



Gregarious
Makers:
Frameworks in
Wrestling and Design

Louise Perot-Bonnell



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'I FEAR NO MAN, NO BEAST OR EVIL, BROTHER'

— HULK HOGAN

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**SEPTEMBER 2005 - JUNE 2009**

Looking back on my three years at the textile department I would describe it as a restless search into solving the discrepancy between data gathering and data rendering. I had faced a wall in my previous study. At the university I was asked to regurgitate repeatedly, my long hours of readings at the library and my ensued thoughts into endless essays and compositions. In other words, I was one of the multiple ants working under the prerogatives of an Head of Research, only interested in using my collected data for his subject of research: a pre-determined receptacle. This constant movement from the parts to the whole were for me the cause of incessant frustrations. It was frustrating because I was aware that my datas were biased due to the requirements that preceded any new research.

I use on the one hand [search] related to my experience at the academie and [research] when describing my university life. There is indeed a crucial difference, I think, in those two methods used to scrutinize the world around us. I will not describe the detail of the first one since I think that its synonyms are a good way of understanding the particular meaning of the word. Indeed under search, one will find *to look, to scavenge, to explore*. As for the latter, the inner construction of the word [re-search] implies a second layer. Yes I am searching for something but in a systematic way which means that I am aware, more or less, of the goal of my research, the outline of my investigation.

**JANUARY 2009 - AUGUST 2013**

While working for 4 years in a market research call center in Amsterdam, I had the same experience. As a caller I had a central position between the individual who owned the data (the humble citizen that accepted to answer my questions) and the company that had a very precise field of interests concerning this social material. The problem is, no matter the presence of a script that I had to read word for word, I never reached the status of a neutral medium (if such a thing exists). I was always used as a filter between what people could be telling me on the phone and a limited set of pre-determined answers I had to choose from. The problem is that I was the only one deciding which answer corresponded best to my interlocutor's stream of consciousness (they were indeed eager to share details of their life).

I was repeatedly asked by my supervisors to channel the responses of those chatty people and to force them to answer the question even if they did not understand it. Why? Because the software I was using was designed in such a way that each question had to be answered before I could go to the next one. Also it was impossible for me to go backwards if needed: I was under a *diktaat* of the outcome.

The people that I had on the phone contained so much more fantastic information than what statistics made of them a posteriori. I was experiencing the very limits of this mode of inquiry's ability to picture what individuals really were and therefore what was the essence of a community of individuals, that is to say a society.

In parallel, I had the opportunity and the time to navigate different fields or domains offered at different universities and I can tell from my experience that they are still functioning as tiny market research centers in the form of laboratory. Very rarely have I encountered teachers there that saw the importance of navigating between differ-



P R E A M B L E

ent laboratories that practiced cross-sourcing data. My urge to go back and forth from one laboratory to another pushed me to extend in my education.

From those series of experiences I realised the importance of breaking this one-way pattern from the part to the whole: individual actions should not disappear in superior structure. Indeed those superior structures could only give distorted or biased images of an individual and therefore of what a society was.



**A SENSE OF
BELONGING TO :
A TOTAL
TRANSITIVITY
BETWEEN MATTER
AND AUDIENCE.**

In 1927, Walter Lipmann published the *Phantom Public*¹ in which he already questioned the very existence of the people, the public, as a sort of super-individual with one will and one mind. For him this notion was the direct result of a traditional “mystical” notion of the social, corroborated by the last two hundred years of political science and philosophy. However almost one hundred years later we are still busy with defining what the social is. If we are still preoccupied with this matter, it is not only to perpetuate a traditional vision of communal human life or to reinforce a certain ideology of individuals’ relationship. For me it is because social experiences do exist. It is still for us to find out where, how and in which conditions.

When Latour uses the term of *phenomena*² as a new source of inquiry to define the nature of collective ties, he is already determining the complexity of the quest. Indeed the term *phenomenon* is related to very specific and personal way to apprehend the world around us. A phenomenon is an object or aspect known through the senses rather than by thought or intuition. In other words, what manifests itself to the senses or consciousness of an individual in a physical way as much as in a psychological one. Afterwards this experience becomes an object of knowledge. With his words Latour was asserting the intuition I had had regarding the intertwining between creativity and the experience of the social.

That textures and visual perception could trigger knowledge was of course for me, a textile designer, more than an important aspect. However that this knowledge could be experienced on a collective level seemed of course very exciting, since it gave a decisive importance to the representation of my work to an audience, but also made it kind of impossible to control, therefore to apply to my practice. I needed to understand what was the exact nature of this phenomenon that could gather in a split-second a sum of individuals and take part in what I would call **a sense of belonging to: a total transitivity between matter**

1 Walter Lippman, *The Phantom Public*, Transaction Publishers, 1993, New Brunswick

2 International seminar on network theory keynotes, speech of Bruno Latour, 19 february 2010, You Tube.



and audience.

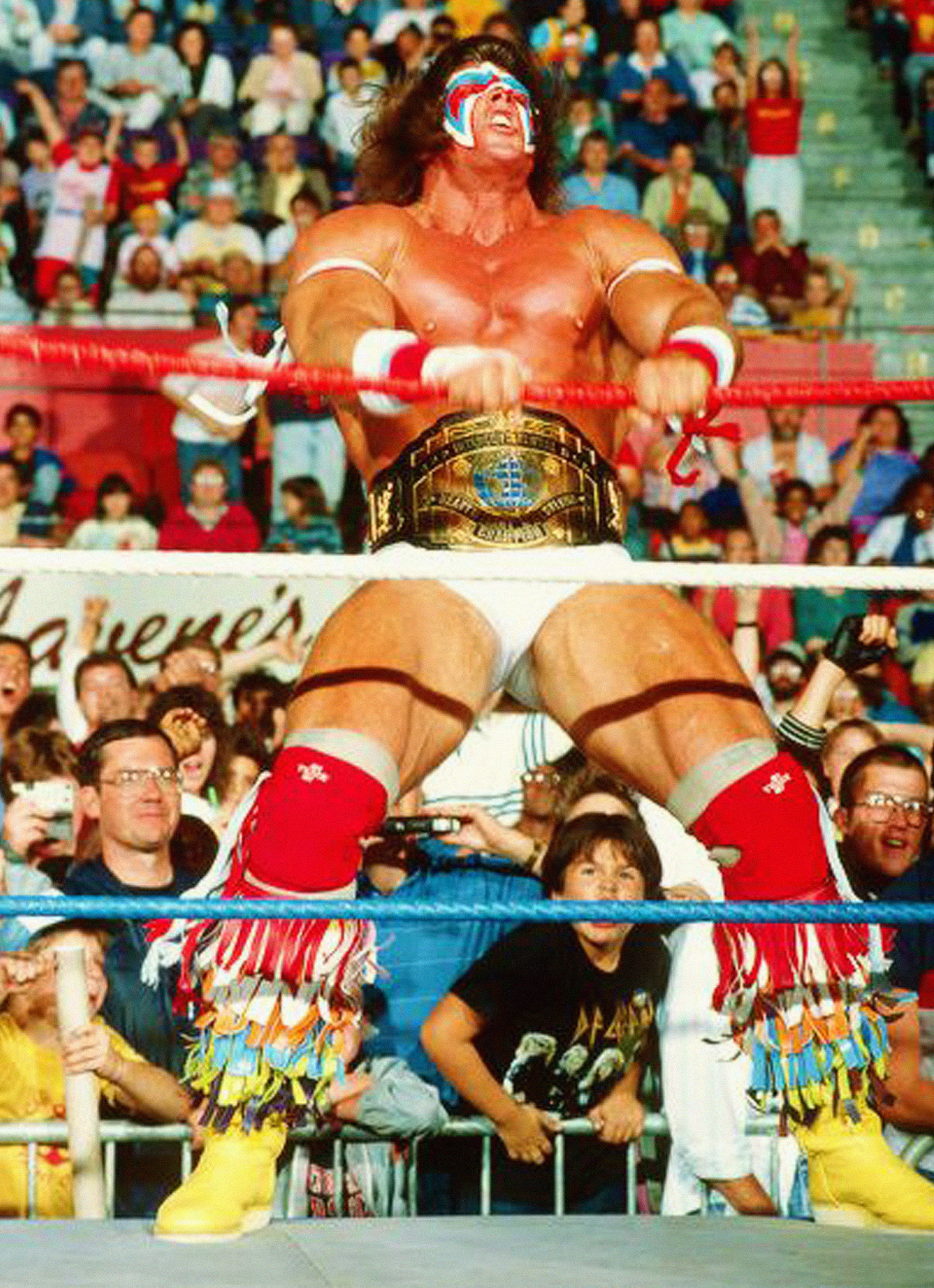
Wrestling entered my life the way that it did for most people in Europe. Every Saturday night on RTL 7 the famous WWE matches, the American pro-wrestling league, were broadcasted. The first time I watched was out of pure curiosity, the other multiple times out of fascination. Staging, entrances of the contestants, awe-struck takes, costumes and scenarios were an addictive mix to me. All of this made me decide to attend a wrestling competition and I took my ticket for a wrestling match in *Solution* (Eindhoven) organised by the PWH, pro-wrestling Holland league. Enthusiastic about this first real experience I looked for literature about wrestling, which is very scarce. Yet, surprisingly, I came across an article from Barthes as part of the collection *Mythologies*.³ If his description of the proceedings of the match felt very accurate, his typological description of the public attending, by contrast, felt very historically dated to me. He described it as a very low-class entertainment yet when, in Eindhoven, I had seen a diversity of people around the ring.

This had been what had actually moved me the most. The possibilities for a whole room of strangers to shout in amazement at the energetic kick or to get verbally angry at the treachery of an opponent towards another wrestler. However, could I get valuable knowledge from this entertainment? How could I incorporate, and therefore compare, the ingredients from wrestling and from a cultural and creative practice such as design?

Very intuitively I felt the links between those two fields and not only in the representational necessity but on so many other levels which had to do with the experience of the social. First I became interested in the relationship between the wrestlers and the audience. The scenario of two opponents fighting over a piece of land (the ring) was mimicking what I call a pre-social state. This violence of the performance was

3

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies, le monde ou l'on catche*, Editions du Seuil, 1957, p.13



INTRODUCTION

therefore reinforcing in the audience the wish for collective aggregation regarding the defence of a territory (the shared territory being, according to me, the one precondition to social welfare). In the first part called Territory I also recall that this wish for a collective living arose in the mind of the audience not after confabulations or pros and cons speeches but, rather, emerged as a phenomenon which I called *Harmony*.

Secondly I could not ignore the very reason for the wrestling performance, that is to say the ring in the middle of the room, organising and framing the athlete's movements. Here again, wrestling was showing me and reminding me the nature of the frame. The very same frame I was encountering physically in my textile work but also theoretically when I was reading and referring to ethnology, biology or sociology. It was necessary to come back to the lexical origins of the word but also to notice the special use wrestlers were making of it.

These reflections led me automatically to confront in a third part the absolutist aspect of the use of the frame both in theory and practice. Designing and maybe designers were in a position to overview and therefore over-control the audience since they were the ones defining their own frame of work.

Finally, I wondered about the very special status of the wrestler and how it could maybe influence and direct me in the whole process of creation: from sourcing to exploiting matter and to represent my process in order to generate self-organising knowledge within an audience.



TERRITORY

*A ring,
an extra stage
linking the ring
and the door
through which
the wrestlers will
appear.*

A SET-UP

Upon entering the arena where the match takes place, there remains no doubt concerning how the fight is set-up.. Whether it is an international wrestling competition organised by the american WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment inc,) or by a local organisation, the composition is built on the same principles: a ring, an extra stage linking the ring and the door through which the wrestlers will appear. The public is placed around the ring, either in bleachers, allowing some empty space between the audience and the frame, or directly around the ring.

