

WAKING UP TO THE OBVIOUS

# Faking as an eye-opener

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# Introduction

Recently while talking to a teacher about remaking existing patterns using a different technique I kept calling it faking. The teacher asked me, how is it possible to take the feeling of faking away? This was the moment I clearly understood that I am totally willing to keep this feeling. It sounds like a deviant, almost prohibited action, yet quite often undertaken [by those brave ones] to step out of the allowed zone. It is not that I like fakes. In fact I am very sensitive to lies and cheating. Life has to be a fair play. What I found intriguing about faking is that we endow certain things with a special position or an attitude, making them welcome or undesirable. Indeed, imitation deals with the notion of authenticity, as soon as it implies alteration in materials and/or process of making. I strived to take the morality out of this idea by pushing those changes to the edge, and it has become an eye opener that revealed fascinating horizons for understanding intuition, choices for materials and the ways of working with those.



# ACKNOWLEDGING LINES







Ties made on the warp for ikat dyeing

Resist dyed yarns



# Double ikat

Lines came to me while studying Indonesian Textiles during my second year at the TXT department. I focused on one specific Balinese cloth called gerinsing, which means “no death”.

It is woven in the double-ikat technique in the small village Tenganan, where only a few women know how to tie-dye the sacred pattern properly. The production of a single piece can last up to three years, because all the procedures and taboos have to be observed. Prior to stringing on the loom, hand-spun cotton is being soaked in a bath of candlenut oil, then in wood ash to aid the take up of red dye. After 42 days threads are hung up to dry in the sun for another 42 days, and the process is repeated 12 times. Then yarns are strung on a frame and the pattern is tied. Afterwards, the yarns are sent out for indigo dyeing to a neighbouring village, because indigo is prohibited in Tenganan. After that some ties get untied and indigo is overdyed by red to get a dark rust-brown colour.

Once the warp is on the loom, they weave loosely, adjusting the weft with a stick with each pass of the shuttle. Women are not allowed to weave during their period, nor during pregnancy, as they may harm a growing cloth and a growing fetus.

Consequently, double ikats are very expensive and even regarded as sacred cloths, ascribed supernatural properties, especially

to assist forms of healing, including exorcism. By virtue of their magical qualities, geringsings are not only capable of keeping danger and impurities out of the village, but also shield and protect humans from baleful influences during rites of passage as they transition from one phase of life to the next. Birth, first haircutting, initiation, tooth filing, wedding, death and purification of soul after death are marked with geringsing.



A family wearing geringings on a ceremony



# Order of the treads, order of the world

A good textile is like a story. If you learn how to read it, you learn about history, anthropology, the environment, geography, and the stories of rural cultures that offer few



opportunities for women to express themselves.

It also helps to map out how this big complicated world fits together. The whole idea of Bali is a matrix, a massive and invisible grid of spirits, guides, paths and customs. Every Balinese knows exactly where he or she belongs in the family and society, oriented within this great intangible map.

Geringsing becomes a tangible map of the whole Tenganese life, a string that holds everything together; it is itself a preserver of cosmos (the balance of community), or at least an avatar of it.

Balinese say that a man is only happy when he can maintain himself — mentally and spiritually — at the intersection between a vertical line and horizontal one (remember, warp and weft), in a state of perfect balance. For this, he needs to know exactly where he is located at every moment, both in his relationship to the divine and to his family here on earth. If he loses that balance, he loses his power.

“It is not an absurd hypothesis, therefore, to say that the Balinese are the global masters of balance, the people for whom the maintenance of perfect equilibrium is an art, a science and a religion”. Gilbert 2006: p.238.









# Inspiration and appropriation

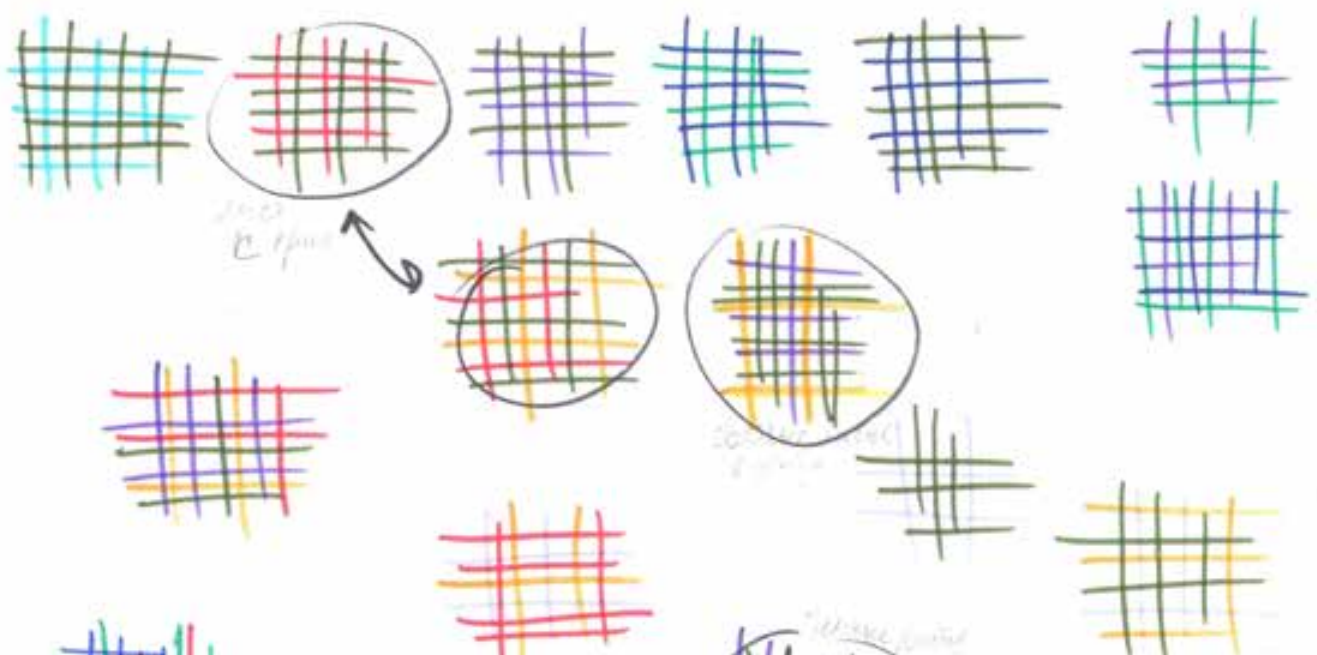
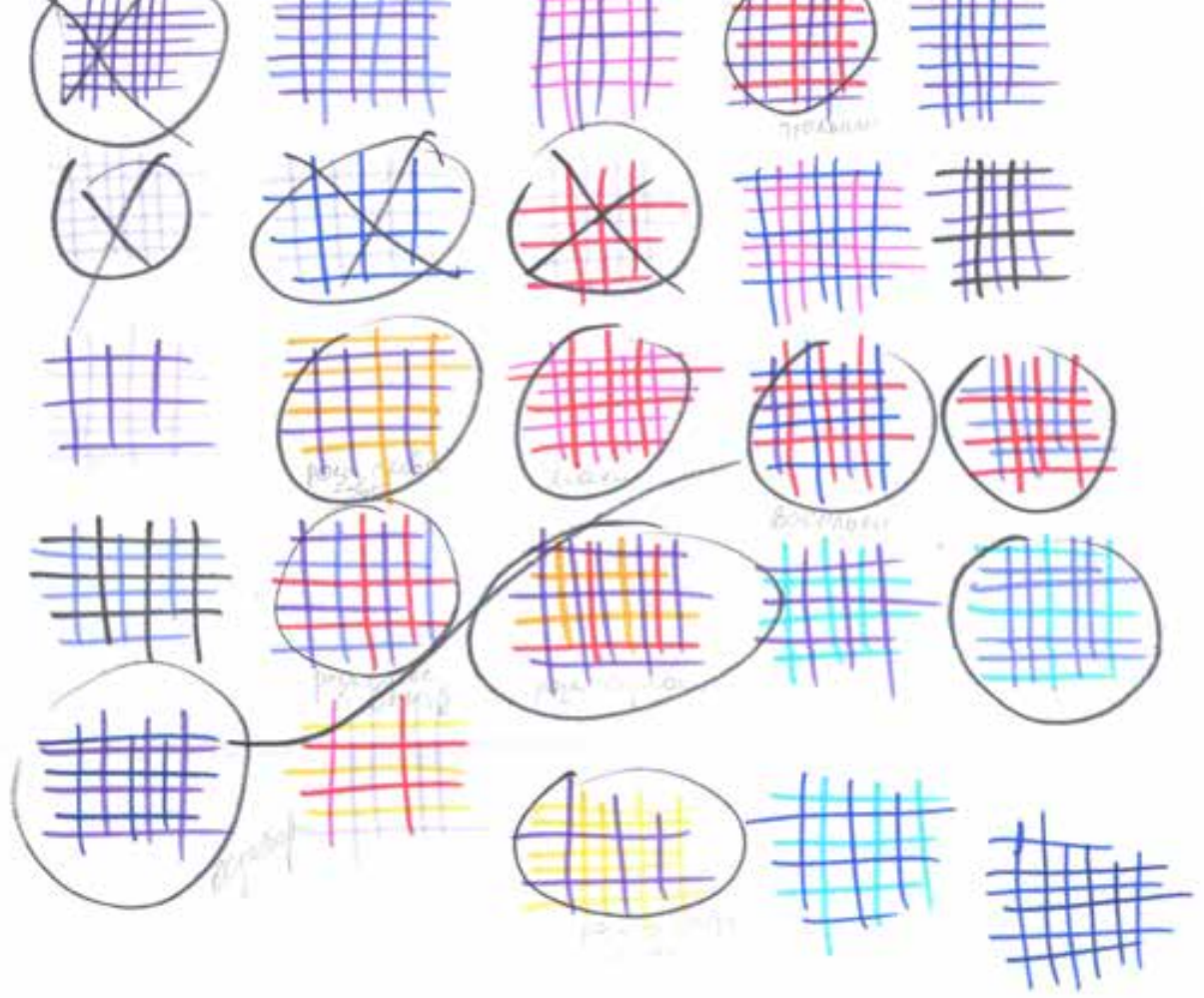
I was so impressed and inspired by the story I had discovered, that I decided to share my fascination for the tight organization of this fabric by means of textiles, to appropriate this piece of sacred cloth through interpretation. I played with the rules of creating a cloth, but instead invented my own rules, and also the rules to invent rules, inspired by the strict procedures of the geringsing production.

