



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Laird, T;Goodman, A

Title:

Spot the Difference: Thinking-with Pattern's Unsettling Powers

Date:

2024-11-01

Citation:

Laird, T. & Goodman, A. (2024). Spot the Difference: Thinking-with Pattern's Unsettling Powers. *Environmental Humanities*, 16 (3), pp.590-602. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-11327364>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/354572>

License:

[CC BY-NC-ND](#)



Spot the Difference

Thinking-with Pattern's Unsettling Powers

TESSA LAIRD

Department of Critical and Theoretical Studies, VCA Art, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne, Australia

ANDREW GOODMAN

Department of Languages and Cultures, La Trobe University, Australia

Abstract How and why is pattern undervalued in Western thought? Pattern's narrative is checkered: historically banned from respectable clothing for its transgressive power; in the sciences relegated to survivalist function; in the arts tamed as decoration. This article advocates for pattern's radical provocation to think outside cultural conventions and neo-Darwinist constraints. Pattern connects with vitality rather than utility; its radical excess overruns proprietary boundaries. Pattern blurs delineations of figure and field, operating as a decolonial force, queering the separability of phyla, and unsettling the false binary between nature and culture. Drawing on process philosophy, art, literature, histories of fabrics, Black studies, queered biology, ecofeminism, and the continuum of naturecultures, this article experiments with the playful patterning of writing and voices and follows wild and impersonal tendencies, creating space for collective individuation, more-than-human joy, and beauty.

Keywords pattern, naturecultures, shimmer, differentiation, fielding

Pattern in the Occidentalist West is undervalued, undertheorized, and overlooked. Human cultures bestow patterns with histories and meanings while demanding its delimitation.¹ Western dogma insists pattern be tamed, otherwise it is too much; like a caged tiger, it must stay inside the lines. Patterns “in the wild” suffer humanist interpretations, narrativized for physical fitness and use value.² Occidentalist epistemologies run like bots in their search for patterns of behavior in order to control undifferentiated information, instrumentalizing and collapsing differentials into manageable bites/bytes;

1. This provocation refers to “Occidentalist” Western epistemologies as an axiomatic force driving colonialism and homogeneity, while it offers non-Occidentalist Western epistemological alternatives. See Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics*, 67–68.

2. On a concept of the wild beyond humanist interpretations, see Halberstam and Nyong'o, “Introduction,” 458; on the wild as the impossible, see Goodman, “Undoing the Human,” 8.

but paradoxically, visual pattern is capable of exceeding such axiomatics.³ While science attempts to build boundaries, to regulate bodies through association, patterns' seriality can disrupt signifying systems as they exceed "calculated borders."⁴ We argue that patterns, which thrive at every scale and within every species—from the molecular to the cellular and the cosmic—express complex beauty.⁵ Pattern in nature revolts against containment and revolts the "tasteful" human, which by definition is already overcoded. This provocation is an exploration of pattern beyond delimitation—its joyful, playful, and sometimes jarring motivations and meanings connecting and disrupting, adoring repetition while questing for novelty.⁶ Thus this article offers numerous variations on a theme, circling back to certain refrains, engaging repetition and employing decorative language as a methodology, allowing a polyphony of voices, ideas, and images to emerge.

Pattern is the coming together of two or more vibratory signatures, multiple refrains producing transversally, if not a line of flight, then at least a flight of fancy.⁷ This text is the "patternated" product of resonating and clashing sensoriums. To write in this dappled fashion acknowledges that pattern unzips egos and unbuttons bodies, just as we acknowledge that sartorial stylings and synchronized starlings are part of the continuum of patterned "naturecultures," which, like all art, begins with the animal.⁸ In the Linnean animal world, pattern is generally divided into two neo-Darwinist categories: camouflage, which outfoxes prey and/or predators, and display, which lures mates or sends out warning signals—*eat me at your peril*.⁹ These interpretations delineate a dog-eat-dog world where persistence and procreation are the only games in town. But what if evolution was more creative, if patterns weren't just mummy-daddy instruments of selfish-gene survival but conduits of expression, differentiation, and joy?¹⁰

Where does the Western fear of pattern arise from? Neo-Darwinism tells us there is always an evolutionary imperative at play. Trypophobia, a fear of natural patterns, has people recoil from such horrors as lotus seed pods. Welts, bumps, and blotches

3. On Western colonial/capitalist axiomatics that overcode the earth, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 453–74. For examples of patterning as a "wholeness" that enlivens through "mixing and mingling" rather than controlling or separating, see Gay'wu Group of Women, *Song Spirals*, 17.