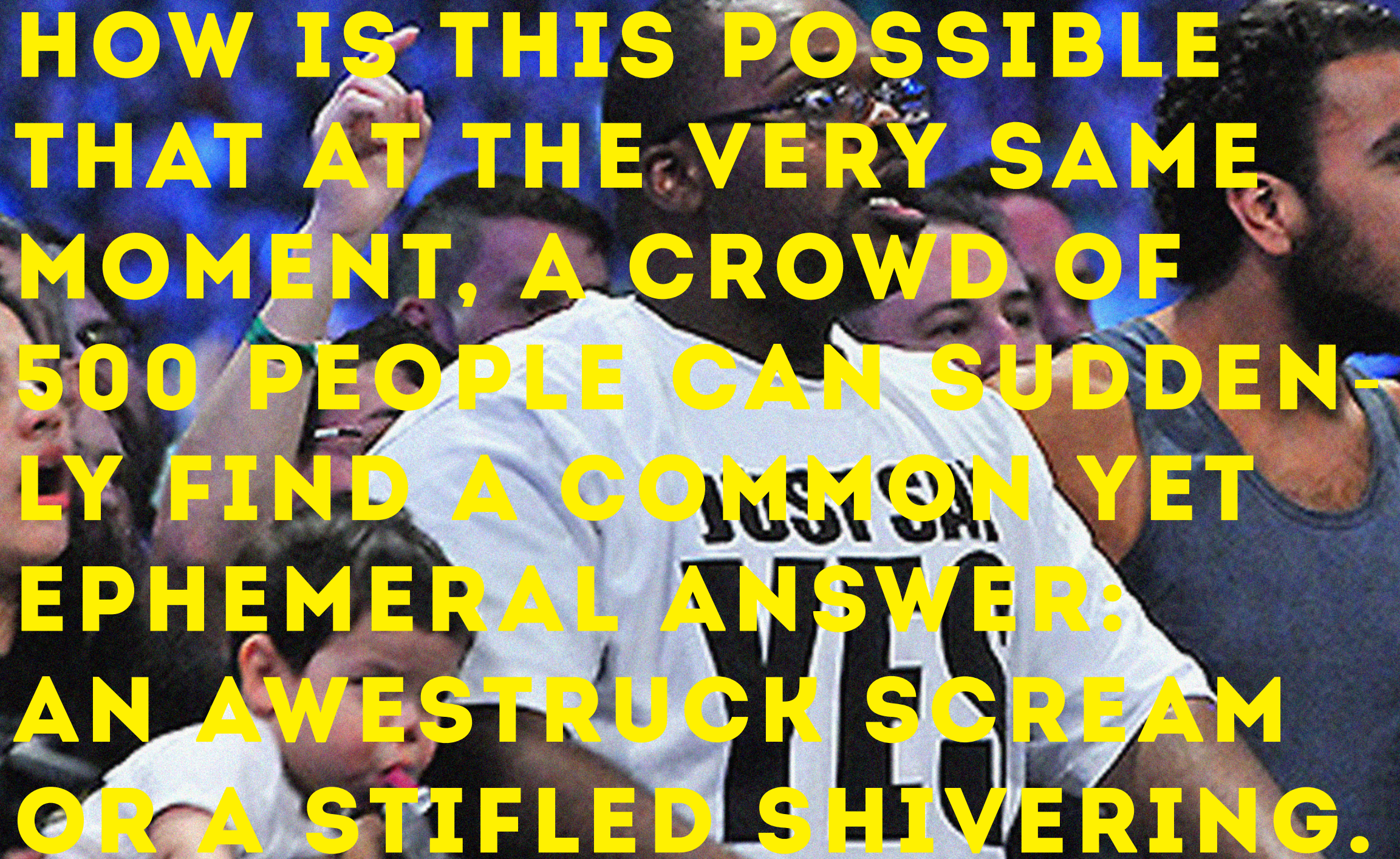
Indeed when I attended my first match of the Pro-wrestling Holland league, I was surprised to find out that I could actually lean over the edge of the ring the whole duration of the performance. This perspective emphasizes the emotion in the public since the wrestlers regularly end up falling or jumping 10 cm away from your head. By entering this room, I embrace a setting and accept it for the next two hours. Only in performance settings can I be made physically aware of the context I agreed to be part of: I can touch it, I can make an inventory of the ingredients surrounding me in a very precise territory. This counts for the tangible part of the experience.



THE SNOW-GLOBE EFFECT

However something extra takes place when those elements start colliding and intertwining, when they are put into movements, when the actual show starts. I keep thinking of a snow globe in order to describe the nature of the switch between context and action.

At rest, I can describe very precisely the elements arranged within the snow globe as well as the perimeter circumscribing those elements (in that case the volume of the glass sphere): this is my context. However when I start shaking the globe to churn up the white particles, I am not able anymore to sense and perceive clearly all the positions of the elements. I am unable to register and convey precisely in my brain the movements of each particle. My senses are outnumbered by the amount of simultaneous happenings. Nevertheless this sudden disturbance, this chaos, is surprisingly a renewed source of joy and excitement for the one holding the snow globe: because of the sensual puzzlement, because of the impossibility to predict the trajectory of the elements after each new shake.

A photograph of a diverse crowd of people at what appears to be a concert or a large public event. In the foreground, a man with glasses and a white t-shirt is looking upwards with an open mouth, as if shouting or singing. To his right, a woman with dark hair is also looking up. In the lower left, a young child is visible, looking down. The background is filled with other people, some with their arms raised, and the scene is lit with blue stage lights.

**HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE
THAT AT THE VERY SAME
MOMENT, A CROWD OF
500 PEOPLE CAN SUDDEN-
LY FIND A COMMON YET
EPHEMERAL ANSWER:
AN AWESTRUCK SCREAM
OR A STIFLED SHIVERING.**

*I was not only
a spectator holding
the snow globe,
I was inside of it:
one of the thou-
sands of white par-
ticles undergoing
intense stimula-
tions.*

CHANNELLING VIBRATIONS

However what I underwent during all the wrestling competitions I attended was even stronger than this sensual puzzlement. Why? Because I was not only a spectator holding the snow globe, I was inside of it: one of the thousands of white particles undergoing intense stimulations.

Indeed what is happening above me, in the ring, is not only shown to me, it seems to be thrown at me: it looks like with each shake (taking) I am offered a chance to enter into collision with new elements. As a spectator I vibrate with those bodies in movement. The bodies of the wrestlers of course but also the bodies of the people surrounding me in the pit: their tightness, their heavy breath, their exhilarating shouts. It has nothing to do either with the jingoism one can find in sport (the patriotic feeling supporters experience while hoping for their team to win) or with a sort of cathartic experience as described by audiences of theaters. It is something totally and absolutely sensual.

This sensuality I share tacitly with the person standing next to me but also with the one sitting up there in the bleachers. In a split second a thrill crosses the room while the body of Brian Kendrick falls in a muffled sound on the left corner of the ring. How is this possible that at the very same moment, a crowd of 500 people can suddenly find a common yet ephemeral answer: an awestruck scream or a stifled shivering. Moreover this feeling is as strong as the reaction is short.

I know instinctively that this pleasure is extremely valuable and an insatiable quest in human association: the pleasure of agreeing with others no matter their social background, expectations and desires. I would compare this intense joy to my experience of sailing and, more particularly, marine communication. There is nothing more exhilarating than finding, after hours on the VHF radio¹, a channel on which another

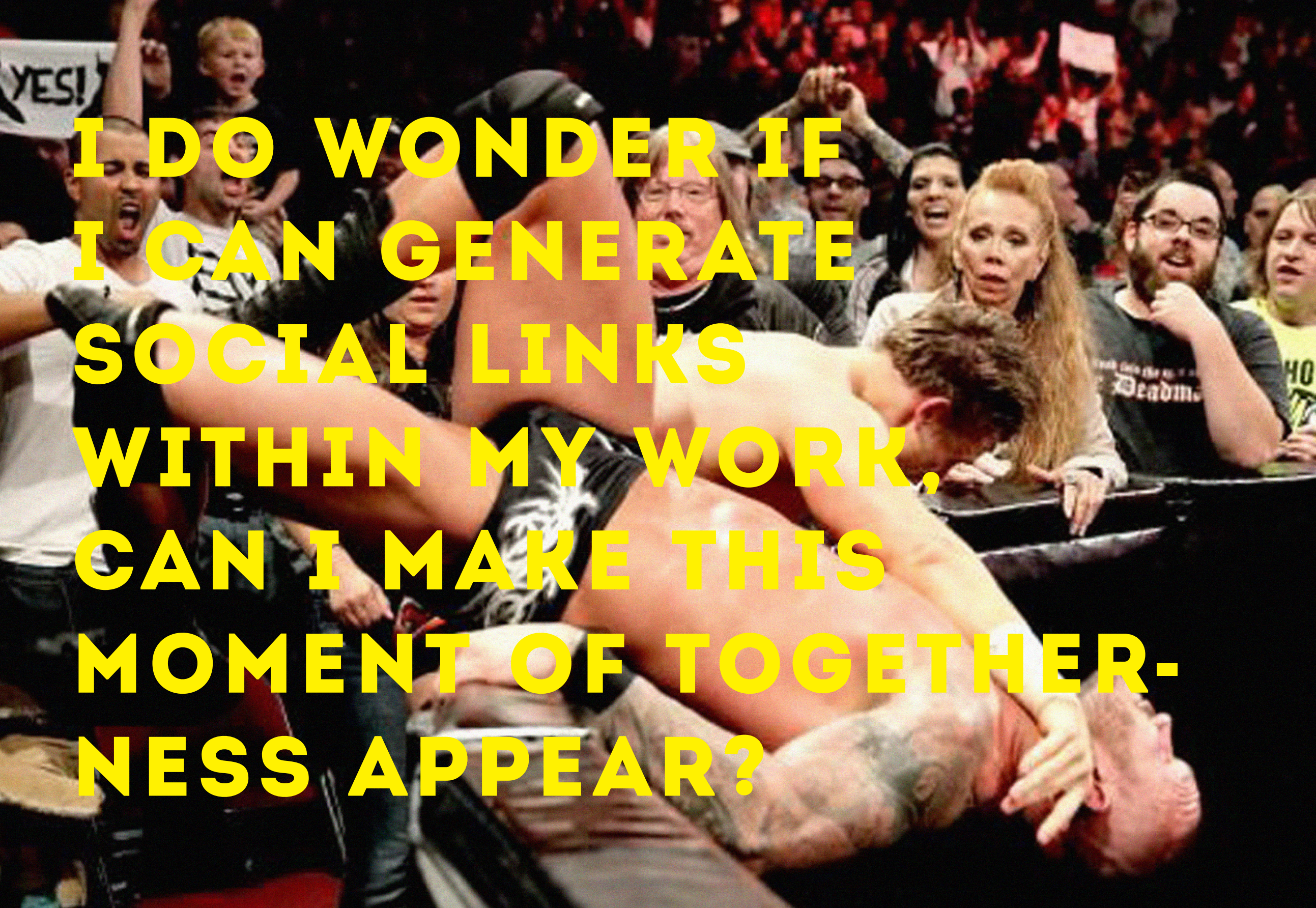
.....
¹ VHF radio stands for Very High Frequency radio. VHF is the ITU-designated range [1] of radio frequency electromagnetic waves from 30 MHz to 300 MHz, with corresponding wavelengths of one to ten meters. Frequencies immediately below VHF are denoted high frequency (HF), and the next higher frequencies are known as ultra high frequency (UHF). Common uses for VHF are FM radio broadcasting,



TERRITORY

boat is connected. With relief, hope, joy and excitement on my part, the crackled sound of interferences makes way for a uniform vibration: Harmony.

.....
television broadcasting, land mobile stations (emergency, business, private use and military), long range data communication up to several tens of kilometres with radio modems, amateur radio, and marine communications. Air traffic control communications and air navigation systems (e.g. VOR, DME & ILS) work at distances of 100 kilometres or more to aircraft at cruising altitude (Wikipedia)



**I DO WONDER IF
I CAN GENERATE
SOCIAL LINKS
WITHIN MY WORK,
CAN I MAKE THIS
MOMENT OF TOGETHER-
NESS APPEAR?**

Harmony.
That's the word
that's stuck in my
mind.

Harmony.
It's not about
what's lasting or
permanent.

HARMONY IN CONTEXT

It is this kind of harmony one can become addicted to. In my opinion, this kind of harmony should be given major role in design representation. Somehow, somewhere, the rest of the audience and I are connecting with one another. This vibration is transforming us: from a multiplicity of individuals to a harmonious aggregate.

I came across this word, *Harmony*, while I was watching the Netflix version of *House of Cards* (2013). I was surprised by the strong impression this somehow dusty word made suddenly on me. Was it not a very classical term? It was a necessary feature in the balanced composition of a sonnet, and also a Holy Grail for seventieth-century composers and painters. How come this word, used in a speech of the main character, Francis Underwood, resonated suddenly with my wrestling experience, a very baroque show:

*"Harmony. That's the word that's stuck in my mind.
 Harmony. It's not about what's lasting or permanent.
 It is about individual voices coming together for a moment.
 And that moment lasts the length of a breath."¹*

Because Francis Underwood was using it in its original meaning. Harmony was not about the nature of the things assembled together but about the very ties that were linking those things. When I had a look on the actual Latin construction of the term, I realised that, as a matter of fact, the focus was on the actual junctions, that is to say, the connections between heterogenous parts and not about the nature of the parts themselves, exactly like with the public in the wrestling pit.

