What is to Hand: The Fold as Landscape Within Textile Imagination

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Abstract

This article explores the fold and textile imagination within art by using as main case study the author's project *Imaginary Landscapes*. This work consists of a series of photographs taken during the first COVID-19 lockdown in the UK in 2020 and was motivated by a longing for spaces and places at a time of confinement. It provided an opportunity to work with "material to hand", pointing to Martin Heidegger and Barbara Bolt's discussion of his theory regarding "handling." The cloth as arranged or folded allows for light to enhance form whilst suggesting landscapes such as shorelines, mountains, forests, deserts or volcanoes. The discussion refers to Gilles Deleuze's reading of Leibniz, Christine Buci-Gluckmann's observations on the Baroque, and to various theoretical and artistic positions concerning the fold, drapery, and textile imagination within different visual contexts, including Giuliana Bruno's observations on the fold in relation to the screen. *Imaginary Landscapes* is explored with particular attention to contemporary artists Christo and Jeanne Claude, Christian Boltanski and Angela de la Cruz. The argument concludes that the fold as visual and conceptual process allows us to engage in spatio-temporal relations where the appreciation of materiality through handling/folding informs ideas of movement within and across media.

Keywords: fold; textile imagination; Deleuze; baroque; contemporary art; photography; landscape; body

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Introduction

It is often in hindsight that one realizes the scope and complexity of a creative process. This is what happened when reflecting on the connotations of my photographic project *Imaginary Landscapes* (2020) and its use of diverse textile materials as it involves a signifying process where the creation of an image and the indication of the original material quality or function as garment come together (Figure 1). This has sparked further considerations of textile as material in art, its malleability and performative potential, in particular in relation to the folding and unfolding of cloth, and more generally to the fold as process and idea.

This discussion aims to contribute to the explorations of the fold as a visual, haptic and philosophical concept as it implies movement, volume and change within a wide range of art applications using case studies of my own work and of various other artists. It will examine different theoretical positions concerning the fold, drapery, and textile imagination, in particular Gilles Deleuze's reading of Leibniz and Christine Buci-Glucksmann's considerations of "*forme-force*" within baroque dynamics. Through comparative analysis of individual art works, the writing engages in providing new insights as to the scope of the fold within and across visual media responding or acting as analogies of Deleuzian/Leibnizian ideas of the fold and its potential to challenge linearity within

ideas of time and space.[1] Particular emphasis will be given to considering the potential of the textile fold within photographic, performative/sculptural and filmic applications. The argument will draw from my practical and theoretical research regarding performativity and image perception within contemporary art, in particular the spatial dimension of color and the potential of the fold within and across different visual methods.

The main focus of this article lies on the fold and textile imagination within an art context. Whilst the fold in fashion design is a fundamental aspect of the discipline (in historical and cultural terms) and has inspired many artists, in the context of this discussion, it will only be referred to as the folding of garments "ready to hand" within my *Contemporary Landscapes* series, and in relation to Giuliana Bruno's observations on the fold and the sartorial dimension of the screen.

Methods

This discussion of the fold and its potential to signify is developed through a main case study (*Imaginary Landscapes*) involving the folding of textile material into soft sculptures to create impressions of landscapes through photographic documentation. An important aspect of this body of work lies in the context of its making during the first COVID lockdown in the UK, when my (painting) studio was inaccessible and I had to devise new
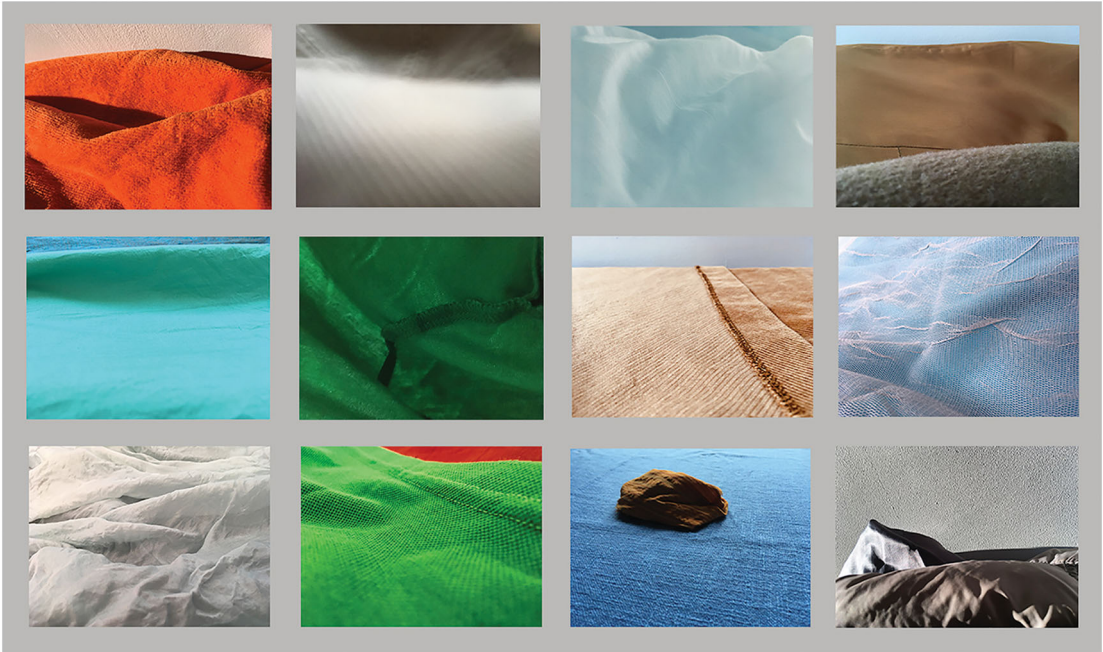
Figure 1
Imaginary Landscapes, Detail/selection. Image: Andrea Thoma.

methods of making whilst relying on materials ready to hand.

Additional case studies involve my *Colour Folds* series of paintings (ongoing) and two of my video works, *Back Garden* (2012) and *Josefle* (2017). In order to provide further insights as to the visual scope and conceptual complexity of the fold within art making, the discussion will refer to artworks (or films) by Simon Hantaï, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Maya Deren, and more in-depth readings of works by Angela de la Cruz, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and also Christian Boltanski.

