

# Contours

Eric Schmid

July 24, 2025

A contour is both boundary and bridge—the precise line where inside meets outside, where self encounters other. In Carl Mannov’s new work, contours manifest as striped surfaces that oscillate between concealment and revelation, mapping the topology of consciousness itself.

The stripe emerges as primary vocabulary: horizontal bands that transform bodies into terrains of thought. These are not mere decorative elements but active boundaries—each line a threshold between dimensions. Two-dimensional letters crown three-dimensional heads. Painted surfaces bridge the gap between symbol and flesh, between the typographic and the corporeal.

$$f(z) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n (z - z_0)^n$$

This mathematical expression of holomorphic functions illuminates Mannov’s method: consciousness expands in infinite series from a central point. As Châtelet writes, “In giving a point thickness, I thereby cause it to reverberate through the whole plane: this is the miracle of holomorphy.” The contour is no passive boundary but an active zone of transformation.

Mannov’s subjects—friends directed in introspective poses—wear their stripes as both uniform and camouflage. The costume effaces individual identity while paradoxically defining it. These painted thinkers become archetypal figures, their striped surfaces serving as coordinate systems for mapping interior states. The contour line becomes a Möbius strip where outer representation and inner feeling merge without seam.

This topology of identity recalls Fichte’s dialectic: the outer I conjures the inner I through mediation. But here the mediating surface is paint itself—material contours that trace immaterial boundaries. Social-realist echoes from 90s theatre blur with contemporary portraiture, as if old performances leave their striped residue on present surfaces.

$$\oint_{\gamma} \text{consciousness } dz = 2\pi i \sum \text{cultural residues}$$

The contour integral suggests how consciousness circulates, gathering cultural markers—glasses, books, theatrical gestures—as it traces its path. These residues accumulate at the boundaries, making visible what Diederichsen calls the impersonal *Sie* haunting every intimate *Du*. Social distance manifests as graphic interval.

Châtelet’s insight resonates throughout: “Virtuality prepares the ground for individuation and links force to a process of partialization, to a dotted-line cutout which reveals the vanity of all solidity.” Mannov’s contours operate in this virtual space—not fixed borders but dynamic zones where identity forms and dissolves. The stripe is simultaneously mask and map, concealing the self while charting its topology.

We are invited to see ourselves as both the contour and what it encircles—the function and its derivatives, the boundary and the bounded space. In this synthetic vision, painting becomes a technology for rendering visible the invisible architectures of thought, the hidden junctions where trains of consciousness converge. The contour emerges as method: perhaps a way of thinking the interval between self and world, or perhaps the dissolution of that very distinction—a zone where actualization and virtualization become indistinguishable.