One thing is sure though: wrestling is capable of making me reach this ephemeral state. The question is to find out how, so that it can be applied to my working process. I do wonder if I can generate social links

¹ Francis Underwood in *House of Cards*, season 1, episode 8 (2013)

*It is about
individual voices
coming together
for a moment.*

*And that moment
lasts the length of a
breath.*

within my work. Can I make this moment of togetherness appear?

The answer seems to lay in the very representation of the process. Indeed there is no climax without me, the audience, being led stage by stage towards it. I have to be conditioned by a context and a mise en scene, to be made aware of the stages of the process through a mise-en-scene of the context.

*Suddenly
the status
of the audience
switches from
a passive viewer
to an actual player
of the game.*

MISE EN SCENE: A CATALYST

Harmony is not contained in the body of the wrestler but will rise thanks to their mise-en-scene, and this mise-en-scene begins way before the actual meeting in the ring. All of the senses of the audience are involved, almost assaulted to a maximum level by the intensity of the music, the spotlights and the warmth of the room, the bold-colored lycras, the violent blinking neons. So far nothing really different from an international boxing fight. However the sensual experience becomes complete when the competing wrestlers enter the space.

Suddenly the status of the audience switches from a passive viewer to an actual player of the game. As a matter of fact, every time I attended a show, the entry of the fighters lasted as long as the fight itself. The opponents would never arrive at the same time to the effect that each contestant has individual time in the limelight.

The wrestler waves around him to the spectators, climbs on the side of the ring energetically to face the public who encourages him with cheers and shouts. However the very difference comes next when all at once he goes down into the crowd pressed against the ring. He makes his way through the hands and the arms that are touching him frenetically. The body and the strength I thought I had caught sight of earlier on the stage I can now touch, press, and even smell. Although there are more steps in his transformation, this is the ultimate stage in it and the audience joins him in this transformation and become actors.



BEFORE HARMONY: THE PRE-SOCIAL STATE

Wrestling also gives us the opportunity to travel back in time and experience tangibly the danger of a world before the social state. What is happening on stage has direct repercussions in the flesh of the audience. The constant sollicitation my sensory system is undergoing in the context of a wrestling competition enables me to slowly reconnect with my animality.

All that takes place from the moment I enter the room till my first sensory reaction. This is not just a warm-up. It is a necessary phase to bring slowly the audience from a civilised state to a pre-social condition (from a world of common rules to a world of carnal possibilities). At the same time the challenge of the performance is not forgotten. The wrestler is here to convince of its strength, to convince that he has physical potential. Indeed, in the middle of the room is the ring: a territory to conquer.



HOW TO DEAL WITH THE OTHER?

The term territory takes its origins from the world of nature (Territories would regulate the spatial distribution between animals or individuals). Unfortunately, the expression “the laws of nature” is too often used to explain the construction of a territory as if territories would fall under a jurisdiction or even an agreement. They are no such things as agreements in the natural world, only facts. And the facts are enclosed within the individuals not outside of them. In other words, I have to accept that I am either a weaker or stronger individual always regarding the other. He is the only reference point that allows me to place myself in this corporeal hierarchy.

Indeed, I have to constantly evaluate myself vis-a-vis the other: its muscles, its confidence, its smell, its look. Our interactions are regulated strictly by our attempts to assess dominance.. I will have to observe him to determine how I compare physically.

Let's say that I do meet someone else in the forest during one of my lonely hunting trip. I will first examine the way he is built from afar to evaluate if I can defeat him. If this first examination was convincing and if the other one did not turn back yet, we will fight one another. All of this in the hope of making the expected impression: a total submission from the other: **Might makes right¹ and only might does in this “state of nature”²**

1 “Het recht van de sterkste is altijd de beste”/“La loi du plus fort est toujours la meilleure”

2 Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, Flammarion, Paris, 2001



STATE OF NATURE AND SOCIAL CONTRACT

At the turn of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, philosophers like Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau revived the questioning of the cause of the birth of "the Social". Philosophy manuals and political science essays tend to gather them under the label of "Contract Philosophers" as they stipulate the existence of a pre-social state in which there would be no such things as group or community, only isolated individuals relying on their natural rights.

For Hobbes it is mainly a situation of chaos depicted in a hypothetical state: the *Bellum Omnium contra Omnes* (the war of everyone against everyone). Indeed, in this natural state individuals are obsessed with their own survival. The near future is a constant worry materialised through the preservation of a territory for hunting, mating and nesting. The individual relies on its own forces to repel the Other who is invariably motivated by the desire to possess more territory.

*" Et c'est pourquoi si deux hommes desirent la meme chose, dont ils ne peuvent jouir tous les deux, ils deviennent ennemis; et pour atteindre leur but (principalement leur propre conservation, et quelquefois le seul plaisir qu'ils savourent), ils s'efforcent de se detruire ou de subjuguier l'un l'autre."*¹

This theory about the pre-social state is then linked to an individualistic and utilitarian ideology concerning human nature. For Hobbes but also for Rousseau they are de facto inequalities in this state of nature: in physical forces but also in genius.

1

Hobbes; *Le Leviathan*, De l'homme, Chap XIII



ASSOCIATION: A CONDITION TO MY SURVIVAL?

Individuals pre-exist a social state. They are unequal by nature: they are competitive and conniving beings, they are naturally and individually looking for security as in order to survive.

According to those “contract philosophers” what makes the difference or the shift between the natural state and the social state is the capacity of the individual to weigh up and figure out the benefits of different situation: its genius.

Indeed by associating territories and power two individuals become stronger. Thanks to this “contract of association” two of them now protect a bigger territory which means more security and defense against the outsider. It also means more resources for both of them. The first link is established. The association cannot be but a success for all involved parties.



REENACTING THE SOCIAL LINK: A TRENDY SCENARIO IN THE 2000'S

In that regard, the entertainment industry has witnessed a tremendous success in the previous decade with a multitude of shows about chaos. I would gather them under the term of community series. They all have the same starting point. A major event or catastrophe lead to a tabula rasa of social structures for a return to one on one confrontation which lead automatically to creation of new associations. It is the case regarding *The Walking Dead* (2010), *Lost* (2004-2010), *Revolution* (2012), the movie *The Road* (2006), adaptation of the best-selling book. The same phenomenon took place in reality shows with a succession of tabula rasa settings: *Expeditie Robinson*, which started to air in 2000 on dutch television, but also the recent shows produced by Discovery Channel like *Man vs Wild* (2006) or *Naked and Afraid* (june 2013).

*Subjectivity
is not a threat
to the collectivity
anymore,
but an added value
to the social
construction.*

THE WALKING DEAD: THE END OF IDEOLOGICAL SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

I see three reasons for this proliferation. The first one would be a direct consequence of the end of the belief in a society based on shared ideological ground.

A second one would be a direct consequence of the first one: a way to reassure the social link and maintain the social ideas by re-enacting the strength an individual can only find in association with its fellow humans. Indeed, in those neo-communities the emphasis is made on the differences between each character (social background, age, wishes and desires). However, instead of showing those differences fading away for the Good of the neo-community, characters' singularities and ambivalences are emphasized and exploited as a quality or just accepted as being so. Their only focal point is the security of the space they share. Those series are focusing more on the construction of those groups than about the actual source of danger surrounding them.

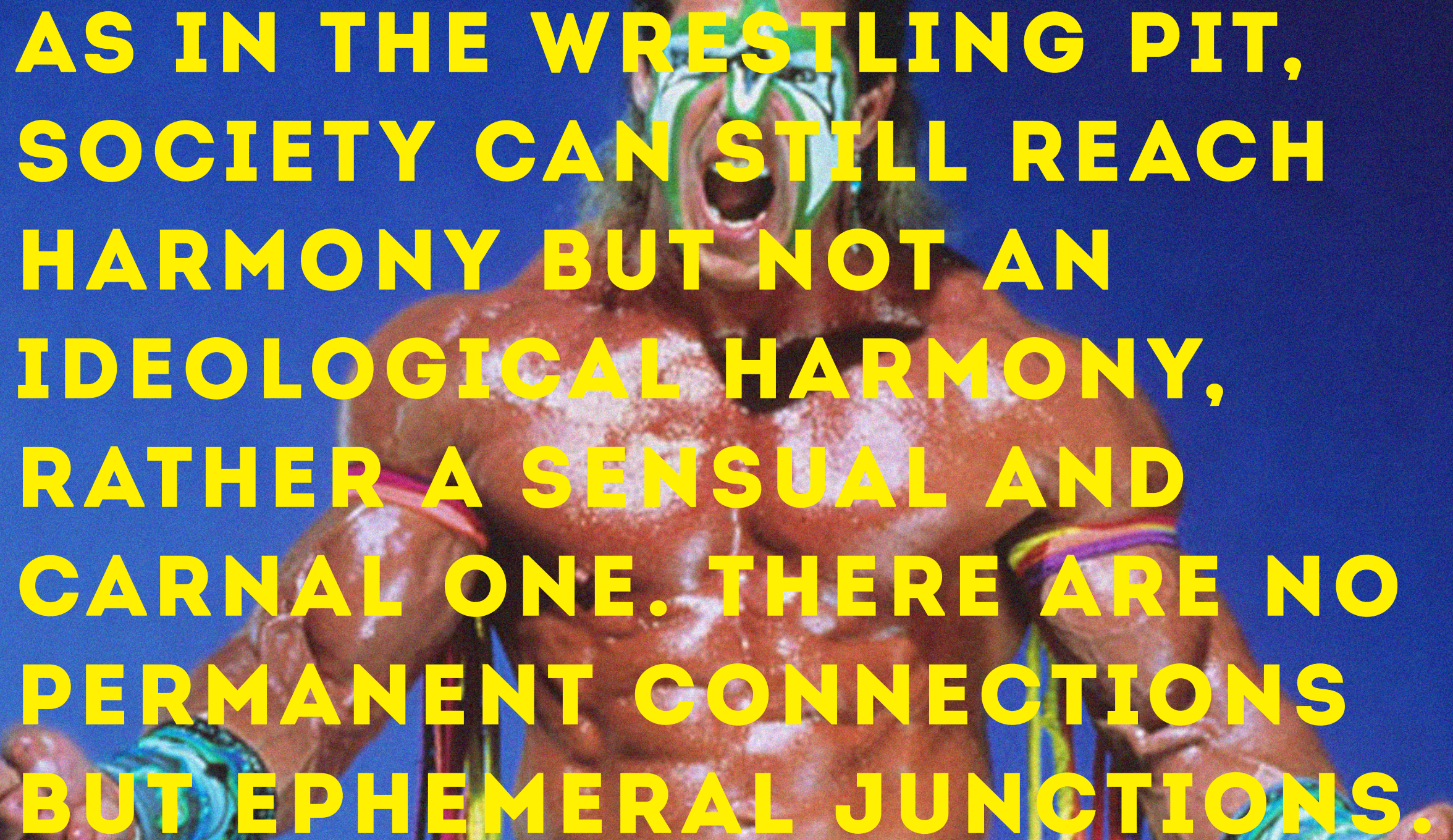
Finally no producer can ignore the unequivocal success of those shows, a success that motivates TV producers to invest largely in this concept. However the latter reveals more the need for this show to exist thanks to popular appetite and enthusiasm. This new type of association of individuals is largely approved and validated by their success. In other words, this already works on an entertainment level. **Subjectivity is not a threat to the collectivity anymore but an added value to the social construction.**



FLEXIBLE SOCIABILITIES

Why not get inspired by the success of those popular shows? It clearly demonstrates maturation in the audience which, I shall recall, is coming from a very heterogonous background, like the audience from wrestling competition. Indeed agreeing to this “association contract” does not mean agreeing to social homogeneity but opening up on the ephemeral nature and heterogeneity of those links. This vision of the creation of the social is by any measure a destruction of the ideological dynamic vision behind the creation of a community. Could it be possible that the creative area is still mainly obsessed with the representation of the outcome but continues to conceal the making of from the audience? (the progress, the diversity of elements, the multisourcing). To reveal should be part of the game.

Association is a really pragmatic yet empowering vision of the group as not one but a multiplicity of individuals with their own wishes, expectations, psychoses, obsessions, life patterns. A network, on the contrary, encloses its own dynamic of exclusion as it defines primarily the qualities required to belong to it. The net only catches the information it has been designed to capture (the trap for a butterfly will not be constructed the same way than to catch a bore). Conversely the association is continuously growing new arms to capture no matter what comes its way and integrating it to the burgeoning structure.