Opposite to the archetype, I have taken a woven piece of polyester, felt-tip markers of brown, red and yellow, and the

genuine geringsing pattern projected on top of fabrics, and started assembling the piece by colouring yarns warp- and weft-wise separately. Hours of drawing horizontal and vertical lines on fabrics produced a beautiful result resembling the original geringsing weave.

A monk's work, it brought me a great benefit of meditation. Eventually I called it "the Sacred Fake Cloth", not only because of the result, but also because I was taking a shortcut by evading the procedure, not having the required expertise, time and equipment.











# Internship experiences

It is important to note here is that this object and a beautiful story behind it earned me an internship at Marina's Exceptional Textiles design studio, where I was further exploring lines. As a result, a collection of eight lined patterns were designed, this time reviving XVII century floral still lifes. Imagine those: very classical elaborate paintings, yet quite kitschy to a modern eye, now they are made only of horizontal and vertical lines, again produced without any particular talent for illustration. It felt that I was cheating again.

In fact, I never thought of 'drawing lines' as a skill. Yet it became a skill, considering how much time and effort was invested into sorting out the scale, the density, the ways of drawing stripes, and achieving a high vibrancy of colour if there are only ten flashy shades and no opportunity to mix those.





# Inquiring lines

Although I was taking a shortcut to recreate the original, it was not actually a shortcut, as the skill was building up and developing unconsciously. Making freehand lines has become a tool of mine, a technique of its own that was designed to simulate and address oldness, authenticity and history. Albeit according to the contract of the studio I am not supposed to demonstrate the designs in the open media as they are legally the property and the product of the studio, no one can take the approach from me as soon as “making stripes is there for everyone”. They have already outlined my position as a designer.

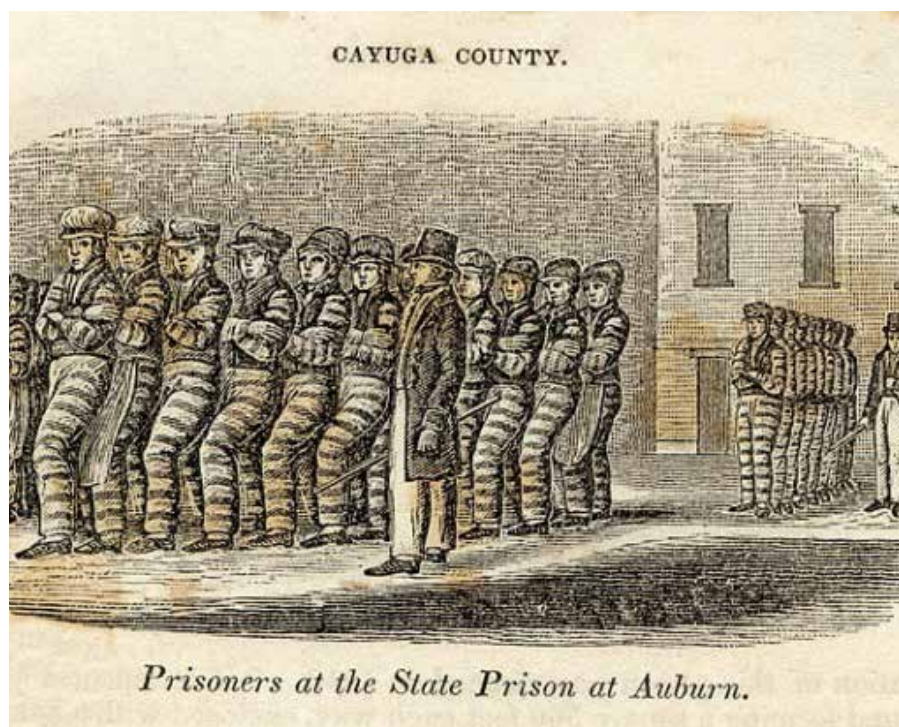
At a certain moment I started questioning why stripes are so enigmatic, and diving into the history of striped fabrics revealed fascinating horizons for the artistry.



The Ignominious Stripe: Three young women condemned to prostitution, saved by Saint Nicolas



Painted mural, northern Italy, about 1340



# Bad lines, good lines

Originally constituted as a handicap, stripes end up becoming an undoubted asset. In the medieval Western world, there were a great number of individuals – real or imaginary – whom society, literature and iconography endowed with striped clothing. In one way or another, they were outcasts or reprobates, from the Jew and the heretic to the clown and the juggler, and including not only the leper, the hangman, the prostitute, but also the disloyal knight of the Round table, the madman of the Book of Psalms, and the character of Judas. They all were accused of disturbing or perverting the established order, thus to have had a relation with the devil.