4. Lancaster, *Dragging Away*, 67.

5. This provocation uses *pattern* and *patterns* interchangeably, troubling pattern as theoretical abstraction and seeking its expression in the world, while acknowledging the play between the two modes as forming a shimmer between virtual and actual.

6. For Alfred North Whitehead, the characteristics of life are "absolute self-enjoyment, creative activity, aim"—in other words, the drive toward novelty (*Modes of Thought*, 23).

7. On transversal lines of flight, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 396–98.

8. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 183.

9. On the colonial aspects of the Linnaean classification system, see Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, chap. 2. See also Stefano Harney and Fred Moten on the concept of an unscripted "earth" that "moves against the [colonial] World" (*All Incomplete*, 113). Arturo Escobar calls this colonial world the "One-World World," which he contrasts to a "pluriversal politics" or, as the Zapatistas propose, "a world in which many worlds might fit" (*Pluriversal Politics*, 14, 26).

10. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 89–103, 169–70.

might indicate disease or signify poison, such as toxic harlequin toads, or the window-pane wings of monarch butterflies, which insect-eating birds assiduously avoid.¹¹ This is a reductive narrative, nevertheless, such revulsion indicates that pattern is powerful; causing disdain as much as delight, it nauseates as often as it enchants.

Even in Darwinist logic, which appears to oppose itself to creationism, the pater of pattern returns to haunt genetics, which individualize and historicize—"you have your mother's stripes," "you have your father's spots"—never recognizing the ecological and transpersonal nature of one's decorative coat that fields, and in doing so, renounces its heraldic duties.¹² Pattern is a "seed without a father" that sows wild oats in the rutted field (sperm-like shapes of paisley promiscuously circumnavigating the globe).¹³ Pattern is not survivalist by nature but rather exemplifies expansive, generous, intertwined self-enjoyment. Pattern does not seek resolution, conquest, or absolution like Dawkins's good Christian genes in Darwinian disguise, nor to achieve Platonic perfection.¹⁴ Rather, the gene launches itself into the unseen, seeking to spread its emergent enthusiasm, with a will to engage in lively and relational dynamics through adventures in space and time: a nascent spottiness that seeps and spreads across skins, or a stripiness that runs and drips down hides.¹⁵

Pattern is so contagious, its viral variegation can be spread by sight alone. It is enough for a child to fleetingly glimpse a tiger in a zoo and "presto! the child is tigerized."¹⁶ Pattern wilds bodies, howling collectively at the moon: *I am not one, I am the many and the one, I am the more-than-one that flickers, shimmers, and dapples half-seen with the movement of the light and the winds.* "Becoming and multiplicity are the same thing."¹⁷

In order to spot the difference across isomorphic resonances, we look for clues in languages. In Yucatec Maya, the word *ek* means both stars in the sky and spots on a jaguar's coat, notwithstanding the fact that in Latin America today, a jaguar is often called *el tigre*.¹⁸ This semiotic miscegenation of stripes and spots reverberates the feedback

11. See Raymond Ruyer on the absurdity of neo-Darwinist logics, including in relation to pattern (*Neofinalism*, 163–89).

12. On the relation between Darwin and Darwinism, see Morton, "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," 278; on neo-Darwinism, see Roughgarden, *Nature's Rainbow*, 13–15; and Wicken, *Evolution, Thermodynamics, and Information*. On the concept of "fielding" as a coming into relation of potentialities that primes for individuation, see Manning, *Always More Than One*, chap. 1. On a transversal conception of phyla, see Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, 92–102.

13. Carboni, "Infinite Ornament," 106.

14. For critiques of Dawkins's ideas on genes, see Schneider and Sagan, *Into the Cool*, 316–17; and Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, 28–30.

15. Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, 157–60. Discussion has moved from genetic determinacy toward "morphogenesis," explaining characteristics of a creature through intrinsic patterns of growth and organization rather than chance or teleology (103–5).

16. Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us*, 83.

17. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 249.