A muscular wrestler with a large, spiky hairstyle and face paint in green, white, and red. He is wearing multiple colorful armbands and a loincloth with a geometric pattern. He is shouting with his mouth wide open, and his fists are clenched. The background is a solid blue color.

**AS IN THE WRESTLING PIT,
SOCIETY CAN STILL REACH
HARMONY BUT NOT AN
IDEOLOGICAL HARMONY,
RATHER A SENSUAL AND
CARNAL ONE. THERE ARE NO
PERMANENT CONNECTIONS
BUT EPHEMERAL JUNCTIONS.**

Our social cosmogony has entered a crisis.

THE SENSE OF BELONGING TO

As in the wrestling pit, society can still reach harmony but not an ideological harmony, rather a sensual and carnal one. there are no permanent connections but ephemeral junctions. The islands, that individuals are, are indeed connected to one another. Without those joints, there is no community. The recent works of Bruno Latour on sociology corroborate this intuition and the new approach we must have regarding the nature of social ties:

*"There is nothing wrong with the use of the word [social] as long as it designates what is already assembled together, without making any superfluous assumptions about the nature of what is assembled."*¹

Latour is clearly trying to change the focal point, offering new perspectives based on an intuition that the sense of belonging has entered a crisis and that another notion of social has to be devised². I would go further in my remarks and consider that **our social cosmogony has entered a crisis**. That it is ferociously looking for new territories to generate and initiate those associations and that design could be one of those generating platforms. Well, platform might not be the appropriate word. The spatial qualities that it is offering me are too restrictive and too definite for what I am looking for. It has the rigidity of a network. This will definitely lead me to further investigations in the next figure.³

1 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, p.1

2 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, p.7

3 cf. figure 3, *The Absolutist Framework*.



INVADING THE SNOW-GLOBE WITHOUT BREAKING THE GLASS

However at this point I am aware that wrestling has been able to create this in-between setting: reminding us of the physical versatility of matter, the joy of play and creation but also the emphasis on an accurate representation of the process and of the outcome¹. It already made the switch long ago from a very typological world of matter where the bodies of the “Bad guys” were ugly and repulsive and the “Good Guys” glistening and muscled to a place where the flesh is not signifying anything, where the bad guy could be attractive and vice versa. Materials in general (the body of the wrestler, the bodies of the public) have lost with its function, a predetermination, and opened itself to a field of possibilities.

If one wants to understand the essence of those new associations and to be able to define a new set of rules regarding the making, it is necessary to understand the exact nature of this area. As seen previously, being made aware of a context play a key role in reaching togetherness. So is the emphasis on the process.

This communion is taking place somewhere and it is for me to find out in which settings it occurs and where the changes have taken place.

1

cf. figure 4, Taking Action.

THE FRAME



TERRITORY AND FRAME

The notion of frame is intimately linked to the notion of territory, as it is the necessary support to the demarcation between the domain of an individual and the outside of it. It is also a demarcation between different sets of rules. It is as well the way zoologists; ethologists or hunters delimit and map the territories of animals, the range of their actions. They do that in a very practical way, that is to say, on maps, by framing mostly with the use of colored lines the different territories.



*Is it rules, spatial
restrictions or
material obstruc-
tions that make
a frame,
well,
a frame?*

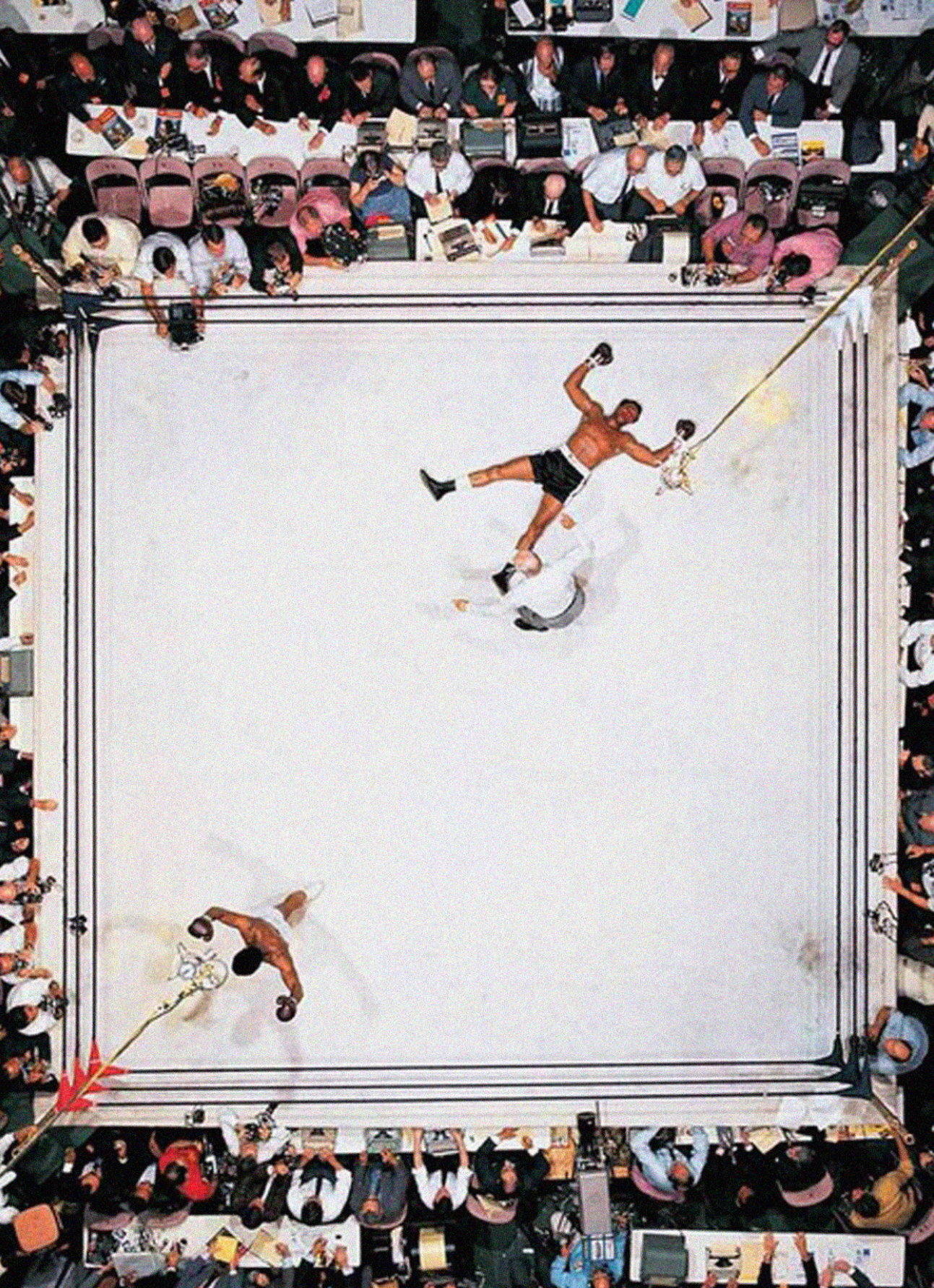
TEXTILE WORKSHOP: THE TOOLS TERRITORY

This idea of trespassing, of entering someone else's domain or estate, is somehow very close to what I experience when I have to approach the tools that are offered to me in the textile workshop. As soon as I pass the door I am overwhelmed with a plethora of tools and equipment, which are themselves assigned to both a specific textile area (silk Screening, Dyeing, Batik) and an actual well-guarded territory in the space itself. At the Rietveld Academie, the silkscreen table, on the direct left of the entrance, is a worshipped territory: pampered and almost caressed everyday by the current owner. The dyeing station will not tolerate batik experiments on its ground... The manipulations I am allowed to perform on my materials are not permitted in all the spaces of the workshop. All of those rules are tacitly observed between the users.

On other occasions, tools themselves enclose the area where I should perform. For example, the loom, horizontal or vertical, the embroidery hoop, and even the laser-cut machine are limiting the surface where I can operate. I can calculate in cm² or m² the area that is to act as the frame offered to me for handlings.

Only in the textile workshop am I already exposed to a multiplicity of criteria regarding the essence of a frame: *Is it rules, spatial restrictions or material restrictions that makes a frame, well, a frame?*





FRAME: WHAT IS IT?

The Oxford dictionary gives several options regarding the definition of Frame. Strangely its physical features are presented as the last occurrence in the dictionary by the following sentence: *a system of geometrical axes in relation to which size, position or motion can be defined*. Nothing is leading me to any defined geometrical shape, only lines. I reread the rest of the definitions above and realise that none of them refers directly to a square or a rectangle. I was so sure to find it somewhere. However none of the stiffness of the object is left out. As a matter of fact the dictionary offers me as a first and general clarification the following sentence: *a rigid structure that surrounds something such as a picture, door or windowpane*.

There are no rectangles in Nature.

THE FRENCH SQUARE

I then started to question the reason of this rectangle mental image of mine. Was it only related to my French education, maybe a cultural mental construction?

Looking into the definition given to the French translation of Frame, "Cadre", in the CNRTL¹ I realised that the rectangle idea was nowhere to be found. Yet I had the hardest time to transfer the image of the frame to something other than a rectangular shape. Indeed I was sure that by asking any French people to draw me a frame ("cadre") on a piece of paper they would deliver as a result a square or a rectangle figure.

I found my answers, or at least the reason for my mental pictures, not in the lexicological history of the word but in its etymological one. Indeed the term "Cadre" takes its origins in the latin form "quadra, quadrae" which means "a square table". Moreover the latin word has also an adjective form which would apply to objects with a "squared" quality and finally a verbal occurrence, *Quadra, Quadrare*, related to the action of forming a rectangular shape or even more simply, the action of making a square. It does not refer to a state of nature but to an action, a human creation. There are no rectangles in Nature. It is, as Barthes notices, a human construction mainly linked to human habitat in society. Barthes even talks about a "rectangle pollution" when dis-
serting about urban architecture:

*"Perception de l'habitat: majorité d'angles à 90 degrés et à 180 degrés
= maisons, immeubles, portes, fenêtres, toits, ascenseurs.
Tout est rectangle (différent) "nature" [...] Il y a une pollution par le
rectangle. Agents de cette pollution: les architectes. Importance (tyr-
annie) des "tracés régulateurs"²*

Had my brain been also polluted iconographically by this omnipresence of the frame as a four-angle closed shape in my surroundings?

¹ CNRTL, centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales, www.cnrtl.fr

² Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble, Cours et séminaire au Collège de France Tome 1*, éditions du seuil, Novembre 2002, p.158



THE SENSORY FRAME

It would have been an easy and maybe satisfying conclusion but I felt that the explanation laid in a much more sensitive and sensible place: a sort of materiality surrounded the word no matter the languages. It was rigid, stiff, inflexible, harsh and firm. The square was suitable to this representation with its four sharpened angles and its straight lines. Like a medieval castle it stood its ground, deeply rooted and would not move - a symbolic physicality as it determined for both the insider and the outsider the limits of its movement.

A professional wrestling match taking place in a ring with red ropes. One wrestler in red trunks is being thrown or held by another wrestler in black trunks with a yellow and red flame design. A third wrestler is on the mat in the background. The scene is lit with bright arena lights.

IS THE SHAPE OF THE FRAME
ACCOMPANYING MY MOVE-
MENTS, SUPPORTING MY
GESTURES, ORIENTATING MY
WORKING POSITION OR, ON
THE CONTRARY, FORCING MY
POSTURE, CONSTRAINING
MY MOTIONS?

FRAME AND CONFINEMENT

As a matter of fact it orders the body to accept a restriction of motions: to confine its movement to the line. In or out of those lines the flesh is subdued, defeated, in other words, becomes submissive to the demarcation. It is not the shape that matters but the effects it has on the body: the physical structure against or towards the organic matter.

This brings me back to my experience in the textile workshop where I had to conform my actions and movement to the frame. Actually I realise now that the term to conform automatically indicates a posture of the body. I have to "go with the form" (com: *avec + formare* : to form/to shape).

Is the shape of the frame accompanying my movements, supporting my gestures, orientating my working position or, on the contrary, forcing my posture, constraining my motions? The experience I have of my first contact with a loom would push me to go for the second option.