Reference will be made to diverse processes,[2] some involving the depiction of the fold within painting or sculpture through drapery within art history, others relating to more contemporary case studies including

some of my own works. Within the *Imaginary Landscapes* series, the literal folding of textile material is motivated by the photographic documentation of the fold, meaning the whole process is aimed at obtaining a two-dimensional image. Within Simon Hantaï's painting we find a literal and conceptual folding/unfolding of visual or pictorial space, whereas within my "*Colour Folds*" series of paintings the folding/unfolding of color bands or forms is optical/conceptual in challenging the idea of a flat canvas. In my video works discussed here, the folding process lies within the editing or post-production where the view, movement or action within audio-visual footage is disrupted or conceptually folded through inserts of still images or repeated footage.

The following questions will guide reflections as to different applications of the fold within art processes:

How can folded cloth be instrumental in considering movement between image and material connotation? This relates to art practice but equally to Deleuzian ideas of the Leibnizian fold pertaining to both the physical, material world and the realm of ideas.

And more generally, I would like to contribute to the scholarship, which asks how the fold can be utilized within moving and still images to reflect on the complexities of time-space relations? This might refer to juxtapositions of virtual and actual,[3] digital and analogue material, where the folding process is expressed through various editing techniques.

The visual analysis of the case studies will be informed by various theoretical positions, such as Deleuze's interpretation of the Leibnizian fold (1988), Buci-Glucksmann's reflections on the baroque with its formal and ideological implications (1986),[4] George Didi-Hubermann's essays on drapery (2002, 2015), Becky Peterson's exploration of (folded) fabric within a filmic context (2010), Giuliana Bruno's observations on the textile fold in relation to fashion and the screen (2014) and Claire Pajaczkowska's reflections on the "semiotics of the textile" (2010).

The Fold as Method in Art Practice

In this section I will explore the fold as method in art practice in relation to some of my own works, with particular attention to the project *Imaginary Landscapes*, whilst referring to a selection of artists to elucidate the discussion.

Imaginary Landscapes is based on a series of photographs taken during the first Covid−19 lockdown. The project was motivated by a longing for spaces and places at a time of confinement (Thoma 2020). As mentioned earlier, one of the main questions resulting from this body of work is how the photographic documentation of folded textile material benefits from the conflation of image and material connotation. This concerns a two-fold signifying process— one, of textile depicting landscape as illusion or image and two, textile involving relations to the body and its absence through the original material functionality of the garment used in the photographic arrangement.

From a theoretical point of view, the fold as a philosophical and scientific concept is highly complex, whereas the practical application or literal act of folding and unfolding of material might seem more straightforward. Deleuze's writing reflects on both. Deleuze published *The fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* in the original French version in 1988. Its influence has been considerable within a wide array of disciplines including architecture, art, design, cultural studies and philosophy. Deleuze observes how the fold relates to materiality just as much as to the world of ideas. Within art practice, this can involve material processes whilst also referring to the conceptual dimension of folding as a way of challenging linear time-space relations. Deleuze writes, "materiality is the ground, or the base, but the folded forms are manners."[5]

Within the *Imaginary Landscapes* project, the "materiality or ground" is the piece of cloth selected for its texture, color or reflective qualities which through the folding process takes up different "folded forms" suggesting particular characteristics or "manners" of a landscape (or its representation). O'Sullivan comments on the baroque understanding of matter as "a world of material fabric" suggesting we might refer to the folding and refolding of "smaller and smaller parts" and how these relate to a Deleuze's ideas of a "*texturology* of the world" [original emphasis]. (2006, 123).

In her writings on the historical, philosophical and cultural dimension of the baroque, Buci-Glucksmann has also reflected on Deleuze's work on the Leibnizian fold. In her view, Deleuze moves beyond a Cartesian relation to the image where the subject and object are distinct – and thus reiterates aspects of Heidegger's "Weltbild", which puts forward that we encounter an image [of Being] in its totality. She observes how, by referring to Leibniz and his concept of the fold, Deleuze offers a way out [of the dichotomy mentioned above] by applying a concept that suggests a constant redeployment of tempo-spatial relations. She understands it as a "new notion of image and of *forme-force*", as a "temporal mannerism" closer to Bergson (Buci-Glucksmann 2003, 71–72).[6] Interestingly, Deleuze in his theorizing of the fold, has referred to Glucksmann's interpretations of the baroque whilst critiquing her focus on the optical dimension of baroque perception.[7]

Through folding and arranging the garments within *Imaginary Landscapes*, attention is brought to movement (of folding) and the relation to stillness (the final photograph). Within the process of making the image, which is then recorded/taken by the camera, I have been folding, unfolding and refolding the cloth many times before selecting a final image from a series of possibilities— in its stillness the image I am looking for owes to the Deleuzian/Leibnizian Baroque, and as Buci-Glucksman would say to a notion of image moving beyond a dichotomy of object and subject, to a *forme-force* that suggests a dynamics of form and movement.

One of the first images of the series has been made by turning one of my winter coats inside out to allow for the lining to feature center stage as the silvery planes of a mountain with glimpses of the outer surface of the garment forming the rockier parts of this intended landscape feature. This juxtaposition creates variations within the reflection of light from the textile surface, thus suggesting a richer more varied terrain. The fluency in the

movement of folding is nonhierarchical and the resulting image shows a coming together of inside and outside. In her essay accompanying the exhibition *Textures of Memory: The Poetics of Cloth* (1999) Pennina Barnett talks about the Deleuzian fold as "an infinity of folds always in motion, composing and recomposing without inside or outside, beginning or end" (1999, 26–27). Interestingly in this context, Barnett also refers to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the smooth and the striated, the former suggesting the proximity of the haptic, the latter relating to "long-distance vision" (28–29). As I select, fold and arrange the cloth with my hands, the photographic close-up shot translates this smooth space into an image— often parts of the scene are out of focus seeming very tactile whereas other parts provide clearer lines, suggesting horizons, shore lines or the contours of hills or mountains— the latter introducing the striated aspect of a more structured landscape.

Whilst the methods involved here are straightforward in terms of making, their conceptual implications engage in various registers from relations between cloth/material and its manipulation engaging the body to form a landscape—whilst the cloth is still apparent as garment retaining the memory of the body of its wearer—to the use of the (smart phone) camera, the apparatus, which as an extension of body becomes prosthetic device of seeing allowing for a close vision particular to the photographic lens.