18. Olivier, "Gods and Jaguars," 76. Escobar proposes "Abya Yala/Afro/Latino América" to describe the continent's "world made of many worlds" (*Pluriversal Politics*, 32).

fuzz of colonization—the interference pattern to end all interference patterns—when the figure swallows the field. But linguistic misalignment creates its own patterns; the link between a tortoiseshell cat and distant watery relatives inheres in the language used to describe the cat's coat, enacting sympathetic magic. Patterns refuse to speciate; they are trans-phyla expressions seeking trans-species convergences, exposing Linnaeus's daddy issues. Stripes form clans with stalks, totemic unions are forged between trunks and fence posts. Spots vibrate sympathetically with eyes, holes, and burrows; variegations resonate with gaps, folds, and fractures; leafy fenestrations jump between foreground and background (named *monstrous* by colonial botanists confounded by plants splitting and pocking themselves). Kinships resonate between skins and surfaces, styling more than substantiating.¹⁹ These are passages, not forms, based on the dynamics of organization; a biology of movement, liveliness, and deep connection; a sociality.²⁰

In a sympathetically magical universe, Tito Mukhopadhyay imagines a black-and-white photograph of a koala to be cousins with the zebra, quipping that both animals “are protesting the rise of color photography.”²¹ Besides, he asks, “Who needs color when there is glorious pattern?” Not just the pattern on the zebra's skin but the pattern that connects the two animals by way of (lack of) color. The zebra's stripes shift skin from container to connector and the zebra slips the noose of horsiness, becoming a grassy plain of immanence, rewilding itself, beautifully. The zebra is always “crossing,” and X marks the spot where black becomes white, and b(l)ack again, in a shimmer that tactically flickers across the savannah, kicking up dust in the face of a lioness who goes to bed with a migraine.

Deborah Bird Rose, parsing Yolŋu aesthetics, refers to “ecological erotics” encountered in ceremony, where sound can be described as “iridescent” when background and foreground suddenly flip. Equally, the body becomes iridescent as it flips between “the feet on the ground and the ground on the feet,” leading to the age-old (and unnecessary) question “who is the dancer and who is the danced?” The question should never be “who wears the pants in this relationship?” but rather, an acknowledgement of “mutuality . . . located in the flip back and forth between us.”²²

While it is normative in the West to differentiate between animate and inanimate, natural and cultural, much of the world knows no such boundaries, indeed “there is no difference between you, a stone, a tree or a traffic light” since all contain “knowledge, story, pattern.”²³ Where Western multiculturalism recognizes a unicity of nature and a multiplicity of cultures, Amerindian cosmologies see “a unity of mind and a diversity of

19. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 307.

20. Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, 105, 184.

21. Mukhopadhyay, *Plankton Dreams*, 18.

22. Rose, “Pattern, Connection, Desire.” See also Rose, “Shimmer.”

23. Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 29.

bodies.”²⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s “multinaturalism” braids together Amerindian worldviews, creating a carrier bag for non-Western thought in which human culture is universal and it is bodies that differ. This is individuation as “non-taxonomical differentiation,” a multiplicity in which “there are not relations that vary but variations that relate.”²⁵ In the dappled ontology of the forest, how do you know whether a big spotted cat is “a block of human affects in the shape of a jaguar or a block of feline affects in the shape of a human,” and does it matter?²⁶ The human dimensions of jaguars and the jaguarian dimensions of humans create an oscillation or “infinite complication” where “everything seeps into everything else.”²⁷ Pattern disrobes skins from the organs and drapes them from the branches of trees. It peels away, slips sideways into the dark forest—the panpsychic realm—fielding its fur. To field is to move with the virtual, to feel the activation of a more-than, “to experience the non-linearity of time where nothing is yet, but everything acts.”²⁸

Everything seeps, yet contrast is the basis of pattern and the “basis of understanding and meaning itself. Without contrast between one thing and another, I cannot know anything.”²⁹ But how to make sure that distinctions don’t ossify into polar, or for that matter molar, oppositions, into categories, prejudices, the programmatic and preordained?³⁰ Copy, repeat, alter, spread, melt, leap!