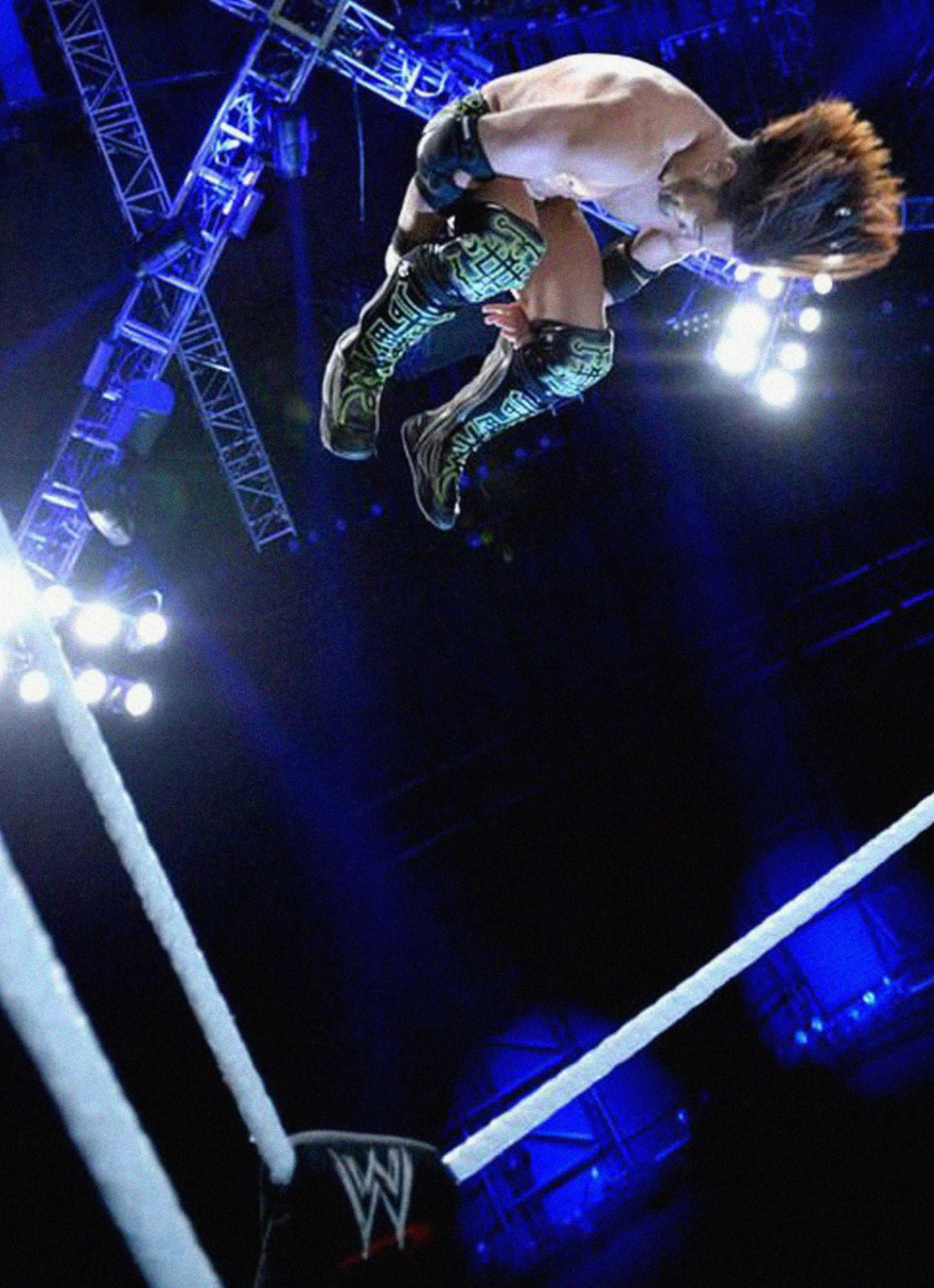
Indeed from the threading of the instrument to the actual weaving, I felt how powerless I was regarding the Frame, how much useless I was vis-à-vis the intricate relationships taking place within the machinery. I felt like an outsider that needed to look beforehand or afterward at technical drawings to understand what was really taking place between the warp and the weft.

Why? Because I could not feel anything, I was the trigger. I was just a button. I was a catalyst of the action but I would never stand in the middle of it, just on the outskirts, on my wooden bench, and I felt powerless.

I had the same terrifying experience, this time at the *Textile Museum* in Tilburg where I encountered my first Damask loom. Several of them are gathered at the end of a corridor in a very dark room. My memory might play a trick on me but, if I remember well an audio track is being played, letting us hear the repetitive squeaking of the machinery being activated.

*This time I was
not being left on
the outskirts of the
frame but under
the impression
that I was being
digested by it.*

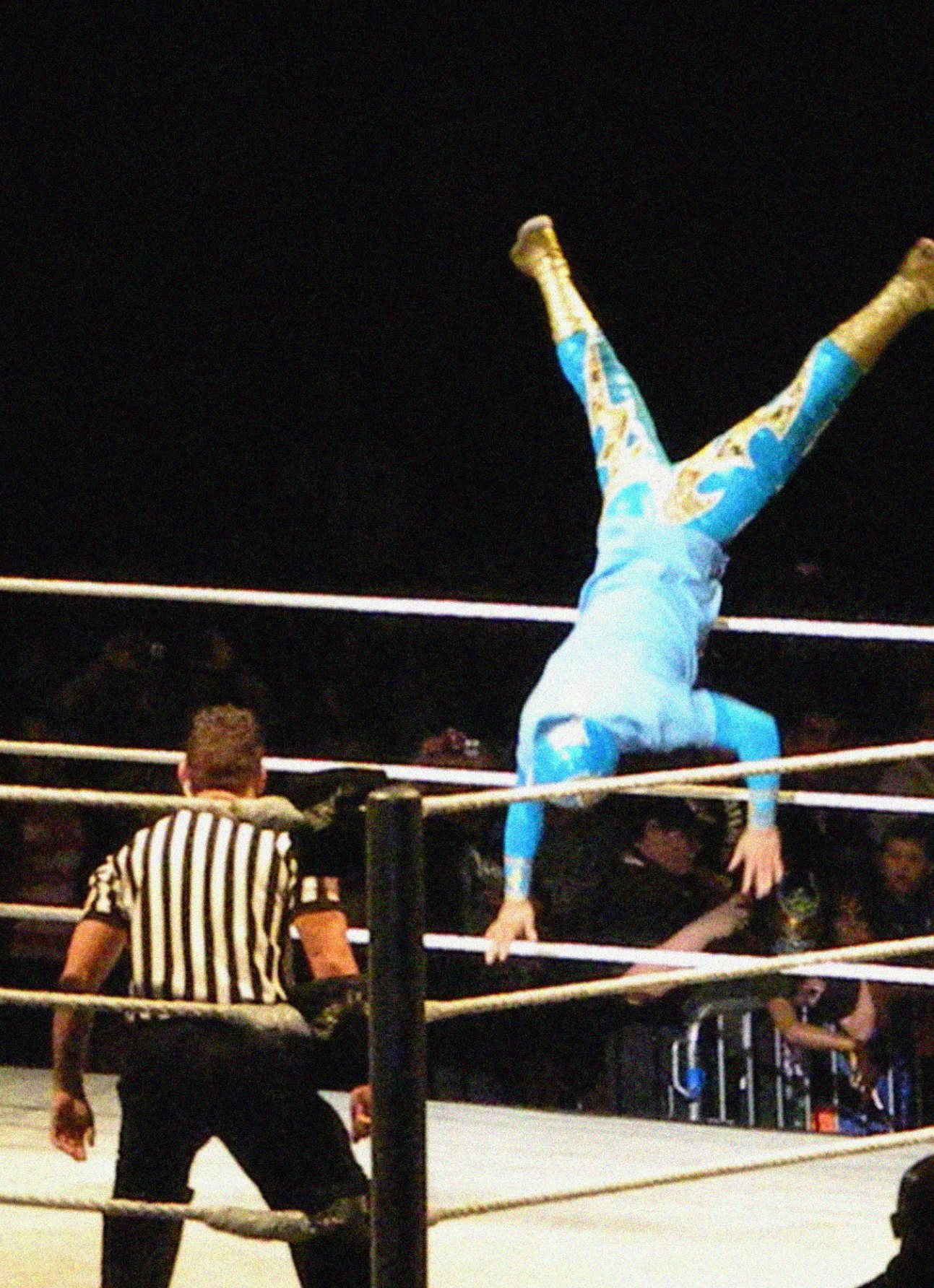
Once again no trace of a human behind the machine, just the cligging of the system. Moreover the room is packed from the ground to the ceiling with several Damask looms. This time I was not being left on the outskirts of the frame but under the impression that I was being digested by it.



FRAME AND RING

It is then easy for me to see a clear link between the frame and the ring in sport where the notion of fencing but also protection and delimiting the action are taking place. This ambiguity of approach therefore would explain the strange shift in meanings regarding the term “ring” in combat sports. Otherwise, there is little in the way to explain why that which is called a “ring” in boxing and wrestling actually has a square or hexagonal shape. By contrast, the ring in Greco-Roman wrestling is indeed a circle. The issue is not about its physical configuration, but rather about its symbolic meaning.

It is interesting to note that the boxing ring is commonly referred to as the “Square Circle” in an attempt to gather in one expression both its symbolic and physical aspects.



RING, ROPES AND CONFINEMENT

However while the greco-roman ring remains in its purest form (a painted circle on the floor), lines materialize and become tangible in boxing and wrestling with the use of ropes. Like a fence they delimit not only the public from the fighters but metaphorically they delimit an area where a certain set of rules applies from another territory with other rules.

In that way those two spaces are totally hermetic to one another as they are under two different jurisdictions.

That is when the actual configuration of the wrestling ring has to be thoroughly investigated . The surrounding ropes are not just fencing the set of operations. They are offering it a multiplicity of chords and variations that the body of the wrestler will use to modulate its launching speed towards its opponent, the height of its jumps, and the force of its kicks. Indeed unlike boxing where the four ropes surrounding the canvas mat are attached to one another, the three ropes of the wrestling ring are fixed independantly from one another. In addition, the ring ropes are not tethered together at their midpoint making them less taut than boxing ropes. Only the pressure the wrestler puts on the rope will determine the reach of its gesture. He is not limited by the rope but makes an actual use of its obstructive nature.

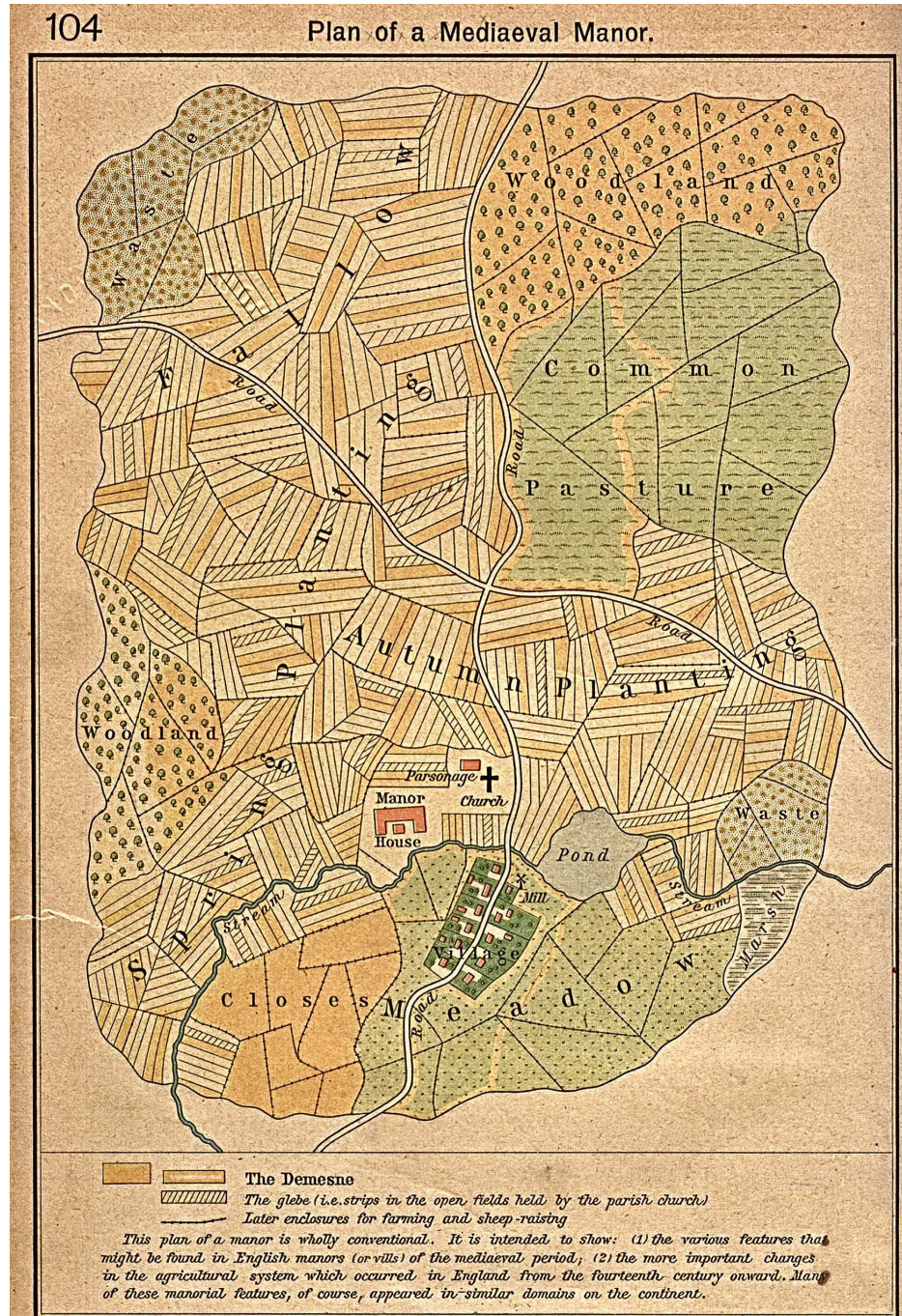


INSTRUMENTAL ROPES

For me this is what an actual tool-instrument is: not an object that encloses the condition of its usage but an object that offers a multiplicity of mediation and possibilities of actions between me, my body and my surroundings. The spatial, but also material restrictions, of the frame could not be contested. There was, however, an additional aspect, not existing as a system of fence or ropes but which I discovered still had a major influence on my movements. This layer or feature was much more complicated to isolate. I have been working on it for at least the past year as it lays in the relationship between human territories and human power or domination.