Catherine Dormor explores the Deleuzian take on the Baroque fold as a way to generate "subjectivity" not as dichotomy of interior and exterior but as a continuously evolving process. "Thinking of the fold as a way by which to think through the

production of subjectivity, folding offers itself as a critique or challenge to models which separate interiority and exteriority. Folding foregrounds the continual and processual notion of such a production, and thus the fold is both figure and ground, process and product, continuously producing itself" (Dormor, 2020, 5). As I folded the fabric, the process involved various takes (as on a film set), where relations between close-up vision conjuring a sense of interiority and definition of contour lines suggesting landscape elements as exteriority— one might refer also to figure-ground relations—were in constant flux until the juxtaposition of light, form, color and surface folded into an image, short lived but documented to last.

On a larger, architectural scale concerning relations of cloth and landscape or built environment, the artist couple Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrappings of buildings and landscapes have featured on the international cultural scene since the 1960s.[8] Their most recent project has been the covering of the Parisian *Arc de Triomphe* (2021) with polypropylene fabric.[9] The planning stage of the work often takes many years, and as the realization of this project had to be postponed due to COVID-19, Christo, who passed away in 2020 (Jeanne-Claude had died in 2009), did not live to see the monument of French triumph veiled with endless folds of fabric tied across the exterior surface of the landmark building to both conceal and reveal. (Figure 2) As with their previous projects, it became a public event where thousands of visitors witnessed an enthralling change within the phenomenological experience of the (temporarily covered) building. Like a shrouded figure, the wrapped *Arc de Triomphe*

revealed another dimension as the absence of war scenes usually visible on the facades of this iconic monument created an impression of peace, of almost immaterial serenity.[10]

Where Christo and Jeanne-Claude cover or conceal architectural or natural landmarks of monumental scale with large amounts of material,[11] my project *Imaginary Landscapes* (2020) creates miniature landscape scenes through the folding of cloth. The latter are made at a much smaller, intimate scale with materials that are close to hand whilst suggesting a much vaster dimension through photographic illusion. In his reflections on "intimate immensity", Gaston Bachelard (1957, 168) explains how the memory of natural sites like the sea can within our imagination conjure echoes of the "grandeur" of the original experience: "Through a simple memory, far removed from the immensities of the sea and the plane, we can, in a state of meditation, renew within us the resonances of this contemplation of grandeur."[12]

The method of developing the individual images for *Imaginary Landscapes* was based on ad hoc experimentation with pieces of fabric or clothing available within my home. This was preceded by the idea of a particular landscape, for instance desert, ocean or forest, or the focus on a particular fabric, such as my late mother's raw silk skirt or a light blue scarf. The project had an interactive element in so far as, on the day of making, I posted images to social media, to share the imaginary travel experience with others. This created a momentum where I generated one image per day for 28 days. The incentive for the next image was either based on the idea of a place or a time of day, or related to particular

Figure 2
Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *L'arc de triomphe, wrapped*. 2021. Image: Courtesy of Corinne Cardot.

fabrics that I wanted to use because of their color, texture, luminosity, transparency, density or reflective qualities. As I was looking for suitable pieces of cloth, I realized how much material I had to hand.

"What is to hand" refers to Heidegger's concept of handling things as a way of engaging with the world through a phenomenological encounter. Heidegger refers to tools or materials that are instrumental within a process of making as "readiness-to-hand" and to ideas and theoretical constructs informing our engagement with the world as "present-at-hand" (Wheeler 2011)[13]. I would argue that in the creative process, as seen here with the development of *Imaginary Landscapes*, what I had to hand was both a "readiness-to-hand" of textile material and also the "present-at-hand" where theories of the fold, the concept of the imaginary in relation to landscape, and landscape as a historical (mainly associated with painting, drawing and print) and contemporary field of enquiry (encompassing a wide range of methods) informed the making of the work.

Within an art context, Barbara Bolt's exploration of artistic practice in light of Heidegger's ideas of "handling" offers further insights. (Bolt 2004, 20) She explains how in Heidegger's theorizing, the emphasis on using "what is present at hand" allows for a different encounter with reality [then in Antiquity]. "In contrast, in the modern epoch, man becomes the determining center of reality … He sets what is present at hand before himself and sets it in place as an object for a subject" (20). Bolt is interested in the differentiation between representation and presentation and explains how through handling and engaging with art processes through handling materials, an encounter is facilitated where things are presented rather than represented. "In the flux of practice, we grope toward an understanding that

Figure 3
Josefle, Video, 4:27 minutes, 2017. Image: Andrea Thoma.

is not representational. Acts and decisions occur in the heat of the moment and not as a result of rational logic. Such knowing operates at the level of hands and eyes and operates in a different register from the representational paradigm of man-as-subject in relation to mere objects" (50–51). When considering these comments in relation to *Imaginary Landscapes*, I would argue that there is a conceptual folding where the handling of fabric and its presentation as such is folded within the aim of making it into images of landscape, that is engaging in a process of representation.

One could consider Bolt's reflections above in relation to Deleuze/ Leibniz where idea/representation and matter/presentation of what is to hand, come together within the dynamics of the fold. Niamh McDonnell and Sjoerd Van Tuinen explain how for Deleuze, the Leibnizian fold facilitates a model of interpretation that enables both physical and conceptual considerations which correspond to "the two orders of baroque expression" regarding the interpretation and the form of matter.

The implication of Leibniz's psychic mechanism of perception is that it

allows models of reading to be generated through the examination of the process of variation in perceptual states. This is attested by the fact that the concept of fold pertains to both the material and immaterial dimensions of perceptions corresponding to the two orders of baroque expression, the reading of matter and its manner of expression. (McDonnell and Van Tuinen 2010, 12)

Deleuze remarks on "the ideal fold" as relating to Heidegger's concept of *Zwiefalt* where folding, unfolding and refolding are negotiated within a process of differentiation concerning presence or absence of being (Deleuze 1988, 42).[14]

Some of these ideas can be traced in my video piece *Josefle* (2017), which I made after the death of my father looking for a way to reflect on the time before his passing. In order to mimic the sound of mechanically assisted breathing within an intensive care environment, I ended up recording my hand brushing over a piece of cloth (Figure 3). Whilst the sound of this footage is somewhat unnerving, the visuals seem like a caress. As the hand repeatedly smoothens the creases of the tablecloth, with its woven blue lines suggesting an

abstract temporality within and beyond the domestic, one might associate this act of de-creasing the folds of fabric with the moment where time-space of individual existence becomes other (Thoma, 2021).[15] The footage is interspersed with stills of mountain landscapes, images my father might have contemplated with his inner eye as he journeyed to other worlds. The edit of the piece is structured through repetition and difference where the folding of still and moving images along various sonic textures reflect on memory, time and change.