For Whitehead, the patterning of contrast is the basis of all becoming, of the endless novelty of the universe.³¹ “Look at the pattern this seashell makes. The dappled whorl, curving inward to infinity. That’s the shape of the universe itself. There’s a constant pressure, pushing toward pattern. A tendency in matter to evolve into ever more complex forms. It’s a kind of pattern gravity, a holy greening power we call *viriditas*, and it is the driving force in the cosmos. Life, you see.”³² *Viriditas* is the holy greening power of life according to Hildegard von Bingen, who might have appreciated Spinoza’s union of God and Nature.³³ Unchecked (or unchecked) green, however, can become tiresome.³⁴ We instead propose the divine energy of the universe is *diversitas*, which the art historian Michel Pastoureau translates not as diversity but “gaudiness.”³⁵ For those that laud camp and queer “semiotic destabilization,” suffering neither homophobia nor

24. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 56.

25. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 109, 114.

26. Viveiros de Castro, “Crystal Forest,” 157.

27. Viveiros de Castro, “Crystal Forest,” 157–58.

28. Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 61.

29. Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them*, 80.

30. On molar oppositions and their perils, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 216–17.

31. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 228–29.

32. Robinson, *Green Mars*, 9.

33. Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Collected Works*.

34. Cohen, *Prismatic Ecology*.

35. Pastoureau, *Devil’s Cloth*, 13.

chromophobia, *diversitas* attracts like bees to the glowing, patterned beacons of blue flowers.³⁶

In Hildegard's time, stripes and striped fabric clothed outcasts and reprobates: Jews, heretics, clowns, jugglers, lepers, hangmen, prostitutes, disloyal knights, and, of course, Judas—each perverting the established order.³⁷ Colonial conquests provided new semantic opportunities for stripes in Western art in the clothing or body paint of Indigenous communities, signifying distance from “civilization.”³⁸ Since stripes were the work of the devil, protection from demonic possession required *talismanic* stripes. Hence, those pathologized as insane were clothed in stripes, and, Pastoureau suggests, this tradition continues with striped pajamas, to protect us from bad dreams. But, he asks, are our striped pajamas, sheets, and mattresses barriers that contain as much as protect us, like grills and cages?³⁹ The pajama is an attempted taming of the zebra, who in reality gnashes her teeth, pounds her hooves, and farts in the face of domesticated humans.

Spots on the bodies of humans and animals were further disdained, conveying “the pustular, the scrofulous, the bubonic,” decoration fit only for demons.⁴⁰ “A good Christian . . . cannot be *varius*.”⁴¹ Neither were animals spared this judgment; tigers, hyenas, leopards, trout, magpies, snakes, wasps, zebras, all featured in Satan's bestiary. *Varius* was medieval lingo for cunning or sickness, especially “mental illness or skin disease.”⁴² Today, neuro-normative “whiteness” structuring society still fears insides being worn on the outside, demanding dissembling and a “plain wrapper,” the better to cloak diversity. Neuro-normativity must not be dizzied or dazzled.⁴³

In *Thus Spoke the Plant*, the botanist Monica Gagliano uncovers isomorphisms between the insides and outsides of sacred plants and the people who imbibe them; between viscera and the membranous surfaces that hold them together. She notes continuity between Shipibo peoples' cosmic patterned cloth and body painting and the mottled bark of the Socoba tree, frequently pierced to bleed its curative latex. Gagliano sees skin, arboreal and humanoid, as the place where tree and shaman meet. Usually skin keeps “the outside world out and all the insides in,” but here “a wound is etched in the body of one to heal that of the other,” imprinting patterns of connection; inter- and intra-species alliances.⁴⁴

36. Lancaster, *Dragging Away*, 25, 26.

37. Pastoureau, *Devil's Cloth*, 2.

38. Pastoureau, *Devil's Cloth*, 40.

39. Pastoureau, *Devil's Cloth*, 61.

40. Pastoureau, *Devil's Cloth*, 21.

41. Pastoureau, *Devil's Cloth*, 23.

42. Pastoureau, *Devil's Cloth*, 23.

43. Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, 1–4. This should not be confused with certain forms of neuro-diversity that require low stimulation; it is precisely because these worlds are already dazzling that no further intensity is desired.