THE ABSOLUTIST FRAME



FRAME, SECURITY AND SOCIAL TASKS DISTRIBUTION

As seen above, the frame has a tangible function: protecting an inside from an outside. That is at least the first definition given for the word "cadre" in the French database CNRTL:

*"1. Bordure de bois, de metal, de marbre, ect., qui entoure un tableau, un miroir, une photographie... tout autre objet qu'elle protege et decore."*¹

But the switch can again easily be made from the function of the frame as an object (the picture frame) to the human environment/level. Why? Because security, and therefore the search for protection, are the motor of social development as seen in the figure *Territory*.

In order to be protected, a community needed to define a frame, its borders, and to look after them. However this activity is not enough to provide for the survival of a group, hence the separation of tasks among the community. While some will have to supply the food by cultivating the ground, others will be in charge of guarding the domain and its population from outsiders. But the second assignment remains the number one preoccupation and therefore offers the one in charge of this task an obvious dominant position.

Indeed without security, there is no time to cultivate the ground. Hence the necessity for at least individual to be in charge of ruling the territory.

¹ Trans. « 1. A wooden, metallic or marbled edge, ect...which surrounds a painting, a mirror, a photo...any other object that needs protection and decoration. »



TRACING THE FRAME, RULING THE FRAME

On this particular point, Barthes brings an interesting matter regarding the origins of the word *Rules*¹. Indeed following Benevise's remarks², he reminds us that the term *Rex* from which *Roi* (king) takes its roots does not directly mean "Leader" in Latin. Indeed it refers to "*the one who sanctions the territories, the one who traces, draws the line.*" Even more interesting if you look at its Greek roots *Rego*<*Orego*. This Greek verb stands for "tracing in a straight line".

Finally "regula" has given us "rule" and "ruler" in English but also "règle" in French. The latter referring both to the actual tool to draw straight lines but also the Law that manage a territory.

1 Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, éditions du seuil, Novembre 2002, p.161

2 Benevise ; *Vocabulaire des institutions indoeuropéennes*, Tome II, éditions de minuit. 1974



THE ABSOLUTIST FRAME

At this point there are clearly no more doubts about the intimate interlace existing between frame and rules, between territory and laws. However, what is new is that the rules and, therefore the ruler, have this total power over the frame. Only one individual determines the movement and the actions taking place within the frame he drew. No matter who is regulating the frame, he is controlling it.

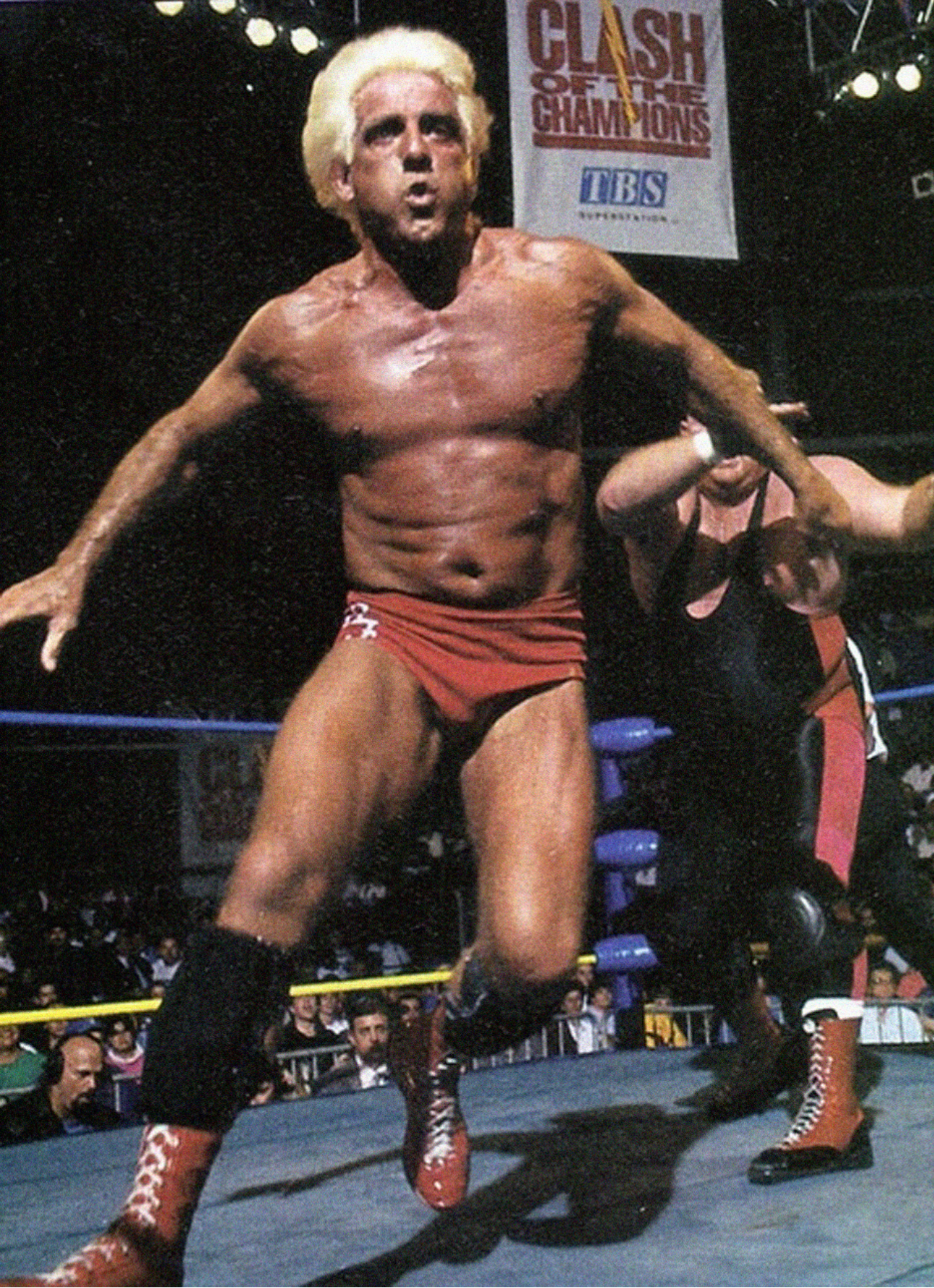
Where there is frame there is domination. This is allowing me to claim the frame to be an absolutist shape as in an absolutist political system in which a single ruler, a group or a political party has complete power over a territory.

However, as seen before the simple action of tracing and drawing the frame is already a symbolic way to take the power over the space that is being enclosed. It is then natural to me to shift from the lexical field of "politics" to the lexical field of "design". Once again the link lays in the very construction of the word "design" itself and it is interesting to have a look into its morphology.



DESIGNARE

The term “design” made its first appearance in Middle English as the verb “to design”. It referred to *the action of outlining or indicating a space*. Already the link to drawing a frame is made in this first historical appearance. According to research it stems from the Latin verb “designare” meaning *to point at where to put a mark, token or sign*. Therefore, semantically *Design* and *Designing* are also in the hand of a Ruler. The designer is the one who projects a plan, defines a frame of action and specifies the outline of his structure. However, what strikes me is that again it has this centralised direction: the hand points and this can only be in one direction at a time. The power of one hand suddenly reaches universality: all the perspectives of the frame are turned into one.



DESIGN, A DIKTAT OF THE FRAME?

The frame seems to be polluting the very possibility of an autonomous making. By *Frame* I mean both a physical structure but also a technical process such as implied by the use of a punching card in weaving or in a knit in my case. I feel like matter is not given the chance to reveal its full potential as it can only develop within that frame. The same goes for any appliance of course, not only textile ones.

Every choice I make, every transformation I perform on my initial matter is only considered as a step closer towards my final piece. None of those steps are really celebrating the changes of matter in itself, only the mastering of a rule, a technique.

However does that mean that I have to operate a *tabula rasa*, that I have to make the frame disappear in order to liberate myself from the *diktat* of the outcome?



APPLYING PRESSURE, TEASING THE RULER

A change in a design process does not necessarily imply an attempt to create and look for the contrary of the “Frame Shape”. Barthes makes an interesting remark concerning this process:

“Métaphoriquement intéressant: la subversion d’une forme, d’un archétype ne se fait pas forcément par la forme contraire, mais d’une façon plus retorse, en gardant la forme mais en lui inventant un jeu de superpositions, d’annulations, de débordements.”¹

Barthes is not calling for a revolution as in an overthrow of the system in place, a disbanding of the frame, but instead to make use of the limit of the frame by walking over and around them. In other words, I should make the limitation of my framework the center of attention, either if it is a tool or a domain of expertise. We have seen earlier in the figure *Frame* how the wrestlers are making constant use of the ropes surrounding the ring.

A picture taken during a match between two superstars of the WWE in 2003, *Big Show* and *Lesnar*, shows to what extent the resistance of the frame is tested: to the point of exhausting the resistance of the ropes and the poles, to a breaking point.

The same goes for the referee and the place he takes within a wrestling tournament. He will not be spared the intense physical handlings. In wrestling, since there seems to be no rules, one could expect the non-attendance of a referee, a representative of the law. He goes through the same treatment as the ring itself: manipulations, exploitations of its limits. He is turned into a material at the mercy of the wrestlers’ imagination and impulses.

1

Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, p.161

*By breaking
the deductivity
of the making of,
from the condition
to the statement,
wrestling opens
a field of
possibilities.*

A PLIABLE TERRITORY: DISRUPTIVE DEDUCTIVE REASONING IN CONDITIONAL STATEMENT

The wrestler feeds gluttonously on its surroundings. However this does not fall within chaos. It would be a mistake to compare wrestling to free fight (fighting without rules). All the ingredients of the performance are there (audience, frame of action, referee) but they are given new perspectives regarding the usual sport protocol.