As Deleuze discusses the fold in relation to art, he examines it as creative method within Simon Hantaï's oeuvre (1988, 47). He suggests that the artist's process of the "painted and non-painted" (where folded material is only painted on the apparent surfaces) might be closer to Far Eastern ideas of the empty and the full, calling it the "line of the Orient", than to the "line of the Baroque" expressed in the Leibnizian concept of an infinity of folds (suggesting fullness rather than ideas of void), though he recognizes that some of Hantaï's works (where all parts of the canvas are painted) relate to the latter (50–51).[16] The empty and the full is a

Figure 4
Imaginary Landscapes/Volcano. Digital Photograph. 2020. Image: Andrea Thoma.

concept within Chinese philosophy that involves an understanding of void and multiplicity as contrasting and complementing aspects within the perception and representation of the world, such as in traditional Chinese painting where the empty or non-painted ground complements or enables the fullness of the painted scene.[17] In contrast, the Leibnizian Baroque involves the idea of incessant variation and folding that relates both to material expressions and their formal gestation but also to the folds within the soul that comprise infinite possibilities. "The infinite fold separates, or passes between matter and soul [...] it becomes actual in the soul, but is carried out within matter."[18] Simon O'Sullivan explains how Deleuze considers the "Oriental fold" as "perhaps not a fold at all" and suggests that art's engagement with this "non-fold is one of *ritual* [original emphasis]" suggesting a relation to "a ground" from which these activities of folding and unfolding can take place (2006, 143). Within Hantaï's process, this notion of ritual or a particular, repetitive engagement with

making is very much at the core of his practice.[19]

When reflecting on the above, one can observe how the fold is considered as much conceptual as material method; it is related to ideas of the baroque, to movement and continuity rather than to a dichotomy of subject and object. Furthermore, folded material enables a juxtaposition of visible and invisible space/s whilst the act of folding, unfolding and refolding offers opportunities of differentiation within changing time-space relations, some of which depend on one's point of view or position.

Whilst the *Imaginary Landscapes* photographs rely on the illusionistic potential of the fabric arrangements, I also wanted to show the actual material reality of the cloth/ing, such as seams, and textile surface qualities such as corduroy or raw silk. With the relation to clothing, there is a reference to body and to performativity, even if referring to an absent performativity. This is heightened when I use my late mother's red raw silk skirt. Beyond the literal folding of the clothing, there is a folding between absence/my mother's body and

presence/the arrangement of an image of a volcano—between figure and landscape. As I was shaping the skirt through folding its raw silk material, it became clear that, in order to form a mountain, it needed to be quite compact to stand up. The image of the volcano with its solid form, red color and dense texture, (Figure 4) could be seen as analogy for the maternal (body) and also for inner, emotional worlds. (And yet, the actual body is missing.)

I would like to draw here attention to Angela de la Cruz, whose practice, amongst a younger generation of artists, offers a significant example through a process that relates as much to painting and the undoing of its traditional setting, that is the stretched canvas, as to sculpture in so far as the outcomes of her various (more or less violent) activities highlight the object character of the work. Within this context, the fold indicates not only three-dimensionality and volume but also relates to a (mostly partial) tearing away of the painted and stretched canvas from its frame pointing to analogies of the painted canvas or cloth as body and its undergoing of

Figure 5
Angela de la Cruz, *Ready to wear (Red)*. 1999. Oil on canvas, 200 × 180 cm. Image: Courtesy of Angela de la Cruz Studio and the gallery.

various actions or processes that can be considered in a literal, material way, but can equally be read with a psychoanalytical frame of reference.

Gilda Williams observes how Cruz has moved beyond the niceties of earlier artists when it comes to the painted canvas:

Painting has been slashed (Lucio Fontana), burnt (Alberto Burri), smeared (Gerhard Richter) and smoked (Yven Klein). With Angela de la Cruz, it's no more Mr Nice Guy. Stretchers are smashed and shoved into corners. Canvas is ripped and left to flap pathetically. Painting is crumpled, stomped on, punched, dragged, and, finally, shed of its frame and any trace of dignity, left to slump like an uncorsetted, drunken

bride, flopped on the gallery floor [...] (Williams 2002, 64)

De la Cruz treats the canvas as cloth, as surface, as volume and ultimately, as body. It is a body that undergoes various contortions, as it is crumpled up, torn off the frame, pressed together, huddling on the floor or hanging loosely on the wall. In some of the works the artist directly refers to canvas as clothing, such as in her work *Ready to Wear (Red)* from 1999. (Figure 5) This piece has prompted further reflection and visual analysis in relation to one of my photographs, *Imaginary Landscapes/ Volcano* (2020).

Where *Imaginary Landscapes/ Volcano* plays off image and material within a photographic transcription,

De la Cruz's *Ready to Wear (Red)* makes us, through its title and visual presence, understand the painted canvas as relating to the body and corresponding to a garment. Here a luscious red monochromatic painting is practically half way torn off the stretcher. The densely painted canvas has a texture, where subtle streaks recall the surface of raw silk fabric with its slight irregularities within the woven threads. The side that remains stretched keeps up with a tidy and well presented appearance, whilst the torn off part implies raw violence, unsettling and yet liberating (from pictorial conventions), where the previously hidden, non-painted parts of the canvas have come undone revealing what is usually not presented in public—the private, fragile, messy,

un-painted/no make-up side of things. There is an elegance though in how the "un-stretched part" of the painting displays a triumphant diagonal fold moving from the top right side to the lower middle part of the stretched canvas, with further folded ruffles like the aftershocks of an earthquake. Whilst these two works are very different as to their material, historical and cultural context, they both use the fold within an actual or "designated" red garment to reflect on the body and its absence.