44. Gagliano, *Thus Spoke the Plant*, 11.

Michel Serres writes of human skin as a “common sense” between senses; every skin has a story, where memory is inscribed on “the parchment of our experiences,” for, as Brian Massumi suggests, we are “dappled” by our “elsewheres.”⁴⁵ Serres proffers another name for skin, *variety*, echoing *varius*, though he does so with love, not anxiety about the difference this implies. Our skins are “dotted with events and singularities” and the person who has truly lived bears the world’s impressions upon their skin, which is “tattooed, striped, striated, colored, beaded, studded, layered chaotically with tones and shades, wounds and lumps.”⁴⁶ Striations and nodes are sensitized contact zones, forming their own sensory organs (proto-eyes born of patches of light-sensitive skin).

Imagine an epidermis covered with eyes! Cephalopod skin is just such a party zone—rock, sand, coral remixed as textured color and light effects, spectacles of rippling flesh—valuing unprincipled pleasure over productivity. The cephalopod caresses its surroundings, “abdicat[ing] its force it makes contact only to expose itself”; its skin extends, moved by its own movements.⁴⁷ The cephalopod does not bother with its own patterning; it leases it out or borrows it unasked from whatever is at hand, whoever tickles its fancy. Playing with the trouble, it is polymorphous, faceless, perverse; its skin has given away its edges, sacrificed solidity for a wobbly, blurred, horned, and folded light show, independent of eyes. It inscribes its world onto its surface; its bower is its own body, a collection of impressions, humming across its more-than-skin.⁴⁸

For Serres, the shimmering soul can be observed on the skin’s surface. This is not the bounded individual soul of some Christian theologies, untouchable and untouching, but rather “the blazing, striated, tinted, streaked, striped, many-colored, mottled, cloudy, star-studded, bedizened, variegated, torrential, swirling soul.”⁴⁹ Like a tortoiseshell cat that becomes other-than-feline, patch by patch, Serres’s lover changes by his side, “tiger, cougar, armadillo. . . . Our soul expands, we are not monochromatic,” indeed we “mutually refract . . . each other’s elsewheres.”⁵⁰ All meetings afford a potential clash, or mesh, of patterns, “tiger and peacock, zebra and jaguar, ladybird and poppy, centipede and chalcidony, a chameleon on marble.”⁵¹ Conflicting codes might be a problem unless we learn how to “melt the map of pathways and crossroads.”⁵²

Melt the map!—a climatological reality as much as a psychogeographic imperative that could lead to a kind of decolonial psychedelia, if such a thing were possible.⁵³

45. Serres, *Five Senses*, 37; Massumi, *Architectures of the Unforeseen*, 156.

46. Serres, *Five Senses*, 37.

47. Lingis, *Excesses*, 10.

48. For Alphonso Lingis, the nomadic “inscribe the earth with their paths, their dances . . . they inscribe their bodies” (“Society of Dismembered Body Parts,” 294).

49. Serres, *Five Senses*, 23.

50. Serres, *Five Senses*, 24; Massumi, *Architectures of the Unforeseen*, 63.

51. Serres, *Five Senses*, 24.

52. Serres, *Five Senses*, 24.

53. Saldanha, *Psychedelic White*.

Psychedelia didn't divest itself of the past as modernism tried to; it pulled Victorian paisleys out of the closet, throwing them together with trinkets from the East, revamping Art Nouveau posters with Day-Glo colors, reviving Dada nonsense with chemical assistance. Molecular revolution revealed and reveled in morphing patterns—the decorative impulse on overdrive, the eternal return, the ghost of Rococo, a riposte to modernity that dared expel the decorative. “Nothing goes as deep as decoration, nothing goes further than the skin, ornamentation is as vast as the world.”⁵⁴ The cosmetic is the cosmos, pattern is the artfulness of experience. Order, arrangement, *teu le va*; Albert Refiti cites the Samoan phrase, which means to attend to the relational space through “well-tuned lines” in the social fabric. Points of social connection must be highlighted and embellished, often via the use of pattern.⁵⁵

Patterns queer bodies—an in-betweenness torquing or dragging away through an “excessive materiality that oozes beyond [categorical] borders”—collective individuating with the remains of worlds.⁵⁶ Serres believes human skin exhibits individual memories while animal hides exhibit species memory, yet surely each animal has its unique particularity, like a snowflake, a thumbprint?⁵⁷ Tyson Yunkaporta relates a Baakandji story in which long ago, people attempted nation-building, settling, and the ossification of a single language and culture. But a meteor crash killed the people and scorched goannas with markings “to make diverse varieties as a reminder to the survivors of the right way to live,” that is, to maintain diversity in language and culture.⁵⁸ *Varietas!* This story is a welcome inversion of the Tower of Babel, in which a phase shift from unity to diversity is seen as a fall from grace.