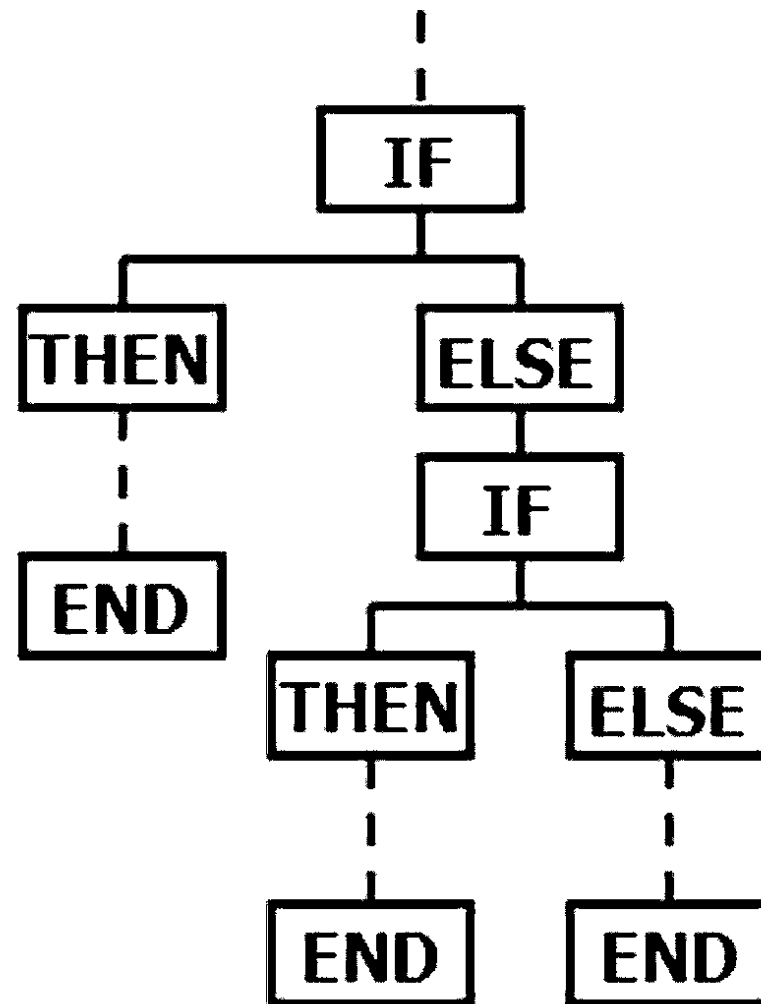
Protocols (a system of rules that explains the correct conduct and procedures to be followed in formal situations) are regulating not only sports but a multitude of other fields where a structured mode of behaviour or inquiry is needed. If one does not follow the protocol, a series of consequences will follow (materialised by a punishment, an offside, a time out...). This is called a conditional statement or an *If-Then* statement.

Indeed, introducing rules automatically imposes the logic of true and false, good and wrong on users and viewers. What I mean is that if one executes a movement outside of the rules in place, there are automatic consequences. For example, "IF I cross the red line THEN I will be excluded from the game". The same goes for the inversed rule: " If I do not cross the red line then I will not be excluded from the game".

But wrestling offers a disruption in this *If-Then* theory: "If I cross the red line then I will not be excluded from the game."

Suddenly the hypothesis does not encounter the expected logical conclusion. **By breaking the deductivity of the making of, from the condition to the statement, wrestling opens a field of possibilities.**

FOCUSING ON THE *IF*, A KEY FOR ME TO MAKE



This might be exactly the effect I am looking for in my making of. To give an example let's have a look at one of the textile construction rules as one can find in a technical book on weaving:

"if a fibre is clean, pliable and either in strips or capable of being spun into thread, then it can be used in weaving".

Does that mean that "if a fibre is not clean, pliable and neither in strips or capable of being spun into thread, then it cannot be used in weaving"? This question I will leave to the technicians of fibers, the craftsmen.

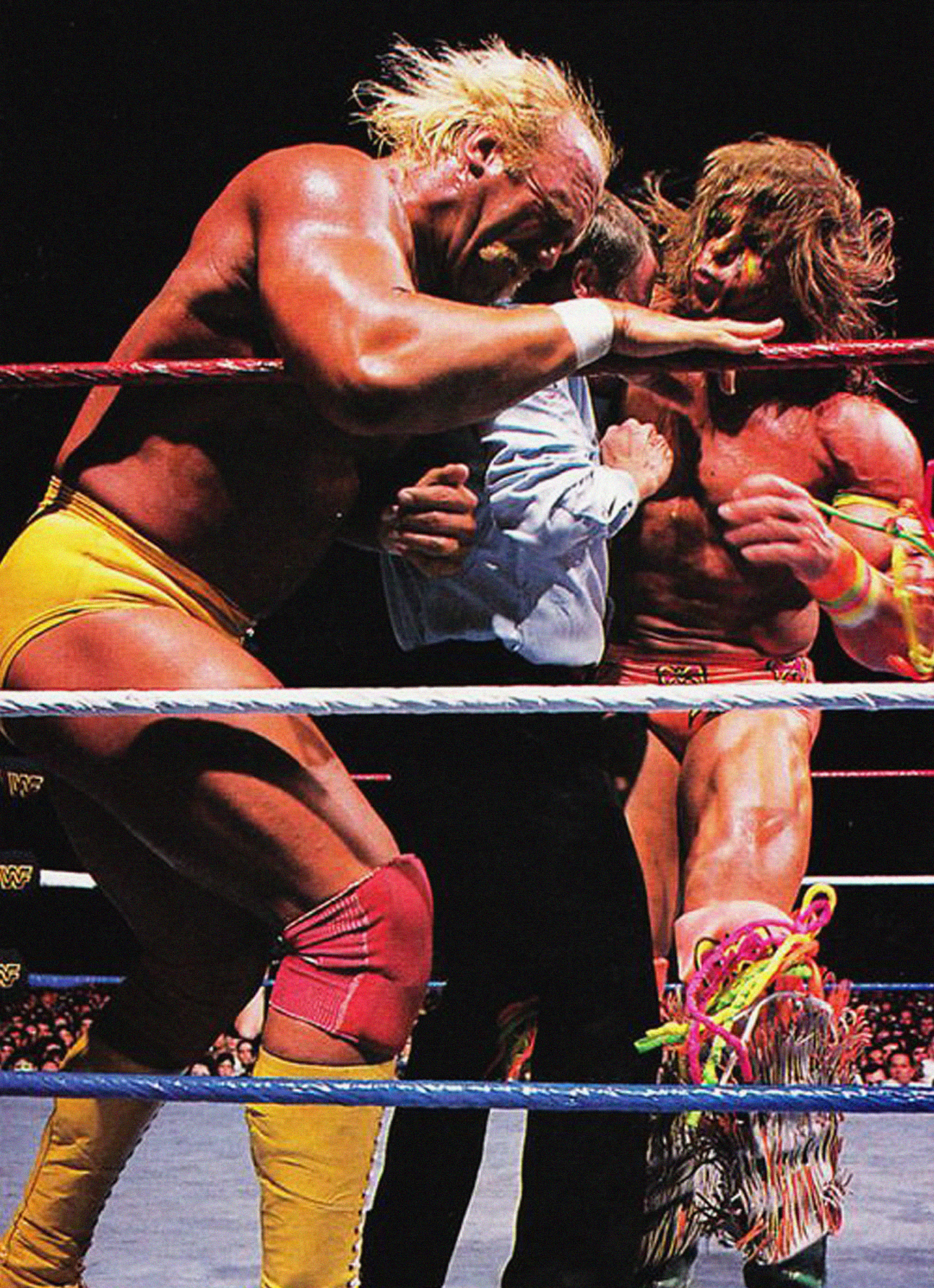
Indeed, that is where our paths diverge, between a craftsmanship process and a design process. As a designer I want to be the disruptive element that is not only able to question and consider situations such as:

"If a fiber is clean, pliable and either in strips or capable of being spun then it cannot be used in weaving."

or

"If a fiber is not clean, pliable and neither in strips or incapable of being spun then it can be used in weaving."

I also want to put into consideration the liberating effect of such an approach, the great power of the *If*, my material conditions, to which I can juxtapose my very own list of *Then*.



SOCIAL ARCHITECTONIC AND TEXTILE SYSTEM

This brings me right into the research I conducted last year and the intuitive link I devised between the “social” and my attraction to textile. I based my interest upon the common use Sociology makes of the textile vocabulary to map social interactions and constructions. *Network*, *social Fabric* but also *social loom* are all accepted terms in this domain to analyse the very range of social interplays. However, I tested the limits of such a method and found that it echoed my questioning of Latour’s work and, in particular his book *Reassembling the Social*.

THE SOCIAL CADASTER

Indeed last year, I questioned the construction of what I then called the *social cadaster* (the methodological frameworks used to analyse connections between people) Or rather much how we could define a new way to register effectively social bonding and how individuals in a block of apartments in Bos en Lommer (a neighbourhood of Amsterdam) related to one another.

Soon I discovered the limits of such a cadaster. There was a clear gap between what the *Gemeente* of Amsterdam and its office of research were depicting through statistics and the information I gathered by meeting those people at home. I had under my eyes the very limits of this mode of inquiry.

A birds-eye view as the one used by the institution was indeed creating links between people, but very selective ones. By making an urban network appear, the city was recapitulating the information, the attributes, that, according to them, defined the inhabitants of Amsterdam. Network and frame were one in that sense as they directed in an absolute(-ist) gesture the information that needed to be revealed and the one that would be left out. This very selective mode of inquiry is described by Latour as such:

*"Take any substance that seems at first self-contained and transform it in what needs to subsist"*¹



1

Latour lecture at the International Seminar on Network, You Tube, from 11:38 minutes on

*The institution
by defining
the frame, the
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CHANGING OUR MODE OF INQUIRY

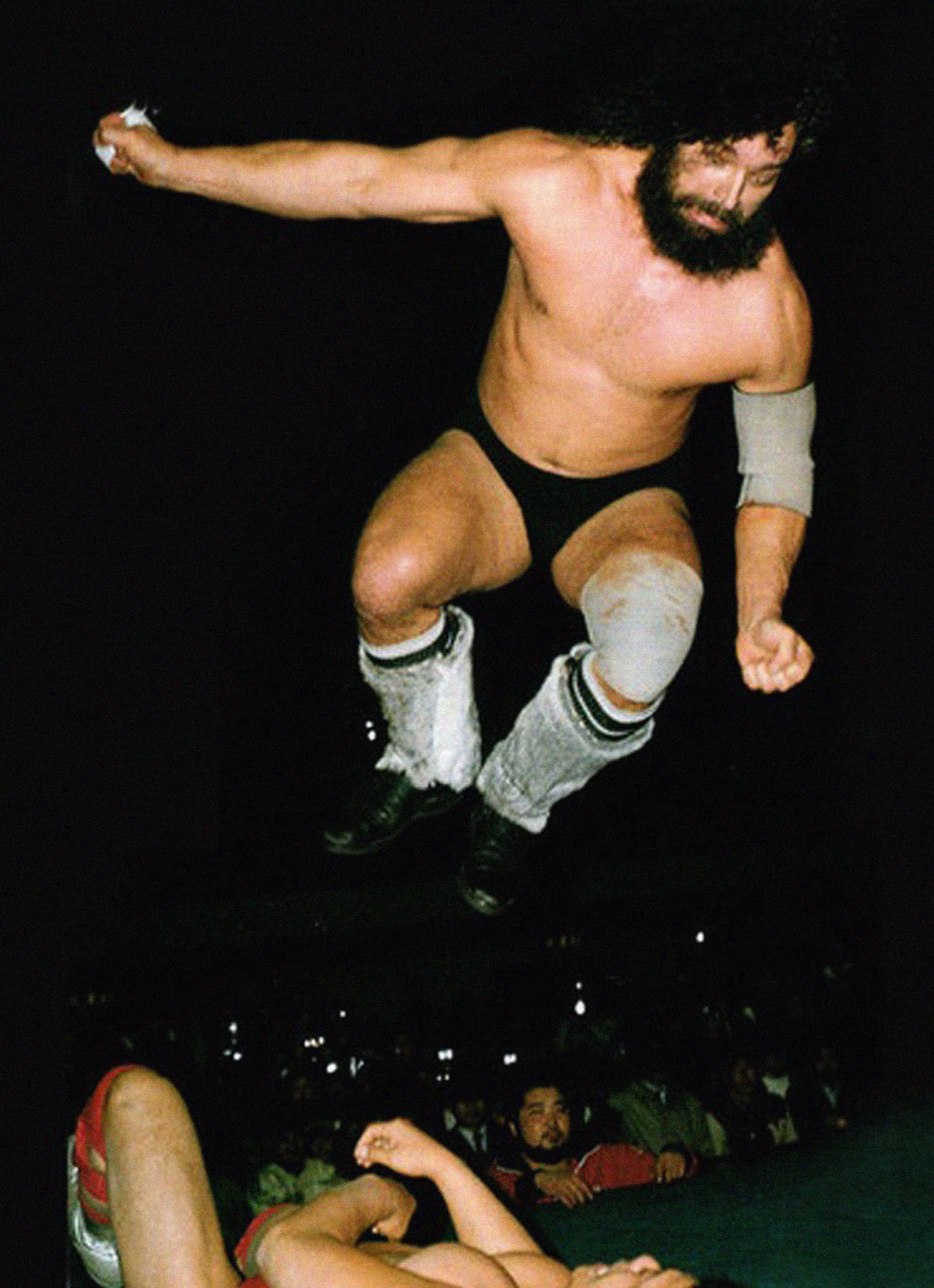
So much valuable information got lost because of the rigid lay-out of the social cartography. **The institution, by defining the frame, the If-Then relation, determined the nature of knowledge.** Social sciences used discourse as if it was there to function as a tool or instrument in its service in discovering and communicating its knowledge. I was unable to find a place for the information I had gathered: what each person had very generously given me through interviews about their age, work but also their neighbours, their inner- worlds, their expectations.

