

CENTER for EXPERIMENTAL LECTURES

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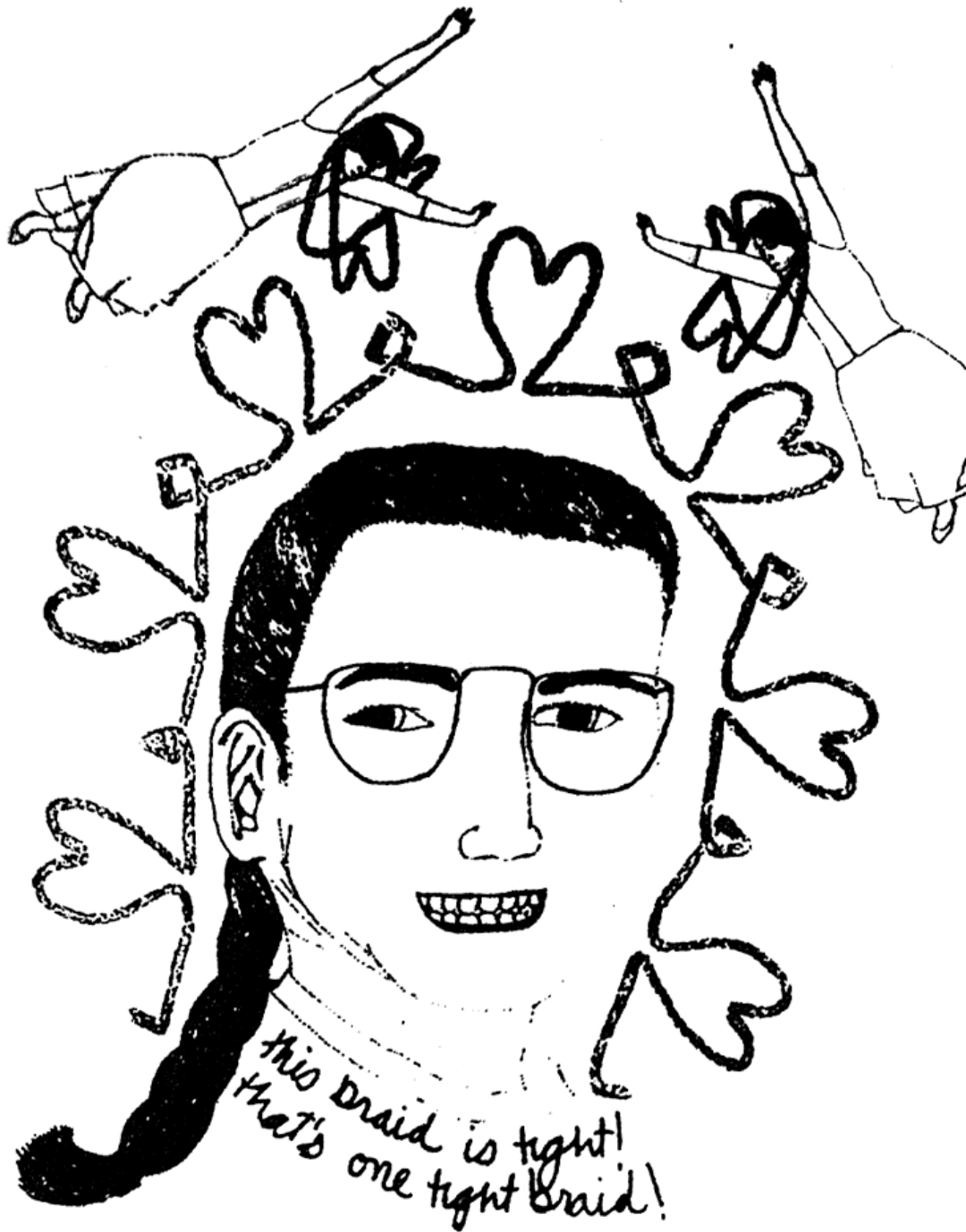
The Sexual Life of Patterns by Edie Fake



Hello strings and cords and ropes, twines. My lecture is going to be a little more intuitive than experimental I think. When I was standing at the back of the room the words “guided meditation” came to mind! So...it might be along those lines.



We're going to be looking at the body as a cord, not a musical cord but a string, and the world is fabric. So, it's going to be an experimental lecture in that it's not going to be tethered to facts or science or credible anthropology... just going to quack a little...and it's about forming intuitive relationships.