That parable of fixity, that the “leopard never changes its spots,” is an identitarian fable, for the leopard's spots are always in flux as the big cat fields its way through the jungle. To paraphrase Whitehead, as the spots spread over the leopard, so the leopard fits itself to the spots.⁵⁹ Spots are products of particular modes or styles of organization. Here patterns are requisite, not as camouflage or display but as bizarrely necessary as legs and feet to a developing whale embryo or as a lizard tail to an in utero human.⁶⁰ They are a rite of passage into this world (not a badge of honor as you leave it). Patterns are the resonant scars, ghosts, echoes, and second cousins of these morphogeneses: a speculative diagrammatics that can be danced with by multiple species. Thus the spots are not owned by the leopard—they are part of a shared history, a shared potential, a

54. Serres, *Five Senses*, 32.

55. Refiti, “Mavae and Tofiga,” 111, 132, 211. See also Whitehead, *Dialogues*, 225: “Art . . . is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern.”

56. Lancaster, *Dragging Away*, 23.

57. Serres, *Five Senses*, 37–38.

58. Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 79.

59. Whitehead's original quote reads: “as the smile spreads over the face” (*Science and the Modern World*, 73).

60. Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, 98, 157–58, 184.

communion with the Dalmatian, the Appaloosa, the Friesian, a plane of eternal spot-tiness. This is sympathetic magic, a cosmology of kaleidoscopic connections, not taxonomies. The yellow bird cures jaundice, and the tiger and the butterfly are cousins, naturally.

Patterns can create absurd sensations, grasping at meaning where there is none. How do you titillate an ocelot? You oscillate its tit a lot. This linguistic performance of oscillation pivots language around itself in a movement reminiscent of avian mating rituals. Syllables change places in a verbal pas de deux that titillates, not with the promise of bestiality, but with the fluidity of language itself—the irreverent flux bubbling below, then rupturing the surface of that which fixes. The joke lies in the movement, the magician's delight in the sleight of hand shared with a knowing audience, as syllables vibrate (and the ocelot and blue tit share the joke).⁶¹ This is chiasmus, or “crossing,” changing places in a more-than genetic exchange, more, even, than miscegenation, or hybrid vigor, but a willful mutation, a hypersexual memetic mimesis.⁶²

Here we must break for a note on assonance and alliteration, those pattern-making properties lurking under the leaves of language; more prestidigitators than predators, performing linguistic hat tricks and showing showing, demonstrating the language of pattern and the patterns of language.⁶³ Pattern is in the break—of the speculative tulip bulb that the Dutchman will mortgage his house for, a so-called broken bulb that promises the marbled feathers of exotic birds; Milton's “pansy freak'd with jet”; the brindled hides of hunting dogs—foreshadowing unbridled splashes of paint on the twentieth century canvas by hundreds of years.⁶⁴ Pattern is the break inhabited—the blip, the twist, the gap and the fill, the loop, the extended mix with no beginning or end. The break is incalculable, felt through the feet: the kick and high hat in and out of syncopation, a “polyrhythmic caesura,” a stop that starts, pauses, hesitates, shuffles back, scratches itself in and out of time, where nothing and everything happens. Pattern is a fugitive form of study, “within and outside and underneath the field that is delineated and enclosed.”⁶⁵

Like any kind of rhythm, pattern is an alternation or oscillation of empty and full, there and not there. A so-called zebra crossing indicates “both passage and the difficulty of passage,” demanding attention, as if we were in danger of falling into the abyssal negative spaces between the positive bars.⁶⁶ For Hitchcock, stripes signal danger in *Spellbound* (1945) where the protagonist fears, not spots, as with tryphobia, but stripes. Of course, this has a traumatic childhood origin story: his brother was impaled on a metal fence. Psychoanalysis, like neo-Darwinism, always looks for explanations, patterns to

61. Taussig, *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, 144.

62. Margulis and Sagan, *What Is Sex?*

63. Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum*, 313–14.