I had decided to put all the information I had gathered on a same level of importance. The frame that I had defined (the building) was too limited to render the intricate links those people were having towards one another. The main problem I faced was the multiplicity in the nature of those links. My frame was either too narrow or not flexible enough. Because of it, the choices I could make regarding a certain perspective would become automatically a random one since I could not treat all the information at once.

It showed me also how arbitrary and skewed my approach was when I realised that my participants were relating of course to one another but also to other buildings in the surroundings, other neighbours, other territories.

In that respect, Latour is also questioning the efficiency of the frame as a mode of inquiry:

" Any fixed frame of references can register action without too much deformation" However this approach is limited and not flexible enough[...]as soon as things accelerate, innovations proliferate and entities are multiplied, one then has an absolutist framework generating data that becomes hopelessly messed up(...) that is when a relativistic solution has to be devised in order to remain able to move between frames of reference and to regain some sort of commensurability between traces coming from frames travelling at different speed and



acceleration.”¹

1

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, p12



MULTIVERSATILITY: THE RELATIVISTIC SOLUTION

Moreover I had been in the middle of the action, surrounded by those people, welcomed in their flats and now I was asked to take a step away in order to process the data I had gathered. In other words, I had to turn a multiversal area into a universal one: a frustrating mission. I did agree with Latour about his relativistic solution. However, I was not so sure about its additions and superpositions of frames, layers in order to provide a much more sensible and accurate experience of the public towards the nature of social links.

What was happening to the matter I was carving out on my way to the Outcome?

A JOURNEY

Additionally, and by comparison, was I not playing the game of the institution by imposing my fixed frames to the material I had chosen? *What was happening to the matter I was carving out on my way to the Outcome?* It was bringing me back to my experience with the loom where, as said before, I felt estranged from the process, embarked on a ship where only the destination mattered and not the journey in itself. A journey with its share of unexpected encounters with passengers, long days of doubts regarding the course of the ship, a whole trip interspersed with compulsory halts. But also any experience of the material itself: the drum of the waves against the steel shell, the cracking of the wooden deck during a storm, the ruggedness of the rail after a hot day on the sea. All those steps, from doubts, talks, to try outs, to exploration and research, were part of my work as a designer, however they were no longer visible as soon as I had reached my terminus.

On the other hand, the terminus was the very reason of the existence of the journey. I was not asking for a destruction of the *Outcome* but for an integration of the process in this outcome. And this could only find a place within a performance, within the representation of the outcome itself. The audience would not be just waiting to be overjoyed on the embankment of the finish line; The public had to be made aware of the conditions of the expedition. That is why *I had to make it part of the journey by dissecting the mutation of matter through a succession of sequenced tableaux-vivants.*



ZONE: THE SOFT-EDGED FRAME

What was this area? How could I describe, this journey, between those two continents? What did it look like? The only word I could come up with was a *Zone*. In its definition it was spatially close enough to the frame, the border, with the particularity of encompassing soft edges. It had this capacity of circumscribing *unfathomed possibilities*¹ and yet was defining a geographical scope. It was the area girding the frame as did the in-between space which was so decisive in the wrestling performance. There was the public, there was the ring. The wrestlers were constantly making use of the passage zone surrounding the ring, making it possible for the audience to experience matter being modeled, converted, altered and modified.

The zone consisted of this expandable frame that could welcome any kind or type of information, but also the necessary restrictiveness, to ensure the possibility of experiencing harmony, the experience of collectivity. Now I had to define the nature of the performance and its uniqueness.

.....
1 Richard Sennett, *The craftman, The Arousing Tools*, p.195



**TAKING
ACTION**

*In wrestling
there is no
science of the
future involved.*

WRESTLING, TRANSFORMATION AND OUTCOME

So what makes wrestling so different from boxing then? They are both a performance which requires the same layout as described above: an audience, a ring in the center etc. ... So it is clearly the stake of the fight. Indeed, unlike any other sports, there is nothing at stake in wrestling. In his article, Barthes makes a remark concerning this crucial aspect: **in wrestling there is no [science of the future] involved.**

Indeed the audience is not interested in the outcome of the match. The public comes to witness the accomplishment of the actions: the takings. In this way the function of the wrestler is not to win but to achieve accurately the gestures of the fight. To show the limits and to reveal the capacity of the matter: His body.



JUDO AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

However one could say that Judo, for example, could also be put in this category. No doubt, this would imply forgetting about the nature of those actions and how they are being processed during the fight. Those gestures are short and precise but held-back in Judo. The judoka fulfills a technique.

I would then put the protocol of Judo in the perspective of a craftsman procedure: where body and mind are allies to produce and follow the enactment, as it should be. This is where I see the limit of a design practice which fall into the diktat of functionality. The matter fades away behind the particular use or set of uses for which it has been modeled and designed. The way the body is treated in Judo is in that purpose a paradigmatic example.

Indeed all the traces of physicality are hidden behind the judo suit. Only the head, center of operation, is uncovered. From neck to toe, the body is camouflaged by the loose unicolor outfit, the judogi. It is made in a heavy-weave, kimono-like cotton vest.

This vest is called an *uwagi* and is, interesting enough, similar to the model of a traditionnal hanten, the workers jacket. The whole garment has one purpose, it (a heavy cotton weave) is made: to withstand the strength of throwing and grappling and to protect the judoka (the same way a stonecutter would wear a protective apron).

Furthermore, one element reminds us of the level of expertise of the judoka: the belt (each color referring to a different state of skills). As a former medievist this sport cannot but echo back to the system of *Compagnonage*. A system of skill transmission that is still taking place in France but also in Germany under the term *Wandergesellen*.

Young wannabe craftsmen from different fields (Stonecutter, cooper, leathersgoodsmaker but also landscape architect) undertake a journey through France to perfect their skills by so-called Masters of those crafts. The system is based on a precise ceremony with a series of steps that have to be achieved to reach the final status of *compagnon*



(from *Stagiaire*, *Guest Compagnon*, to *Aspirant* and finally *Compagnon iinerant* and then *Compagnon Sedentaire*).

This separation between the apprentice and the master is of course also present in Judo. The belt, as a permanent sign, is always there to remind the audience, but also to the judoka himself, the level of expertise that is expected from him and the limit of his abilities in the martial art.





'COVER-UP THAT BOSOM, WHICH I CAN'T ENDURE TO LOOK ON'

In wrestling the body is obviously approached in a very different way. It all starts with the garments. No matter how extravagant the costume, it will be removed as soon as the fight is about to begin, stripped down in order to leave the chest uncovered. Indeed, sometimes the body is covered with nothing more than underpants.

Another remarkable thing is that, unlike judo, the fabrics used are very fitting and stretched (mostly types of Lycra). One might say that it is mainly to allow the widest range of movements. To this I would argue that the choice of the fabric is motivated by the same idea as in bodybuilding or halterofilia: staging the body in action and sculpting it, making it the star of the performance.



TAKING ACTION

KEEPING A LOOKOUT ON YOUR SURROUNDING

The entry of a foreign body in the process is also a good catalyst to create new associations and possibilities. In this respect wrestling practitioners are not afraid of bringing into play extra materials always taken from the direct surrounding of the frame like a chair, a cameraman or even the referee as seen in some of the pictures.



**THE WRESTLER IS NOT
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BUT TO FREE US
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CONSEQUENCES.**

*The wrestler
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pretation of the
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consequences.*

ASSOCIATING PROCESS AND OUTCOME IN A PERFORMATIVE WAY

What wrestling can offer to my making is to forget about the protocol and elude the conditional statement, the *If-Then* practice, to only focus on the “if” side of the material. In order to reach this state, we, designers, have to reconsider the representation of our works by unveiling the process, the research, the sources and by letting the audience watch us perform and think.

The wrestler is not here to deliver one interpretation of the fight but to free us from a world of consequences. By narrowing down the matter to a function, Design could miss its destiny. However, by limiting Design to a series of random matter manipulations and processes would also be a mistake. Wrestling is regularly blamed for being a rigged sport. Indeed there is always a plan between the two wrestlers but this plan is very preliminary. One can compare it to an experience in a laboratory where the steps are known but not the reactions.



FROM THE *IF* TO THE *THEN*

In this way Daniel Mesguich remarks that a representation should combine and make tangible the [literality]¹ of the text (the materiality of the object) with the relativity of the interpretation (the absence of an absolute and universal application). In other words, make the audience experience the matter but at the same time being careful in not closing the possibilities of the matter with his own interpretation:

*[Il s'agit, au théâtre, de donner la lettre dans toute sa matérialité, sa minéralité, son éloignement, il s'agit de faire entendre, oui, l'inhumanité de la lettre, l'écriture, la crissure encore du stylet sur la pierre—et puis, dans le même temps, un commentaire, humain, provisoire, dans toute son oralité, sa chaleur, sa proximité.]*²

1 Daniel Mesguich, *l'Éternel Éphémère*, ed. Du Seuil, 1991, p. 75

2 Daniel Mesguich, *l'Éternel Éphémère*, ed. Du Seuil, 1991, p. 76

"It is, for the theater, to deliver the letter in all its materiality, its minerality, its remoteness, it is for the theater to let us hear, yes, the inhumanity of letter, its writing, the crissing of the stylus on the stone and then, at the same time, to let us hear, a comment, human, temporary, in all its orality, its warmth, its proximity."

A professional wrestling match is taking place in a ring. In the background, a wrestler wearing a silver and blue mask and black trunks with red and white stripes is jumping or performing a move. In the foreground, a wrestler in a pink singlet and pink mask is visible, along with another wrestler in blue trunks. The ring has red ropes and a white mat. The background is dark with some blue lights.

**CONCLUSION:
TO THE ZONE**

Textile was a receptacle for a multitude of data, domestic, historic, ethnologic. It was also the result of a sum of individual knowledge and traditional education and, of course. It was tangible.

END SEPTEMBER 2013

On You Tube, I came across a video taken at the *International seminar on networks*¹ where Bruno Latour, a sociologist of science, was one of the guest lecturers. With a very heavy French accent he corroborated the idea according to which the central focus of investigation for a whole field of research may have been misguided for the last two hundred years. For him, researchers had to redistribute the classical arguments of the society as made of individuals. And among others he put into light a sociologist I had never heard of before. A contemporary of Durkheim : Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904). This man had every argument to seduce me. First of which was an under-rated status.

Except for the field of criminology in which he had left several marks with his *social learning theory*², his ideas on the dynamic of social construction had not found much resonance during the whole twentieth century. However, how could I resist a man who was putting the notion of 'collectiveness' into the form of an experience that was more than just an ideology.

He had been in the middle of collective performances, the court, as He had been a magistrate in public service for several years and had also written a post-apocalyptic science-fiction novel in which he depicted the reconstruction of a community, laying the foundations of their utopia on music and art.

Being educated and recognised in all those academic domains, at the end of the day, Tarde took the time to compose its theory not only in essays but in a novel: this very gesture made of this man a very seducing figure but also corroborated the intuition I had had regarding the collective experience:

The undefinable life of the collective is in reality the constant interplay between symbols, interpretation, individuals and proximity to all of these. Knowledge exists in the undefinable interplay of all these

1 International seminar on network theory keynotes, speech of Bruno Latour, 19 february 2010, You Tube.

2 Gabriel Tarde, *Social Laws- an outline of sociology*, The Macmillan Company, 1899

With textile
I had found what
Latour was desper-
ately looking for in
order to approach
the social :
a { phenomenon }
that could be
collective without
being superior to
the individual.

factors, most of which are ignored or not even considered in normal consciousness. People become who they are through experience, not through discursive language³.

This interplay resonated in my interest for Design and especially the choice to work with textile. Textile was a receptacle for a multitude of data, domestic, historic, and ethnological. It was also the very result of a sum of individual knowledge and traditional education and, of course, it was tangible. Its tangibility meant that I could physically and perpetually go back and forth (no more one-way from the part to the whole). I was allowed to open the structure of a woven carpet or put my piece of textile in interplay with other materials. I had found what Latour was desperately looking for in order to approach the Social: [a (phenomenon) that could be collective without being superior to the individual.]

With wrestling I discovered how to define the wishes I had regarding my *making*. Its disruptive approach regarding the link between conditions and statements, hypothesis and conclusions, allowed me to find out what differentiated Design from Craftmanship. It also liberated me from the necessity of a statement in my work. Finally, it emphasized the intuition I had according to which the rhetoric used to communicate about the design process, the generation of *Then-s*, had to be rethought, reorganized, redefined in order to reach playfulness, understanding, but also to make the audience aware of their relativistic and ephemeral gathering.



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