The entire series *Imaginary Landscapes* provided an opportunity to work with ready-made color and surface and to fold/arrange the fabric so that sculptural light effects would enhance the creation of form. In this process, the photographic close-up was instrumental in conjuring an image, an illusion. Through the photographic image, the textile three-dimensionality turns to flat surface becoming screen-like, and as such relates to the expressive potential of the screen, as Giuliana Bruno might observe (2014). In her reflections on the materiality of surface, she mentions the "migration of images" and how we have esthetic experiences that are shaped through specific media and how they contribute to the reading of the image. She aims "to show that esthetic encounters are actually "mediated" on the surface and that such mediated encounters engage forms of projection, transmission and transmutation" (2014, 3). From forming/folding the cloth to taking the photograph, there is a "transmutation" not only in terms of surface but also in relation to the framing/spatial selection of the three-dimensional arrangement to "project" or record an image that now works within photographic space though its

composition suggests expansion beyond the frame.

When reflecting on the reading of *Imaginary Landscapes* and the fact that I used garments that had been worn by myself or other members of the family, I found Claire Pajaczkowska's reflections on the "semiotics of the textile"[20] helpful in considering particular qualities of textile imagination, such as the interplay of the iconic and the indexical. The former relates to the image arising whereas the latter concerns the making of the clothing, such as zips, seams, or linings. Referring to Peirce's semiotic system, she explores the signifying potential of cloth. The textile as sign involves the memory of touch, of the body. In relation to clothing, it might be the body having worn a garment; more generally, it alludes to "absence of touch." (2010, 142)

The temporality of the tactile, haptic quality of the textile as sign depends on a paradox of presence and absence [...] The iconic serves to retain visual similarity, whereas the indexical serves to commemorate haptic presence, and it is the interplay between the absence of the contact and the presence of the sign which sets in motion the memory of a time in which tactile contact was present. (Pajaczkowska 2010, 141–142)

As to the absence of touch or life in relation to a *mise-en-scène* of clothing, but ultimately of death, Christian Boltanksi's installation *Personnes* at the Grand Palais in Paris (2010) was exceptional in its literal and metaphysical dimension[21] (Figure 6). This is an ambitious work as to its scale (tailored to the gigantic openness of the Grand Palais), which is both spectacle and exhibition installation where

a gigantic heap of clothing is continuously disturbed as a crane picks up a bunch of clothes, only to drop them again. Further pieces of garments were laid out on the floor in rectangular grid form inviting viewers to wander within this textile detritus whilst experiencing wintry conditions of low light and temperature (Boltanski 2010).

Christian Boltanski's artistic oeuvre is defined by a concern with memory and death, the body and its existential dimension through the use of photographic images and objects. Whilst he has referred to photographic documents of individual faces, his interest very much focuses on collective memory, on relations between visual and haptic signifiers to suggest ideas of loss and commemoration within society. Boltanski's engagement with textile objects to indicate absence of body involves presenting the garments as such, which, though re-contextualized, are not meant to say other than "clothing" (in relation to people). *Imaginary Landscapes* does not aim to present clothing but to use clothing to create illusions of landscape whilst holding onto connotations of clothing and associated memories.

Drapery or the Depicted Fold

Having explored how the fold and its relation to the Baroque within the philosophy of Deleuze's take on Leibniz has informed various methods in art practice, including the conception and making of my *Imaginary Landscapes* series, let us consider the fold as drapery within a wider historical context.

In Art History, drapery as a stylistic and conceptual element, from Antiquity to the Renaissance, the Baroque and later periods, has been

Figure 6
Christian Boltanski. *Personne*s. Installation View. 2010. Accessed March 31 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x09h4fxdH5Q

examined extensively, informing theories on the iconographic and symbolic implications of folded material within representational and nonrepresentational imagery. The philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Hubermann has dedicated three studies to drapery[22]. In *Ninfa Moderna. Essai sur le drapé tombé* (2002), which is inspired by Aby Warburg's use of the image of the nymph across different periods, Didi-Huberman explores how (folded) cloth is used to conceal or reveal the human body, in particular the female figure. His essay takes us on a journey involving presence and absence of the figure in relation to drapery (of cloth), that at times turns into rags, as such projecting a complex array of emotions from various registers of desire, repulsion and confusion. Referring to Warburg's reading

of Leon Battista Alberti, Didi-Hubermann (2015, 80) comments on relations between drapery, movement and dance within artworks such as Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (1480), suggesting that the folded material and its animation through a "wind of fiction" envelopes the body creating a "time of fiction" thus considering drapery as a vehicle to enhance the fictional or imaginary character of a painting.[23]

In her study of film maker Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Becky Peterson (2010) comments on Deren's use of (folded or unfolded) fabric to enhance juxtapositions of artifacts with nature, and also remarks on shifts in the viewing process when fabric within the narrative setting becomes screen.[24] Interestingly, she mentions what has

become known as the "Botticelli image" (Figure 7) for its resemblance to the Renaissance painter's style, an iconic still of Deren acting within the film that was used as advertisement and has become a key image within Film History. The slowing down of the footage creates a perceived stillness, or different notion of time, in a shot where Deren's character is looking out from behind a windowpane as her hair merges with reflected branches of a tree (Peterson 2010, 237–238). It seems ironic that within a moving image context, this modern *Ninfa* as represented and embodied by Deren, should evoke stillness, whereas in contrast, despite the stillness of the medium, Botticelli's depictions within his paintings *Birth of Venus* (1485*)* and also *Primavera* give us the impression of animation as the

Figure 7
Maya Deren, *Meshes in the afternoon* (1943). Accessed November 5 2021. https://vimeo.com/218042283

Figure 8
Back Garden, Video, 2:43 min, 2013. Image: Andrea Thoma.

folded fabric and hair move in the wind.

I would like to mention one of my video works and how it engages with the fold and/or textile surface to develop particular time-space relations. *Back Garden* (2012) reflects on relations between private and public space through a juxtaposition of visuals of a back garden with a sound track that points to its immediate surroundings with a sonic urban texture of traffic noise, sirens, adolescents playing ball games and the fluttering of bird wings (Thoma 2013, 145). The gentle movement of sheets and clothing drying in the wind reveals every now and again some plants in the back of the garden. Here the "wind of fiction" mentioned by Didi-Huberman in relation to the illusionism in Botticelli's *Primavera*, has become a tangible breeze (or a recording of an actual breeze which is now virtual) that animates the scene disturbing the flatness of the sheets to make us aware of actual (and pictorial) depth of space.