Yet, the successive periods have produced new stripe codes, thereby bringing about an ever-wider diversification in the stripe's physical and symbolic universe. Thus the Renaissance and the romantic periods expanded the use of “good” stripes (signs of celebrations, exoticism, or freedom) without eliminating the bad

ones at all. And the contemporary period has very much made itself the receptacle of all these practices and all the earlier codes, since coexisting within it are stripes that remain diabolic (those by which prisoners in death camps were ignominiously marked) or dangerous (those use for traffic signs and signals, for example), and others that, over time, have become hygienic (those on sheets and underwear), playful (those for children's things), athletic (those used for leisure and sports clothes), or emblematic (those of uniforms, insignia, and flags).

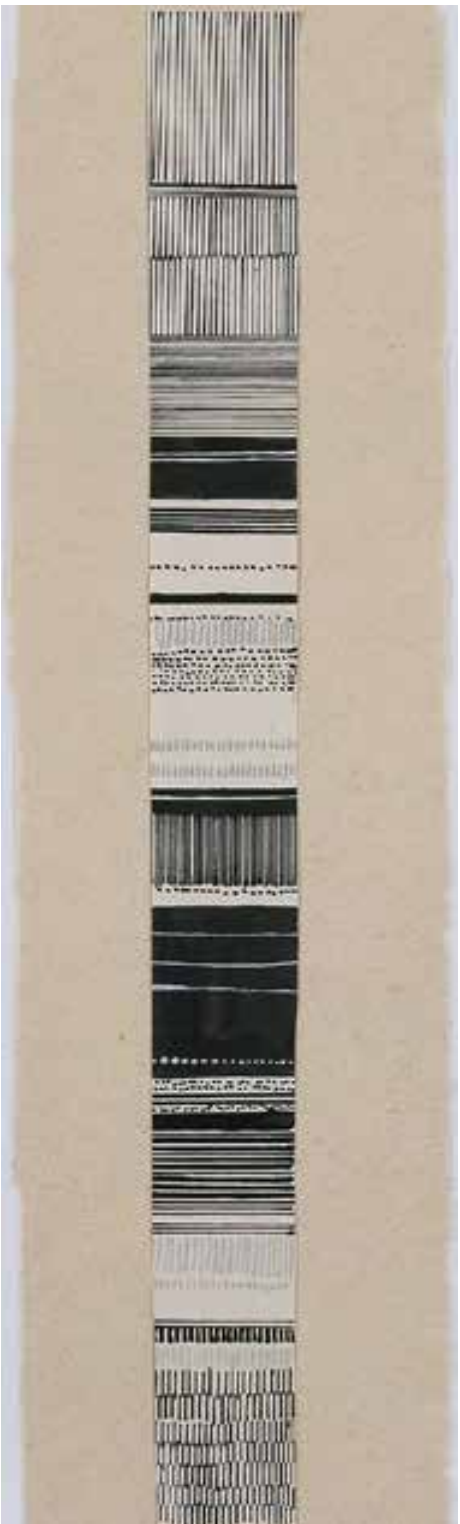
The medieval stripe was the emblem of disorder and transgression. There is a link between the stripe and the idea of diversity in the Middle Ages, or *varietas*, as Medieval Latin calls it. Striped (*virgulatus*, *lineatus*, *fasciatus*, etc.) and varied (*varius*) are sometimes synonymous, and this synonymy instantly pulls the stripe over the pejorative side. Indeed, for medieval culture, *varius* always expresses something impure, aggressive, immoral, or deceitful. Pastoureau 2001: p.2-23. Quite amazed, I realized that the fact absolutely relates to what I have been doing with stripes in both projects, dealing a lot with simulating, falsifying and replication.

The modern and contemporary stripe has progressively transformed into a tool for setting things in order. Order! That is exactly what I am up to. This is an inevitable part of my daily routine; work just does not start until things are put down in order. This is still my fascination in Dutch homes when I walk down the street peeking through the wide windows. Back in my motherland homes looked like Rietveld Academy's third floor at the assessment period, and I can't stand it. Another moment of revelation happened when a psychologist asked me if I put all the objects neatly in a line. I would prefer them to be straight, although they are not all the time. In the final talk, she explained the root of my worries – I appear to be a perfectionist, any uncontrolled disturbance ruins my universe.



“From Chaos to Order” Ursus Wehrli

Gunta Stölzl - Watercolor and ink fabric design, 1919–1925





# Dynamics of a line

Lines are the antipode of both the plain and the spotted, according to the writer Michel Pastoureau in his book 'The Devil's Cloth'. What I personally find fascinating about the line, especially if repeated, is the dynamics and vibrancy of this field. Its rhythm allures action, the transition from one state to another. The line does not wait, does not stand still. Thus, there is narration to be found in lines. Compared to other surface structures and patterns, a lined field claims its "visual priority". The line animates all it touches, endlessly forging ahead.

In the historical research of the striped pattern Pastoureau points out its relentless character. He wrote that albeit the line organizes the world and the society, it (the line) itself seems to remain unwilling to serve any organization too rigorous or too limited. It can function through any medium, and doing so, opened out into the exponential and the imperceptible. All striped surfaces can constitute one of the lines in another, larger striped surface, and so on. The meaning of the line is infinite. Pastoureau 2001: p.2-23.



# JUSTIFYING FAKING



# Distressed fever

Shiny and smooth are stepping backwards. Flaking, gnarled and chipped is taking the stage. The stores nowadays are bursting with collections of wobbly, battered, scuffed, peeling objects that are more preferable for a modern customer than pristine ones. The recent past is taking over modern life. Hardly a few years into the 21st century, we are alarmingly keen on escaping into almost any decade in the past century.

In our globalized and industrialized world, generations are no longer rooted to places and their local natural materials, which become ever scarcer. Factory-made synthetics are cheap and disposable — not worth inheriting. In fact, there is hardly any economical reason for inheriting objects of daily use — everything you might need is affordable right there in your neighbourhood. Thus, the only good reason for inheriting is an emotional attachment to a specific person who passed away or because you have a special attitude toward the object.

Yet, the demand for “soulful” objects that manifest maker’s (and owner’s) intelligence, the wear and ingrained history of fine materials, exerts a pull. The self-conscious archaizing of modern life is seen everywhere. If real

antiquities are beyond your pocket, it is easier and cheaper to buy new items and then tackle with a hammer and a tub, or buy repro-distressed<sup>1</sup> pieces from retailers, or, even more bizarre, hire someone to come to your home and ‘upset’ your furniture for you. Yes, such a firm exists — [tobedistressed.co.uk](http://tobedistressed.co.uk)