64. Milton, “Lycidas.”

65. Moten, *Stolen Life*, 281, 162.

66. Pastoreau, *Devil's Cloth*, 85.

make the world predictable, explicable, and as fixed as the proverbial leopard's spots (until she steps into the undergrowth). But Hitchcock's stripes form a rhythm beyond harmony, a rhythm of "pandemonium, deflagration, and then madness."⁶⁷ Insides on the outside, again.

Problematic expressions of pattern as control include the Western proclivity for striping the land with roads, railways, cables, and trenches, just as colonizers have striped animal and human bodies with the marks of whips. Stripes encode power (just think of writing), used in the service of disciplining those undisciplined streaks across the backs of outlaw tigers and stampeding zebras, not to mention painted and tattooed peoples whose social contracts are with the earth and not church, state, or commerce. Pattern can be cruel, tearing at bodies like the claws of a tiger that carve red stripes into flesh, rendering the disharmony of the interior on the seemingly harmonious exterior; they are a plague of immediacy and intensities.

To be striped, to be spotted, to be variegated is to fold and unfold oneself into the world. It confronts the full horror of a falling apartness of existence, a dissipation into the void-that-isn't, the immanent plane.⁶⁸ Stripes vibrate, spots puncture, insistently turning bodies inside out, becoming with the environment (a free and protean excitation). Bodies made not of organs but surface effects, colors, contact points, liminalities. Skins couple with the environment as they resonate, and the animal is bound to the field in a "reciprocal topography."⁶⁹ At night the wind whistles its refrain through the perforations of the fenestrated leaves, through the burrow, the hollow: it sings a lullaby to its familiars and rebuilds a territory that is full of holes. It builds a home in the cracks of existing territories and weaves its song out of the forces of chaos, held together with the rhythmic patterns of the making.⁷⁰ Pattern grafts itself onto skins and loops and knots and gestures as a line of constant movement, writing and speaking and dancing in rhythms that syncopate and trip and fold over one another, "buzz[ing] or hum[ming] underneath self-concern's melodic line."⁷¹

What can we make of this kaleidoscope of concepts, these repetitions, this barrage of voices, ideas, and images? Can we consider this "chaosmosis," full of affective intensities and differentiation, while lacking in linearity, to be beautiful? Here we return to Whitehead for a concept that can braid these disparate threads without taming their potential and find value in their discord.⁷² Pattern is the holding together of productive contrasts where the liminal tension, the differential, is the essence of a universe filled

67. Pastoreau, *Devil's Cloth*, 86.

68. Karen Barad argues that the void is a Western construct that justifies colonization but is fundamentally contradicted by the evidence from quantum mechanics ("Transmaterialities," 417).

69. Nuñez, *Brain, Mind, and the Structure of Reality*, 135–38; Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 23.

70. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 311; Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*, 23.

71. Moten, *Stolen Life*, 163.

72. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 257.

with ever-expanding novelty. This is not a cold, dead universe of homogeneity and obedience, but one of transgression and “diversities in contrast” that are creative, wild, and beautiful.⁷³ Beauty here is none other than intensity of difference, contrasts that are sustained and sustain, such as the oscillation between self-enjoyment and concern, which is both beautiful and produces beauty.⁷⁴ It is excitation: a wildness at the heart of novelty that both connects and differentiates, rubbing furs the wrong way, joyfully poking holes in wholeness, striping the plain, spotting the difference. When the patterned earth is suppressed we inhabit an anodyne world of blandly harmonious relations, the automatic reproducibility of same-same, the drone of the monotone. What is hidden is richness and depth of experience, the tendencies to otherness, to variation, to adventure. But such tendings “never end” because “mixings never cease.”⁷⁵ Pattern never sleeps.

TESSA LAIRD is an artist, writer, and senior lecturer in critical and theoretical studies at Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne. She is author of *A Rainbow Reader* (2013), *Bat* (2018), and *Cinemat: The Becoming-Animal of Experimental Film* (forthcoming).

ANDREW GOODMAN is an artist, writer, and lecturer in visual art and environmental humanities at La Trobe University, Melbourne. They are author of *Gathering Ecologies: Thinking beyond Interactivity* (2018) and the forthcoming *The Secret Life of Algorithms*; they are currently writing a book on rewilding as a philosophical concept. They are coeditor of the 3Ecologies imprint with Punctum Books and collaborate with the Senselab/3Ecologies Institute, Montreal.

