Greek word for "soul," also means "butterfly." In ancient cultures across the world, from the Greeks to the Aztecs, from the aboriginal Australians to the Japanese, butterflies were thought to be the souls of ancestors.

In September of 1949, while an ancestor inside a funerary bundle was traveling a distance of 3,000 miles to the north, thousands of butterflies were covering the same distance to the south.

* * *

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