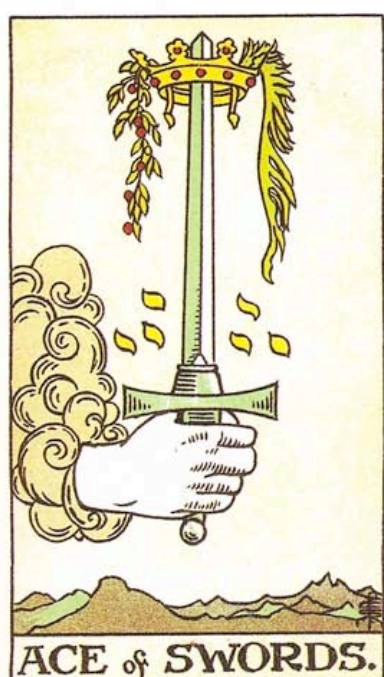
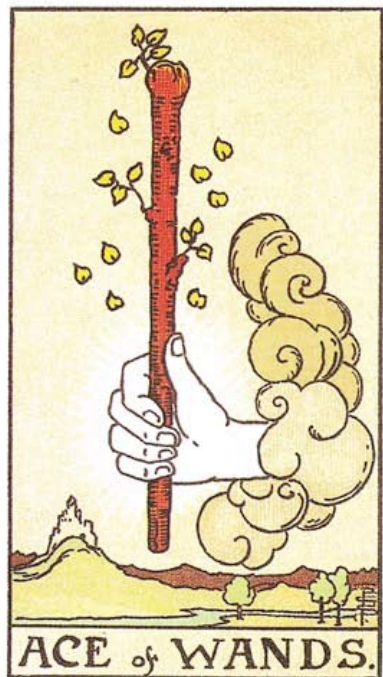
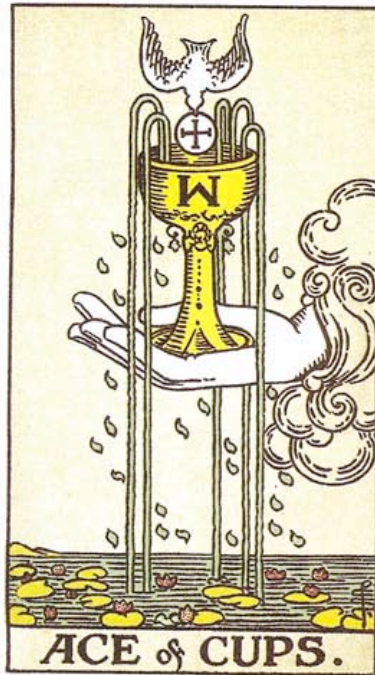


My sometimes collaborator Lee Relvas and my good friend Kim Kelly came up with this drawing about community years ago. The text on it says: “That braid is tight. That’s one tight braid.” And I was looking at this as I was thinking....this, this — that’ll make sense later!