We encounter here the textile material as screen, slightly folded or unfolded, pointing to both painting and cinema (Figure 8).

The Performative Fold
A key artist to have embraced the fold as process rather than as depiction is Hantaï whose method has been appraised by Deleuze (1988), as noted earlier. Reflecting on his

Figure 9
Timothy Taylor, Simon Hantaï in his studio. Extract from the documentary *Les Silence Rétiniens* (1977) by Jean-Michel Meurice. https://vimeo.com/243134655. Accessed 28 March 2022.

practice, Hantaï described "the fold as method" (Wat 1998, 9), in his case a method that spanned over several decades and showed a radical position within painting, where the focus was on process implying an openness toward final visual results. He created variants within the folding process, as to how the canvas would be folded and what part of the apparent surface would be painted (Figure 9). Interestingly, Hantaï mentions as main references for his work Henri Matisse and Jackson Pollock. The former inspired him with his paper-cuts working directly with color paper, often using the wall as ground, the latter for the activation of the painted surface through a dance-like movement across the canvas on the floor. Whilst these artists did not use a literal fold, they certainly undid or challenged the surface of their painting exploring new time-space relations, and with Matisse, a folding or reorganization of figure-ground relations (1998, 9).

Within my practice, the idea of the fold initially took form in my painting, when I wanted to introduce the concept of three-dimensionality within pictorial space whilst equally indicating the flatness of the canvas

(Figure 10). This became the beginning of my *Colour Folds* series. I start these paintings with line drawings resulting from a performative engagement with the canvas where dance-like movements inspire the initial organization of the pictorial space. As the work progresses, the painting is transformed through complex color relations suggesting a folding of form within the time and space of the canvas and the surrounding architectural space (Figure 11). In this context, I formulated the term *Folded Colour Space* to indicate a particular approach to folded space within art/painting. It refers to the spatial potential of individual colors and color relations whilst equally considering the fold as a means to introduce three-dimensionality within either seemingly flat, two-dimensional space and/or actual three-dimensional space. Here the complexity of folded space, where two points can be brought in to proximity whilst simultaneously being far removed from each other, is further challenged by the spatiality of color relations. Buci-Glucksmann in her discussion of baroque esthetics uses the title *Madness of vision*. As she reflects amongst other things on "open, limitless and indefinite form", she

suggests that the Baroque results from a "revolution" of visual perception. "The baroque issues precisely from a *revolution in the ways of seeing*" (Buci-Glucksmann 2013, 8) [original emphasis]. Whilst my *Colour Folds* series relies on abstracted form, it engages in folding and expansion of color/form beyond the canvas suggesting continuous folding into the surrounding space.

An important reference for my exploration of the fold in relation to a performative dimension in painting is the work of Hélio Oiticica with his understanding of spatiality of color as body and Lygia Clark's use of the fold implying the viewer. Oiticica's *Parangolé* works consist of different color fabrics sewn together to form a cape-like structure that comes to life through the actions of a performer making the color-forms unfold and refold in space (Figure 12). The artist, a key contributor to the Brazilian neo-concrete movement, has used ideas of motion and folded space (and time) in many of his works, from his early drawings and paintings *Meta-Schemas* (1957–1958) of formal constellations, to his *Spatial Reliefs* (1960) of interlocked color sheets, to his *Nuclei* (1960–1963) of
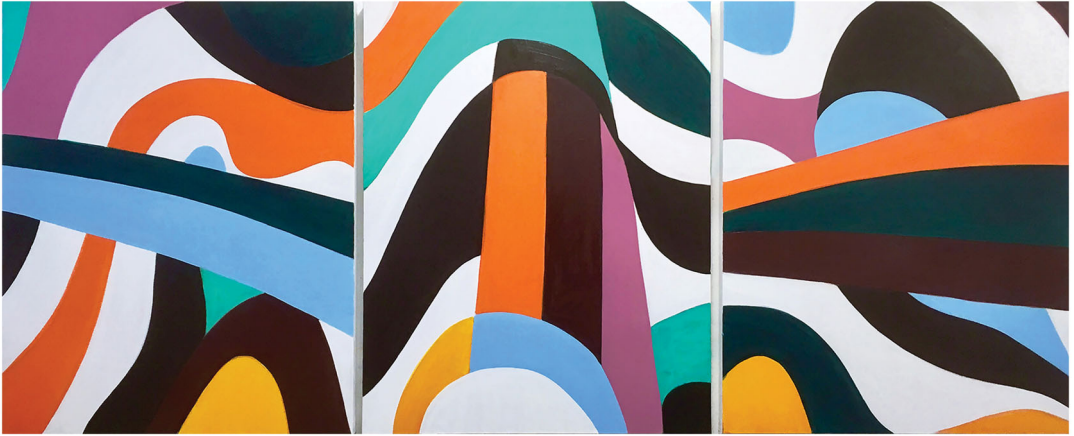
Figure 10
Colour folds/twist. Triptych. Oil on canvas. 2019. Image: Andrea Thoma.

Figure 11
Colour folds/mountain blue, green, red. Oil on canvas, 2 × 100 × 80 cm, 2021. Image: Andrea Thoma.

free-hanging color panels in complex spatial arrangements, or later installation works such as *Tropicália* (1967). As viewers walk along Oiticica's *Gran Nucleus* (1966), or navigate through the architectural structures of *Tropicália*, they experience a visual folding or mixing of color in space, whereas the *Parangolés* involve a spatial experience through dance. The latter are instrumental in allowing for a folding of "color-structure" and a

Figure 12
Extract from Film *Hélio Oiticica* (2012) by Cesar Oiticica Filho. Accessed 28 March 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32xDWfM5g8o

merging of figure and cloth in a relational process that also involves the spectator (Oiticica 2007, 296).[25]

Clark, who is another key neo-concrete artist, engaged with the spatiality of the fold through sculpture and performance in many of her works. Her series of small and medium-scale sculptures *Bichos* (1959–1960) involves an element of handling (Figure 13) to appreciate how the different (aluminium) facets are interlocked and yet mobile, suggesting a folding of time and space. Some of her performances are based on the cutting and unfolding of paper. Her piece *Caminhando* (1963) strikes through the simplicity of the process of cutting a strip of paper that had been twisted and glued together. It is meant as a performance piece so that whoever engages in the actions of cutting increasingly narrower bands of paper, perceives how its unfolding reveals the physical and conceptual complexity of the resulting "drawing in space." Clark explains, "if I use a Möbius strip for this experiment it is because it breaks our spatial habits,

right-left, front and reverse, etc. It makes us live the experience of time without limit and of a continuous space" (Clark 2014, 160).