Intentionally distressed interior

Distressing tool





# Simulacra

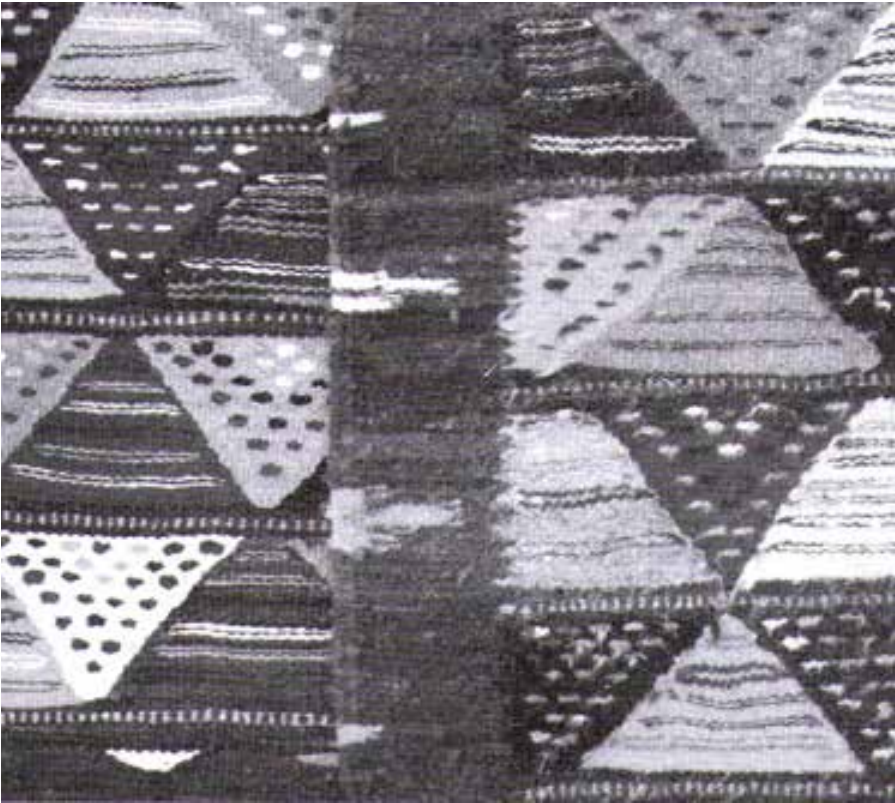
This is the point when Jean Baudrillard comes in. The French sociologist and philosopher was writing about this phenomenon already in the 1980s. But that was the time when the society was busy developing high industry. We could not digest the ideas he was elaborating, as philosophers are sometimes real visionaries. He argued that the world was not dictated by reality, but instead reigned by simulation and simulacra. Simulation is different than simple representation. A representation is our way of communicating and abstracting “real” entity. So, our word “old”, or an image of something old, represents the real thing. Simulation, on the other hand, is the denial of the actual oldness. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines a simulacrum<sup>2</sup> as an imitation of a thing, yet without the substance or qualities of the original. Let us take a closer look at precession of simulacra according to Jean Baudrillard<sup>3</sup> by studying a case of Moroccan rug production.





Moroccan carpet (detail)

Newly woven Moroccan rug (left) and the same piece after distressing (right)



# Falsification of temporality

The Sirwa is situated at the junction of the High Atlas and the Anti Atlas mountain ranges in Morocco. The Berber weavers of the Sirwa are renowned for their wide range of textiles and their technical knowledge and artistry. Since the 1980s weaving production has intensified, this activity occupying most of the households in the region and constituting a major livelihood option.

Woven carpets represent long-established weaving traditions and constitute “the profound reality”.

The practice of giving textiles an antique look through lengthy sun exposure started around that time, or possibly before. Some dealer in Marrakesh noticed that his customers preferred tattered old carpets he had displayed

outside his shop to attract the passers-by to the new ones he had inside the shop. Adamson and Kelley, 2013: p.60-61.

Old rugs mask and denature the profound reality of weaving traditions of the region. (Weavers believe that the surface should be scrutinized for the care, technical skills and creativity of the maker, which appear in the very structure and surface of weaving. A beautiful carpet is the one that is tightly woven and well beaten, one that shows the capacity of the weavers to align motifs in orderly manner, a symmetrical arrangement that demands mathematical and compositional skills.)

The production of outright fakes seems to have started in the 1990s, when Moroccan textiles were suddenly given collectable status after several western dealers and collectors organized various events to promote them. Old textiles, or brand new ones that have been yellowed, torn here and there, and submitted to various treatments in order to create holes, were used. Only experts could spot that the patterns were invented, or foreign to the region where they were supposed to come from. Ibid.: p.60-61.

Fake ancient textiles mask the absence of profound reality, as the pieces were no longer a product/a representation of authentic local weaving traditions.

Distressing is not performed with the sole view of selling carpets to a small niche of collectors, but is done on a large scale to cater for a wide range of buyers. Dealers collect information about their buyers' taste by observing their reactions to carpets they show, and by reading collectors' books and exhibition catalogues on Moroccan weavings. This information is fed back to the producers. It is the obvious taste of tourists for 'old and dirty' things, as many locals have jested, that led Marrakesh dealers to subcontract the ageing of carpets to the Sirwa region, where labour is cheap and the activity can remain hidden. Locals cover the ground in and around their village with rugs, wash

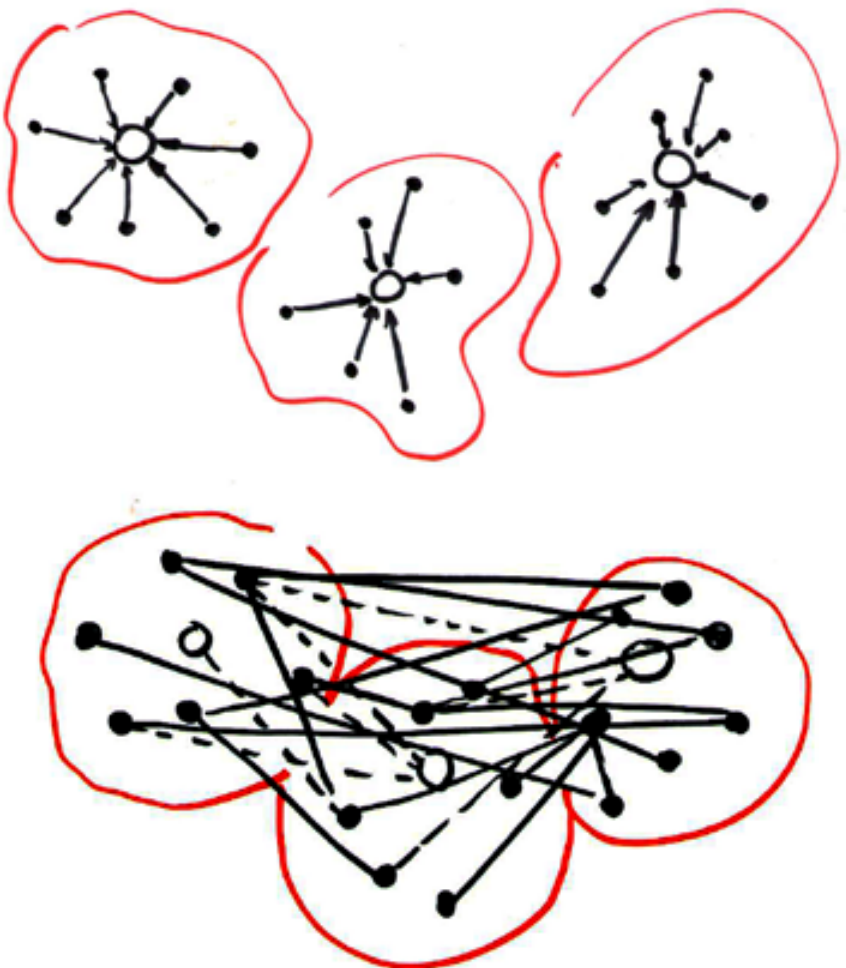
them with detergent, burn them and expose to sun in order to give them antique look. Natural dyes have become very expensive, and apart from madder and henna are no longer readily available in Morocco. Finer threads are no longer spun, as they require more work. Ibid.: p.62-68.

Artificially aged rugs have lost all connection to reality, as they no longer employ traditional techniques of spinning and dyeing. Moreover, they are brand new and have no history behind, while the customers seek to buy 'a piece from the past'. They are pure simulacra, a reality that conceals that there is none.

A simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right: the hyperreal. The simulacrum is true. Baudrillard, 1994. This is where semiotics meets our commodity fetishism. Connected globally, we become locally disconnected, and have just started realizing that. We try to mend the ever-vanishing link with the past (which is not necessarily our own) by anchoring to the material artifacts.







Connections in the past (up), connections nowadays (down).

The carpet's surface is scrapped both horizontally and vertically with a heavy-duty iron scraper



# Industry of distressing

Did I mention that ageing carpets has almost become an industry in the Sirwa region? Not in a general sense, though, as it requires a lot of hand labour and quite some skill.

Just imagine: a newly woven carpet is brushed with an old card to pull out fibers and dirt, enabling their easy elimination by carbonization. Then it is laid on a bare concrete floor and burned with a blowtorch on both sides. The carpet is then moved to a wet area on a gentle slope where it is bleached and washed with a bristle plastic floor brush. Afterwards, it is scrubbed with an iron blade both horizontally and vertically to push chemicals, water and remaining dirt out of fibers. In a harsh sunny climate of the region, a few hours suffice for the carpet to dry. To tone it down further, the exposure time needs to be over ten days. Adamson and Kelley, 2013: p.61-64.

The tradition of distressing has been building up successfully over a quarter of century already. At the same time, in the Sirwa, with the entry of carpets into the global economy, long-held beliefs around wool and weaving are evaporating. Taste and fashion are ever changing and weavers are keen to keep up with them. Like their European counterparts in the 1950s — 60s who preferred plastic tables rather than oak ones, Moroccan consumers have entered the phase in which material culture is ephemeral. So for a Moroccan consumer, a carpet must be new. Adamson and Kelley, 2013: p.70. Consequently, in most houses in the Sirwa, a traditional centre of weaving, it is rare to find a carpet more than twenty years old.

# Anticipations on antique aesthetics

We have got certain expectations of antique aesthetics based on the ancient items we have previously seen in collections and museums. Acquiring an 'old' thing is all about ownership, solidity and lastingness, but clients want it cheap and fast. It is not only that faded colour denotes antiquity, but also a perception of what a

carpet ought to look like. It is obvious that (although not very popular with clients) bold and deep colours achieved by natural dyeing will take on beautiful patina over the time and will be enjoyable for several generations. While intentional photochemical degradation of textile to attain an antique look is only shortening the life of an object. But in a society no longer concerned in investing in a sturdy furnishing made to last several generations, this is the right object to fit the aesthetics of their house, right now.

# (Self-)deception

Yet there is a contradiction in consumers' desire to possess an object that has patina, authenticity and perhaps a personal history, but has not acquired other signs of age. Thus a carpet has to be neat, clean, evenly finished and have faded colours, but not dirt, food remains, holes or fleas. Carpets too worn out or too shabby – or in such a good state that their colours are still vivid – would not appeal to consumers, however authentic. Or take real antiquities – the rare pieces that have survived in collections until the present have been denied their intended life span, and have had no chance to prove lastingness, history, and the highest quality of work.

Ironically, for those seeking antique carpets, for whom time enhances the value of things, the providers of prematurely aged textiles perform the opposite of what the consumer seeks: real time inscribed in the artifact. There is no doubt that most consumers would be horrified to find out that their newly purchased antique is a commercial imitation of the natural decay of the wool, the extreme opposite to the authenticity: they are brand-new products for the western market, probably never used, intentionally distressed and

submitted to extreme abuse. Consumers think of themselves as appreciating the weaving skills inscribed in the carpets, which have been actually obscured, but they are blind to the skills of falsifying temporality, the skills they are actually seeing.



# Apology of falsifying

Yet weavers' aesthetic sensibilities differ greatly from those of their buyers.

Where some westerners see a modernist work, weavers see sloppy, careless and awkward work, probably made by a beginner.

Although one might have a negative idea or a prejudice about destruction the product of hard labour and creativity, we cannot deny the fact that this kind of distressing is a skill in its own right, which involves careful chemical alternation of the surface; also weaving's shortcomings could actually be improved by this treatment. Burning eliminates undesirable materials present in low-quality industrially spun wool. In spinning mills the raw wool is not thoroughly washed in order to keep the weight of the yarn higher. Moreover, burning allows to remove any technical faults protruding at the surface of the weaving, such as knots resulting from mending a broken warp thread, or long threads on the reverse side of the

brocaded pattern. With the removal of small wool fibers, the motifs appear neater, and the weaving looks cleaner and finer. After bleaching and washing, the surface gets a more homogeneous texture, a smoother feel and look, fingers and eyes alike can slide across the surface without meeting any interference or obstacle.

Although distressing methods are to some extent opposed to local practices and values, they have also become part of the process of creating value through textiles – allowing these weaving communities to generate an income, and carry on their trade into the future.

Flawlessness can to be admired in some quarters, but it is hard to justify its place in the home. From a practical perspective, a pristine house will soon be subject to the ravages of daily life – bumps and scrapes are inevitable, even if you are unshakably fastidious. If we look at distressed interior in general, it makes a lot of sense: it is easy to live with, as no amount of hard living can dent its charms. It does not clash against period architecture, it can be feminine or utilitarian.

Then, we are lured by the obvious and familiar, which drives us back to the basic need for safety.

Last but not least, there is a tragic decline of Real Things. In the age of invisible downloads from the iTunes library, is it surprising we long for the days when buying a record was an event? Having an aged (no matter if it is fake) object is all about concrete possession in an increasingly virtual world.

# A backdoor to craftsmanship

While studying faking practices, I found myself trying to justify it, as if it is negative by nature. I would rather skip the issues of piracy and originality in this paper. It is important to look not only at what is being imitated, but what is changed in the transition from the original to the copy, and the manner in which the imitation or copy was received.

If we refer to the word origin and history, fake attested in London criminal slang as adjective (1775), verb (1812), and noun (1827), but probably older. A likely source is feague “to spruce up by artificial means,” from German

fegeu “polish, sweep,” also “to clear out, plunder” in colloquial use. “Much of our early thieves’ slang is German or Dutch, and dates from the Thirty Years’ War”. Weekly, 1967: p.546. Or it may be from Latin *facere* “to do.” Related: Faked; faker; fakes; faking. The bullseye! There are two key aspects not to be neglected: to spruce that means to cheat, to pretend but also to dress up and set in order; and to do.

Copy, imitate, pretend, cheat – I can taste a negative attitude behind as if it is not a fair play, but those practices are a matter of survival in the animal world. In human behavior they are quite inevitable while learning and socializing. Either conscious or not, we copy speech, movements, behavior, dress. It is interesting that faking happens on different levels. Imitating has to do with acceptance by certain groups of people: it means that something is established, has success or respect. In fact, it is an approved aspect or a cultural fact in the society.

Fashion has a history of raising the level of a certain accepted commodity or a cultural object and if it has been worn by a celebrity. It acquired high value or it was worn so well sometimes, that people started imitating it because they wanted to look the same way. It constitutes the biggest push, the embodiment, which fashion designers are absolutely eager to grasp, but not able to create themselves. And then it trickles down to all kinds of levels of society and we don’t even know where it comes from anymore<sup>4</sup>. Or vice versa; multiple acts of copying raised the value of the initial creation, forcing us to reconsider the status of the original, the copy and the fake. It’s the myth about a real object.

For artists and craftsmen, copying and imitation have traditionally been essential facets of training the eye and hand. In the Renaissance, this was true for apprentices attempting to acquire necessary workshop skills and disegno, as well as for masters seeking new realms

of artistic inspiration .