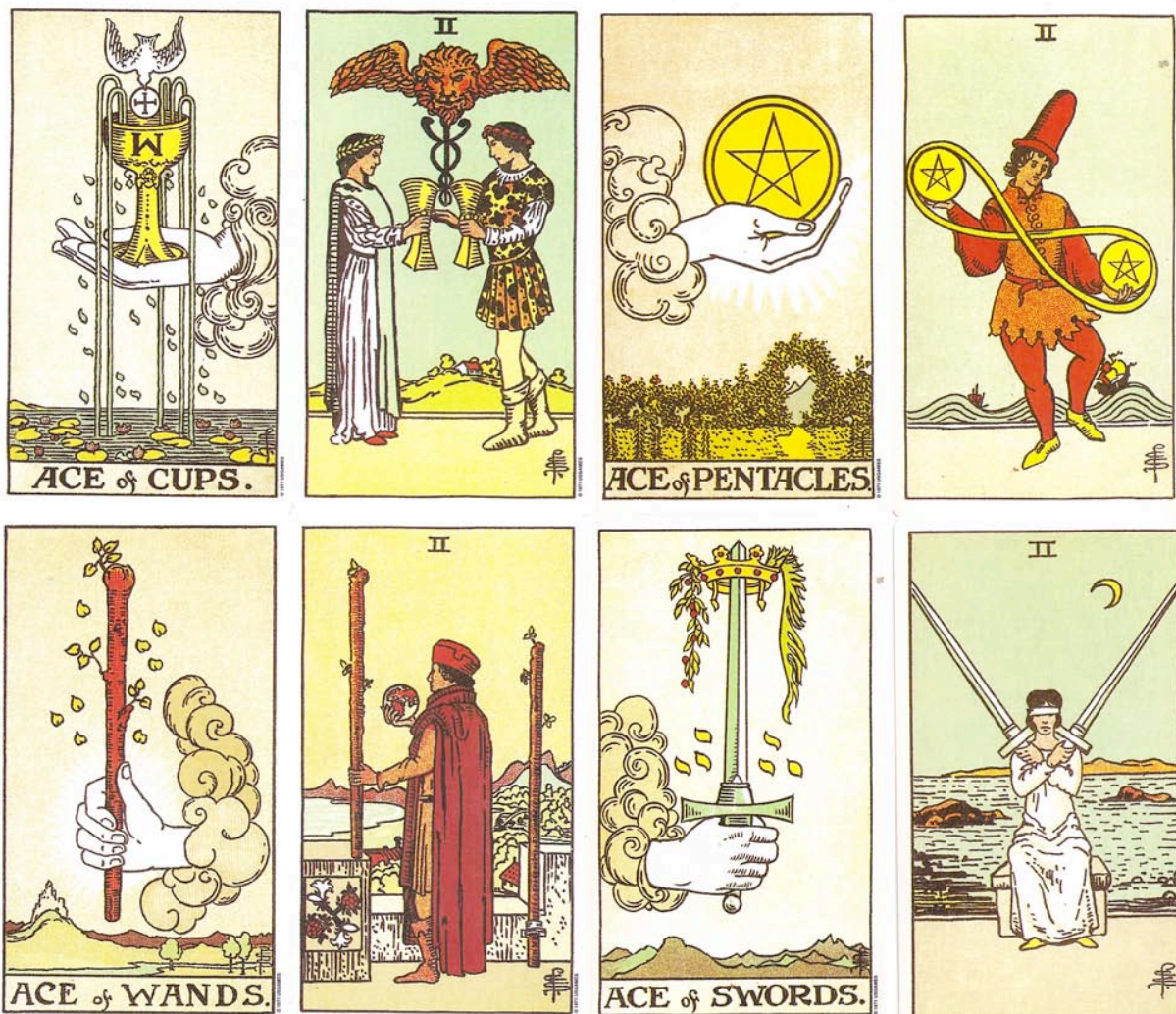


One thing I want to make clear—I'm not a textile art historian, this isn't about learning traditional symbols and culturally specific meanings, but that is key and important to not using textiles in an appropriative or exploitative way, I'd just like to acknowledge that. And, if the root of this lecture is going to hold water, it's going to need some comparative study to traditional meanings of fabrics and textiles. Alright. Let's begin.

I guess I was thinking about breaking down systems in a similar way to how you can break down the Rider-Waite tarot.



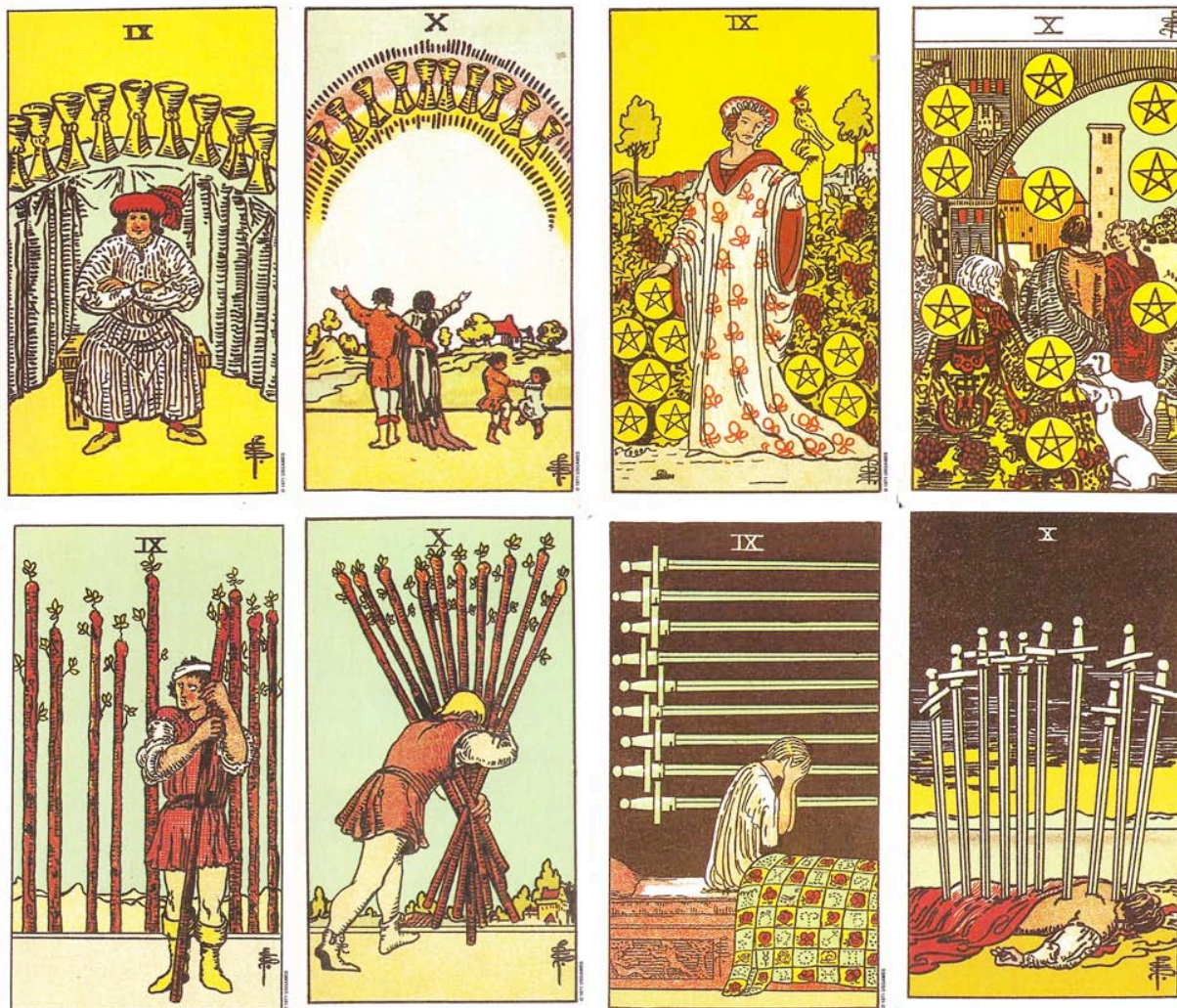
So, I think we are looking at the aces here, and it's pretty obvious to see that it's all a generative force, there's something starting when you get to number one. And, it's true for all these different elements, so they all start up in different ways, the cups emotionally, the pinnacles physically, the swords intellectually, the wands creatively.