Where Clark and Oiticica, imply or facilitate movement within the use of the fold, filmic image works offer different opportunities. Referring to Deleuze's writings on cinema, Bruno comments on the ability of the fold to bring together what seems to be apart within the filmic image rationale of movement-as-action and stillness-as-reflection. "The fold can ultimately bridge the gap between the "movement-image" and the "time-image": it holds the potential to incorporate the flow and texture of temporality in the unreeling of inner space. After all, we must recall that for Deleuze, when the "affection-image" is no longer a particular, determined space it becomes a matter of that temporal landscape which is spiritual affect" (Bruno 2014, 16). Bruno offers a reading of the fold that engages or spans across various disciplines or

media, and importantly, she makes the point that the fold is not simply an esthetic process reminding us that Deleuze speaks about the inner workings of the fold, of that coming together of "mind and matter" and of an emotional dimension, particularly in relation to his "time-image" where space becomes less relevant and different moments in time fold into an "affection-image." Returning to my video piece *Josefle,* the repeated insertion of (my) hand flattening the tablecloth conjures an "affection image" within the process of mourning (the death of my father) where Deleuze's "movement image" becomes "time image" involving memory and anticipation (of the repeats) whilst turning the attention inward. Bruno's theorizing of the filmic fold adds another dimension: "Film itself can be said to be a form of tailoring. It is stitched together in strands of celluloid, woven into patterns, designed and assembled, now even virtually, like a
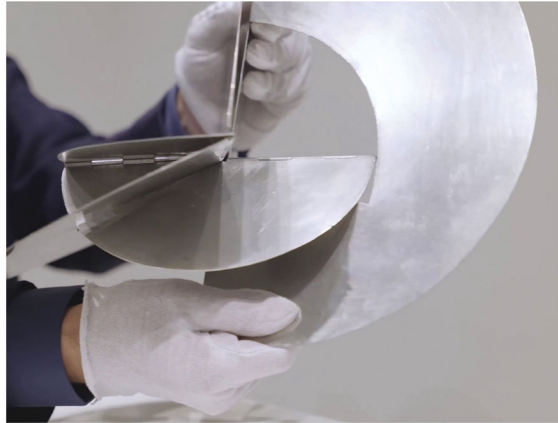
Figure 13
Art Basel 2020, Lygia Clark, *Bicho em Si - Pq* (1966). Accessed 28 March 2022. https://vimeo.com/427398328

customized garment" (2014, 36). Here the folding of cloth becomes metaphor for the filmic editing process.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to reflect on the fold as visual and conceptual process within art. Motivated by a close reading of the photographic project *Imaginary Landscapes,* the discussion aimed to situate it within a wider frame of reference, including different artistic positions and theoretical considerations of the material and immaterial scope of the fold to engage with time and space.

In its particular attention to textile imagination within an art context, the writing explored relations between image and physical connotation. This involved attention to process and to cloth as material incorporating memories of functionality and thus emphasizing absence of the figure and the body, which relates to Pajaczkowska's reflections on textile semiotics. The decision to work with material to hand, which was triggered by the COVID

lockdown situation, made me think about garments within my home within a very different context. Heidegger's concept of "readiness-to-hand" made me consider the availability and direct engagement with the garments in relation to the phenomenological encounter. The importance of "handling" or folding of the cloth was elucidated by Bolt's reading of Heidegger in relation to practice and the differentiation between presentation and representation. Handling/folding also relates to the performative aspect within some of the artworks discussed, such as Lygia Clark's *Bichos*.

More generally, theoretical considerations of the fold (and drapery) by Deleuze, Buci-Glucksmann, Didi-Hubermann, Peterson and Bruno, have allowed me to explore analogies, relations and speculations as to how (audio)-visual and sculptural processes can involve a conceptual complexity beyond the visible. Deleuze's study of Leibniz has been a main reference, in particular his reflections on the fold as relating to

both material process and philosophical speculation. He understands the fold as encompassing both interiority and exteriority where the infinite folds of the soul find exterior, physical expression within the folding of matter (Deleuze 1988, 49). Bruno's reading of Deleuze within a contemporary context has elucidated the discussion, in particular relations between the materiality of cloth and the virtual folding within film editing.[26]

Amongst the wealth of artists working with the fold as process, only a few iconic examples were selected to indicate the wide range of approaches whilst also drawing on insights regarding some of my own works, including the aspect of color to explore the spatiality of the fold. Whilst I have mainly referred to analogue materials (except with the video works), one would need to mention the immense future potential of the fold within digital parameters, some of which can be observed within recent design applications across a wide range of sectors, but which goes beyond the remit of this paper.