Acknowledgments

A short version of this article was presented at the Australasian Animal Studies Association conference “Decolonising Animals” in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019. The authors would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their many helpful comments and suggestions.

References

- Allewaert, Monique. *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Barad, Karen. “Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 387–422.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. New York: Dover, 1998.
- Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Caillois, Roger. “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.” *October*, no. 31 (1984): 16–32.
- Carboni, Massimo. “Infinite Ornament.” *Artforum*, September 1991, 106–11.

73. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348. On the vitality of cycles of life, see Gay'wu Group of Women, *Song Spirals*, 17–18.

74. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 252.

75. Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us*, 52.

- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, ed. *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Elkins, James. *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Escobar, Arturo. *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. Translated by David Frye. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Gagliano, Monica. *Thus Spoke the Plant: A Remarkable Journey of Groundbreaking Scientific Discoveries and Personal Encounters with Plants*. Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 2018.
- Gay'wu Group of Women. *Song Spirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country through Songlines*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2019.
- Goodman, Andrew. "Undoing the Human: "Wild" Art and a Poetics of Ecology." *Hyphen* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1–15.
- Goodwin, Brian. *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots: The Evolution of Complexity*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994.
- Guattari, Félix. *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*. Translated by Andrew Goffey. London: Bloomsbury, 1989.
- Halberstam, Jack, and Tavia Nyong'o. "Introduction: Theory in the Wild." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2018): 453–64.
- Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *All Incomplete*. Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021.
- Lancaster, Lex Morgan. *Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022.
- Lingis, Alphonso. *Excesses: Eros and Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- Lingis, Alphonso. "The Society of Dismembered Body Parts." In *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, edited by Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski, 289–303. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Manning, Erin. *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Manning, Erin. *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Manning, Erin. *The Minor Gesture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Margulis, Lynn, and Dorion Sagan. *What Is Sex?* London: Simon and Schuster, 1998.
- Massumi, Brian. *Architectures of the Unforeseen: Essays in the Occurrent Arts*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.
- Massumi, Brian. *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Milton, John. "Lycidas" (1637). <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44733/lycidas>.
- Morton, Timothy. "Guest Column: Queer Ecology." *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (2010): 273–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25704424>.
- Moten, Fred. *Stolen Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Mukhopadhyay, Tito. *Plankton Dreams: What I Learned in Special-Ed*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.
- Núñez, Paul L. *Brain, Mind, and the Structure of Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Olivier, Guilhem. "Gods and Jaguars." *Artes de México*, no. 121 (2016): 76–77.
- Pastoureau, Michel. *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes and Striped Fabric*. Translated by Jody Gladding. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Refti, Leali'ifano Albert L. "Mavae and Tofiga: Spatial Exposition of the Samoan Cosmogony and Architecture." PhD diss., AUT School of Art and Design, 2014.
- Robinson, Kim Stanley. *Green Mars*. New York: Spectra, 1994.
- Rose, Deborah Bird. "Pattern, Connection, Desire: In Honour of Gregory Bateson." *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 35 (2005). <https://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2005/06/01/pattern-connection-desire-in-honour-of-gregory-bateson/>.
- Rose, Deborah Bird. "Shimmer: When All You Love Is Being Trashed." In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, edited by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, 51–63. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

- Roughgarden, Joan. *Nature's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Ruyer, Raymond. *Neofinalism*. Translated by Alyosha Edlebi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Saldanha, Arun. *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Schneider, Eric D., and Dorion Sagan. *Into the Cool: Energy Flow, Thermodynamics, and Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Serres, Michel. *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Spinoza, Baruch. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Taussig, Michael. *My Cocaine Museum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Taussig, Michael. *Walter Benjamin's Grave*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-structural Anthropology*. Translated by Peter Skafish. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. "The Crystal Forest: Notes on the Ontology of Amazonian Spirits." *Inner Asia* 9, no. 2 (2007): 153–72.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Free Press, 1967.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*. Boston: David R. Godine, 2001.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Modes of Thought*. New York: Free Press, 1968.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. New York: Free Press, 1978.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Free Press 1997.
- Wicken, Jeffrey S. *Evolution, Thermodynamics, and Information: Extending the Darwinian Program*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Yunkaporta, Tyson. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2019.