So important was imitation to artistic practice that during the sixteenth century it became the subject of intense debate among artists and art theorists, who aimed to champion some artists over others as models for those attempting to develop a personal style. Gregory and Hickson, 2013: p.1-11. In keeping with workshop practice, Cennini advocated following the dedicated imitation of a single master by the pupil, adding that in this way, “if nature has granted you any imagination at all ... you will eventually acquire a style individual to yourself.” Cennini and Thompson, 1954: p.14–15.



# Appropriation through copying

Fraud can also be treated as a game; that is to say, it is reliant upon an assessment of a set of constrained behaviours and is enacted within the context of a strict code of conduct. For several decades the art-historical discourse has recognized the distinct category of “appropriation artists” – for example, the “re-photography” of an artist such as Sherrie Levine, whose most well-known work in this genre was her solo exhibition in 1980: this comprised photographs made by

re-photographing (from an exhibition catalogue)  
Walker Evans's photographs of the American rural  
poor, and presenting the new photographs as her  
own. Preciado, 1989: p.7. In another example, Levine  
appropriates Marcel Duchamp's readymade Fountain.  
The original Duchamp (1917) was an actual urinal  
displayed upside-down and signed. Levine's version  
(1991) is cast in bronze, thus pointing even more  
insistently to its status as a work of fine art, and as a  
commodity. Burton, 2009: p.262–71.





'Fountain' by Marcel Duchamp (R) and 'Fountain (Buddha)' by Sherrie Levine (L)



# Recognition of faking

Postmodern irony accounts for many of these appropriations in contemporary art. The “repetition artist” of the twenty-first century wants appropriation to be recognized, because only this recognition verifies the effectiveness of these cultural practices as commentaries on the illusion of originality and the commodification of creative practice. Loh, 2004: p.477–478. The objective now, it would seem, is to let some people know they are being fooled, at least some of the time.

While dragging the notion of faking from the pejorative side to a positive one, I still insist that faking is a skill of its own and can become a competent locus of authenticity. As with Moroccan aged rugs, imitating (faking temporality) contributes to symbolic and material transformation of carpets into valuable and desirable objects. As long as the buyer understands what kind of job and skills he is paying for (especially in places where cheating clients is common practice), the reality is back again.



# MATERIAL CONSCIOUSNESS



What brings together drawing lines, faking and distressing? That question bothered me for quite a long period, until Richard Sennett gave me the greatest gift one can get before graduation. In two words, he gave me a clue about who I am, why I am here at the Rietveld Academy, and what I am going to do. Material Consciousness. He did not amply introduce it, though, relying probably on broadly shared underlying intuition about what consciousness is. Sennett is talking about “material consciousness” as being very common. In fact, it is, but more often it is (what a paradox!) unconscious material consciousness. To sort out this wordplay, I want to investigate the meaning of this notion.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines consciousness as the quality or state of awareness, or, of being aware of an external object or something within oneself. It is also described as sentience, awareness, subjectivity, the ability to experience or to feel, wakefulness, having a sense of the self, and the executive control system of the mind. Farthing, 1992.

Thus, material consciousness is keenness and advertence for matter, substance, and physical qualities. Richard Sennett argues that we become particularly enthusiastic about the things we can change. This is, he says, “the craftsman’s proper conscious domain; all his or her efforts to do good quality work depend on curiosity about the material at hand.”

If you google “material consciousness”, it will return an abundance of links to spiritual resources, which generally oppose pure spiritual consciousness to materially contaminated consciousness. Contaminated? It turns out, that there is a two-way track between the mind and the material: matter changes the mind while the latter invests thought into the possibility of changing the matter.

The deepest material consciousness is rooted in the childhood experience of play. Toddlers learn how they can affect the universe around them by testing the limits of objects

through making and breaking (“how far can it go?”). Destroying things is neither a goal, though it is often indeed a result, nor an expression of aggression. Destruction is a part of touching, sensibility and making.

A long time ago a friend of mine told me that a person should do in life what he or she was best at doing in childhood. Sennett argues that nearly anyone can become a good craftsman, as the rhythm of routine in craftsmanship draws on the childhood practice of playing, and almost all children can play well. It makes me feel very motivated about my choice of profession, as I have always been fascinated by tactility and composition of material objects. By happy coincidence, I played mainly with textiles.







# Why did I choose for lines?

The other big preoccupation of my early days was arranging things in order by size, colour, function or other feasible dimensions. Piles, grids, boxes, symmetry, repetition – they inevitably contained a basic element of line, at the very least the line of logics.

My relation with lines started officially while working on the “Sacred Fake Cloth” project. While figuring out how to translate the art of making (namely making, because it is more than just weaving) Indonesian geringsing cloth, I unconsciously relied upon my knowledge of its production.

I refused to simply reproduce the piece according to the procedure of weaving double ikat. First, because an imitation

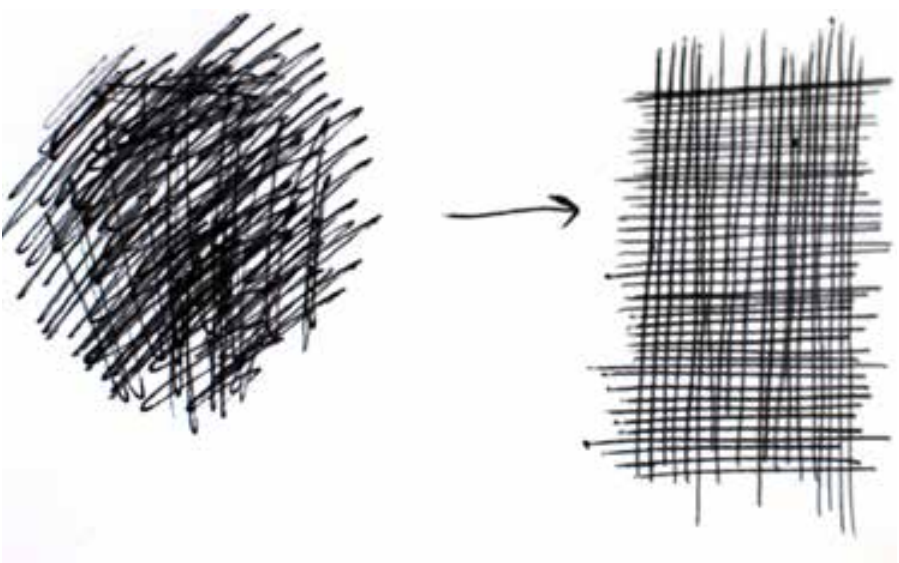


would not convey the tight organization of the fabric, which is loaded with meaning, thus would become at best a simulacrum. Second, possessing no expertise in the elaborate technique of tie-dyeing, I could foresee that even a huge investment of time and effort would produce a sloppy result. In fact, the word 'technique' has always frightened me. Especially if it deals with 'traditional technique'. The word triggers an imagination about a group of devoted makers with a sacred knowledge and exceptional skills in craft that evolved and was inherited through the ages. A group where, I am sad to admit, I do not belong to.