Perhaps the most important aspect, when considering the fold in the context of textile imagination, is that it allows us to think of time and space as a dynamic correlation where idea and material experimentation go hand in hand.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. When presenting a shorter version of this article at the Kyoto conference on Arts, Media and Culture 2021, Ljiljana Markovic commented on how my reflections on the fold brought to mind René Thom's theory of catastrophe and "the stochastic nature of the fold as turning point". His theory includes seven singularities, the fold being one of them. Thom imagined the application of his mathematical method in various disciplines, such as Biology, and especially in "morphogenesis – the generation of form and structure within an organism" (Ekeland 2002, 758). Whilst these ideas move beyond the remit of this article, they provide useful speculations as to the implications of the fold and its instrumentality within (random) changes of tempo-spatial orientation.
2. Case studies will not exclusively, but mainly refer to works using fabric, canvas or digital media.
3. Whilst Deleuze has written extensively on relations or oscillations between the virtual and actual in the "crystal image", a concept taken from Henri Bergson, and developed in Deleuze's Cinema 2: The Time image (1989), this article will focus on Deleuze's examination of the (Leibnizian) fold as a material and ideal process of covering, uncovering and repeating.
4. Buci-Glucksmann suggests that the Baroque results from a "revolution" of visual perception. "The baroque issues precisely from a *revolution in the ways of seeing.*" (2013, 8) [original emphasis]
5. "Les matières, c'est le fond, mais les formes pliées sont des manières" (Deleuze, 1988, 50). Within this article, translations and paraphrasing of the original French texts are based on the author's translations. French footnotes refer to the original text on which the author's translation is based.
6. "En déplaçant le fondement cartésien de Heidegger vers le modèle leibnizien du *pli*, Gilles Deleuze prenait déjà acte de cette crise, et redéployait une notion tout à fait nouvelle d'image et de forme-force, propre à un maniérisme temporel plus bergsonien car tout pli se déplie et se replie à l'infini ... " (Buci-Glucksmann 2003, 71–72). One could refer here to Bergson's *Elan Vital* and also to his concept of durational multiplicity, which has been a key reference within my PhD (Thoma 2013), and continues to inform my practice.
7. "Christine Buci-Glucksmann propose un critère beaucoup plus intéressant, une dialectique du voir et du regard, mais ce critère est peut-être trop restrictif à son tour, et permettrait seulement de définir un pli optique." (Deleuze 1988, 47)
8. Where Christo and Jean-Claude cover architectural features/buildings with cloth and its many folds, an integrated use of the fold within the design of architectural structure has been applied within a wealth of architectural projects, from Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid and many others. There have been numerous appraisals of the Deleuzian fold within architectural theory that go well beyond the remit of this article.
9. The French landmark building was to be covered by "25,000 sq meters of recyclable polypropylene fabric, fixed with 3,000 meters of red rope." (Willsher 2021)
10. My friend, the artist Corinne Cardot, has been able to visit the site in Paris and to view the wrapped building. She shared her experience and observed how the covered monument gave an impression of serenity and peacefulness as the depictions of war and triumph within the sculptural reliefs of the building receded into the background, only present through one's memory of the monument's normal appearance. For her, it made

the site very special, in its relation to French culture and in creating an awareness of (tranquil) otherness through the phenomenological encounter of the folded material covering the building and its scenes of warfare.

11. One could point to Hélène Frichot's remarks on Deleuze's "superfold" in relation to architecture, as she offers a close reading of the material (and digital) potential of the fold and the exponential number of folds within folds. "The undulations of the fold show how the texture of material aggregates varies depending on your point of view, close or distant, and depending on the distribution of the material at hand." (Frichot 2013, 81)

12. "Par le simple souvenir, loin des immensités de la mer et de la plaine, nous pouvons, dans la méditation, renouveler en nous-mêmes les resonances de cette contemplation de la grandeur." (Bachelard 1957, 168)

13. "Indeed we achieve our most primordial (closest) relationship with equipment not by looking at the entity in question, or by some detached intellectual or theoretical study of it, but rather by skillfully manipulating it in a hitch-free manner. Entities so encountered have their own distinctive kind of Being that Heidegger famously calls *readiness-to-hand*." (Wheeler 2011)

14. "Aussi le pli idéal est-il Zwiefalt, pli qui différencie et se différencie. Quand Heidegger invoque le Zwiefalt comme le différenciant de la différence, il veut dire avant tout que la différenciation … [renvoie] à une Différence qui ne cesse de se déplier et replier … dans une coextensivité du dévoilement et du voilement de l'Être, de la présence et du retrait de l'étant." (Deleuze 1988, 42)

15. See also online exhibition "What comes after" at 601ArtsSpace (601ArtSpace 2021).

16. "Tantôt faire vibrer la couleur dans les replis de la matière, tantôt faire vibrer la lumière dans les plis d'une surface immatérielle. Pourtant, qu'est-ce qui fait que la ligne baroque est seulement une possibilité d'Hantaï? C'est qu'il ne cesse d'affronter une autre possibilité, qui est la ligne d'Orient. Le peint et le non-peint … [se distribuent] comme le plein et le vide dans un devenir réciproque." (Deleuze 1988, 51)

17. François Cheng explains in *Vide et Plein* (1991, 56): "Le Vide vise la plénitude. C'est lui en effet qui permet à toutes choses 'pleines' d'atteindre leur vraie plénitude." [The Empty aims for plenitude. It is actually what allows all "full" things to reach their fullness.]

18. "Le pli infini sépare, ou passe entre la matière et l'âme … elle s'actualise dans l'âme, mais elle se

réalise dans la matière…" (Deleuze 1988, 49)

19. This refers to the folding practice Hantaï is mostly associated with. His earlier works do not involve a literal folding process.

20. The semiotics of textile as concept is only briefly mentioned here. A more in-depth discussion of its historical and cultural implications would go beyond the remit of this article.

21. Barry Schwabsky was not as convinced as others by the installation as a whole, considering the textiles presented on the floor as platitude. "These garments in their neat rectangles make a totally flat impression in both senses: they add nothing to the impact of the giant hand scrounging its way through the enormous mound – an image that has at least been thoroughly imagined." (Schwabsky 2010, no pagination)

22. Didi-Hubermann wrote these publications across two decades, referring to fallen drapery in *Ninfa Moderna. Essai sur le drapé moderne* (2002), to drapery in relation to desire in *Ninfa fluida. Essai sur le drapé-désir* (2015), and to drapery suggesting torment in *Ninfa profunda. Essai sur le drapé-tourmenté* (2017).

23. "Elle [la danseuse au Quattrocento] devient une semblance des dieux antiques, une créature de rêve, une revenante. Drapée dans ses 'surfaces en mouvement', elle

crée donc, autour de son corps, un vent de fiction: un temps de fiction." (Didi-Hubermann 2015, 80)

24. "The contact between Deren's body and the hanging fabric also serves as a visual representation of the imagined contact between film screen and spectator …" (Peterson 2010, 236)

25. In his observations on the parangolé as concept, Oiticica claims that it is a crucial development in his "experiments with color-structure in space". (Oiticica 2007, 296)

26. In publication *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media,* Bruno offers insights as to the instrumentality of the fold within a contemporary context involving various disciplines amongst them fashion design, architecture and film whilst also treating her writing as a folding process (2014).

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