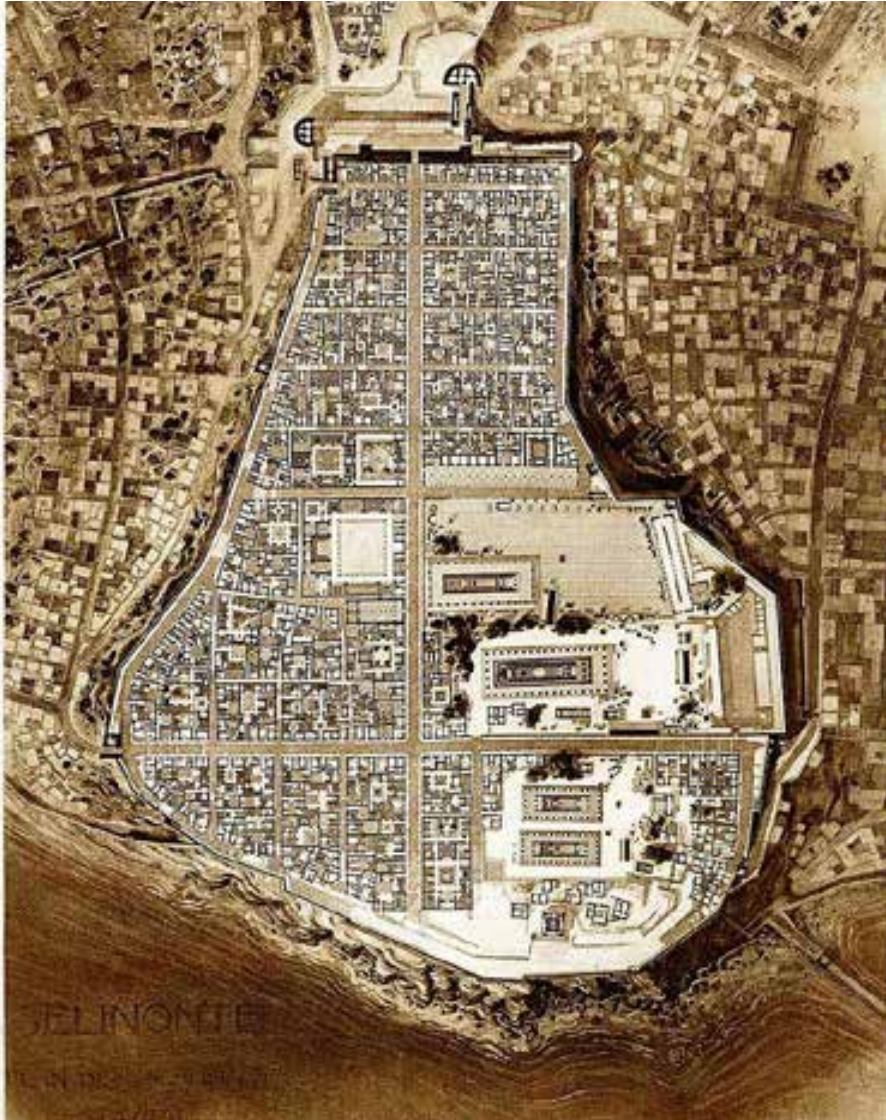
Yet, I intuitively decided to retain the pattern, as it is the most perceivable material characteristic of the cloth that allows the eye to distinguish it from any other textile on Earth. Awareness of the time consuming routine of tie-dyeing threads invalidates any quick printing technique. The careful and balanced weaving of an authentic geringsing on a backstrap loom predetermined that I would be performing prudent manual routine as well. Eureka! I decided to re-make the pattern on the ready-made weave. But the different hues of the pattern could not be directly filled with colour, as double ikat weave alluded vertical and horizontal axes.

So, the dessin would be constructed by thousands of left-to-right and up-to-down straight movements alongside the warp and the weft. This type of material consciousness Richard Sennett calls metamorphosis, when the awareness of material prompts alteration of technique.

Eventually, in this re-enacted piece of weaving, the line became a sibling of the thread. Referring once again to Sennett, here something happened on a small-scale, a "domain shift", as the principle guiding practice (weaving) was shifted to quite another activity (drawing).



A plan of Selinous



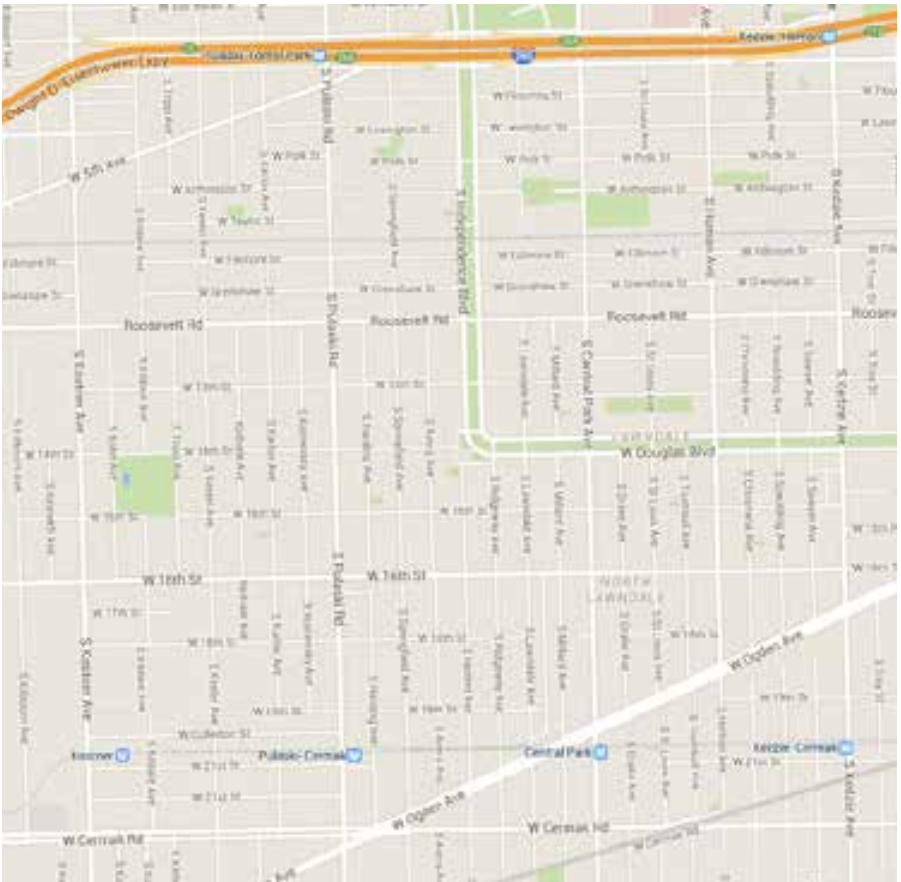
# Consciousness about lines

On a bigger scale, this also occurred in city planning, when orthogonal joints of cloth suggested a way to lay-out the streets. Older grid-plans had connected individual buildings, but the Greek city of Selinous, for instance, founded in Sicily in 627 BCE, was pure warp and weft; the corner itself was emphasized as the major design element.

The image of an “urban fabric” was not here a casual metaphor, but rather a direct description (Sennett, 2008: p.128). Selinous is a historical monument nowadays, but if we look at contemporary street layout in the United States, we can enjoy beautiful systematic arrangements of the streets. Chicago, for example, is comprised of a rectilinear grid with a set of superimposed transverse diagonal avenues.







Rectilinear layout of streets of Chicago, fragment of the city map



# Why a straight line?

The quality of straightness has become essential for recognizing a line as a line, although there is in fact no reason why it has to be. Since the time of its definition in ancient mathematics, a 'line' has been equivalent to a 'straight line' and distinguished from a 'curve'.

In Western societies, straight lines are ubiquitous. We see them everywhere, even when they do not really exist. Indeed, the straight line has emerged as a virtual icon of modernity, an index of the triumph of rational, purposeful design over vicissitudes of the natural world. The man of reason, wrote Le Corbusier, the supreme architect of rectilinearity in modern urban design, "walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going, he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and goes straight to it" (Le Corbusier, 1924: p.274). In the fields of agriculture and landscape planning, modernizers sought to enclose the land within rectangular bounds and to lay parks with perfectly

straight tree-lined avenues, hedges and garden walls. And this, in turn, sparked a counter reaction in the form of yearning for entanglements of nature with ruined, ivy-incrusted walls, rustic fences, twisting garden paths and rampant weeds. There is something fundamentally artificial about straightness. It is apparently a quality of things that are made, rather than of things that grow.

In fact, it is impossible to move a hand perfectly straight up-to-down or left-to-right in order to create an ideal line, nor even with a ruler. The same occurs in weaving, a thread is never flat, heading constantly up and down. But in both situations our eyes have learned to perceive the straightness.


# Multiplicity that triggers consciousness

When repeated many times, lines shape a surface (even on a relatively microscopic level), or a fabric<sup>5</sup> . The latter does not

have to be a textile; still it has a strong reference to textile. This was the case in my own project described above. I used the lines to awaken consciousness about the double ikat weave. Quite amazed, I found my intuitive logic acutely formulated by the great master of lines, Sol LeWitt. In his Paragraphs on Conceptual Art he wrote about repetition: "When an artist uses a multiple modular method he usually chooses a simple and readily available form. The form itself is of very limited importance; it becomes the grammar for the total work. In fact, it is best that the basic unit be deliberately uninteresting so that it may more easily become an intrinsic part of the entire work. Using complex basic forms only disrupts the unity of the whole. Using a simple form repeatedly narrows the field of the work and concentrates the intensity to the arrangement of the form. This arrangement becomes the end while the form becomes the means."




Dish (zara), 16th century, Korea, H.: 3.6 cm, D.: 13.7 cm



**“What’s the secret of my beauty?  
It’s Adobe Photoshop Day Cream”**

**Adobe Photoshop Day Cream.**  
Reduziert Falten und alle  
Hautunreinheiten auf magische  
Weise. So sehen Sie für immer  
jung, attraktiv und glamourös aus.





# Imperfection is a catalyst for awareness

Returning to distressing practices previously described, I assume that worn-out (intentionally or not) objects become

attractive because they trigger sensibility about the materials and possible manipulations. Being exposed to the various layers that comprise an object, we reconnect to the material world and to the virtue of natural forces that have been long sought to be controlled.

Imperfect objects are often recognized as soulful, thus alive and having a life-span. This is, by the way, another dimension of material consciousness, the anthromorphosis; when human qualities are attributed to the material. Humanizing an object does not aim at explanation, but rather at rethinking its value. Sennett, 2008: p.135-137.

Japanese aesthetics value marks of wear created by the use of an object. This can be seen as a rationale for keeping an object around even after it has broken. The Japanese use kintsugi<sup>6</sup> technique not only to mend pottery, but also to highlight the cracks and repairs as simply an event in the life of an object. "The vicissitudes of existence over time, to which all humans are susceptible, could not be clearer than in the breaks, the knocks, and the shattering to which ceramic ware too is subject". Bartlett, 2008.

Curiously, it is an absolutely opposite way that we treat the effects of time on the human body. There is an obsession with youth, not necessarily beauty: "Beating back the clock!", "Ageless body!", "Stay young forever!", "Banish wrinkles!", "Flawless look" and so on. Yet, I see there is one common thing in these counter-heading trends, and that is again consciousness about the material. While aged surface exposes the potential of alteration of the matter, a measure of its resistance and durability, aged skin denotes loss of energy and fertility, thus, ever shrinking potential.

Objects are distressed to look aged, human body is treated for rejuvenation; in both cases effort and skill are involved to falsify the flow of the time, but in opposite directions. Countless industries are busy slowing down the effects of time

on the human body. Cosmetics are the daily camouflage for age; cosmetic surgery has become a common practice nowadays. We are brainwashed by fashion magazines to chase unrealistic images. The infamous Photoshop airbrush retouching is only the icing on the cake. Studio lights make skin look more radiant; models drop pounds by the way they stand. Looking young has become a currency – you can buy it, and then sell it profitably.

There are, of course, counter-arguments against both types of falsification of time-effects. Indeed, how can the body be ageless if it so clearly shows the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood? Nothing is more embarrassing than an older person trying desperately to look younger through excessive make-up, surgery, or hair arrangements. More often than not, these attempts are transparent to anyone who is looking, and what really appears is a picture of fear and insecurity. It is time we accept that maturing is a wonderful thing. It is even empowering.

The same holds true for artificially aged objects: once they are meant to convey exaggerated sentimentality and melodrama and enjoy mass-production, they become pitiful kitsch.





Lies are lies because they are intended to deceive. This is not my position.

What I find fascinating in faking is that, although it aims to pervert reality, it brings in a possibility of revealing new facets and horizons of the material. It makes you aware of properties that might be neglected, triggers consciousness for the matter. Therefore, I see nothing wrong in taking a shortcut — evading long established rules, deceiving time, cheating on technique — as soon as it is done honestly. Faking reality is true reality in itself.



# Notes

1. DIS-TRESS (late XIII century) in Medieval Latin “compel, coerce,” from dis- “apart” + stringere “draw tight, press together”. Meaning “anguish, suffering; grief” in Latin districtus, pp. of distringere “draw apart, hinder,” in Old French destresse, in Gallo-Romance districtia “restraint, affliction”. “Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty.” Edmund Burke (1729–1797), Irish philosopher, statesman. *The Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Introduction (1756). Verb: to afflict with great pain, anxiety, or sorrow; to trouble; to worry; to bother; to subject to pressure, stress, or strain; to embarrass or exhaust by strain; to compel by pain or force of circumstances. Adjective: shabby; beaten; worn-out; coarse; brute; blemished; marred; deteriorating; distorted; damaged; hurt; hindered.
2. SIMULACRUM (n.) 1590s, from Latin simulacrum “likeness, similarity” dissimilated from \*simulacrom, from simulare “to make like, imitate, copy, represent” (see simulation). The word was borrowed earlier as semulacre (late 14c.), via Old French simulacre.
3. Postmodernist French social theorist Jean Baudrillard sees 4 types of reproduction: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever, it is its own pure simulacrum. Jean Baudrillard, 1994.
4. ‘This... stuff’? Oh. Okay. I see. You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and you select... I don’t know... that lumpy blue sweater, for instance because you’re trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back.

But what you don't know is that that sweater is not just blue, it's not turquoise. It's not lapis. It's actually cerulean. And you're also blithely unaware of the fact that in 2002, Oscar de la Renta did a collection of cerulean gowns. And then I think it was Yves Saint Laurent... wasn't it who showed cerulean military jackets? I think we need a jacket here. And then cerulean quickly showed up in the collections of eight different designers. And then it, uh, filtered down through the department stores and then trickled on down into some tragic Casual Corner where you, no doubt, fished it out of some clearance bin. However, that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs and it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing the sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room from a pile of stuff. — "Cerulean Speech", Devil Wears Prada.

5. The word 'fabric' derives from Latin, most recently from the Middle French *fabrique*, or 'building, thing made', and earlier as the Latin *fabrica* 'workshop; an art, trade; a skillful production, structure, fabric', which is from the Latin *faber*, or 'artisan who works in hard materials', from Proto-Indo-European *dhabh-*, meaning 'to fit together'. Online Etymology Dictionary, "fabric".
6. Kintsugi (Japanese: golden joinery) or Kintsukuroi (Japanese: golden repair) is the Japanese art of fixing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.







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