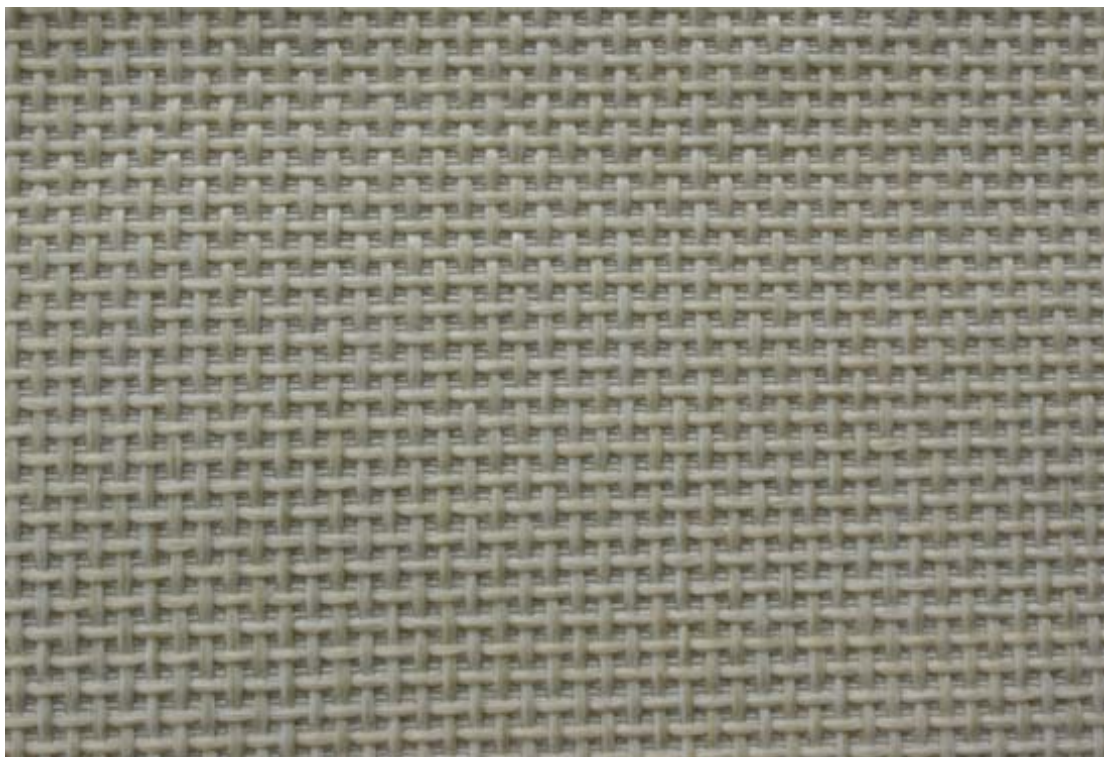
And if we go to number two you can see that number two is very different, but all the number twos in the tarot are about making a choice. You got something started in number one, in many different ways, and then in number two, a choice comes up with your predicament. The same is sort of true—I mean it's true throughout the one through nine in all the suits of the deck.



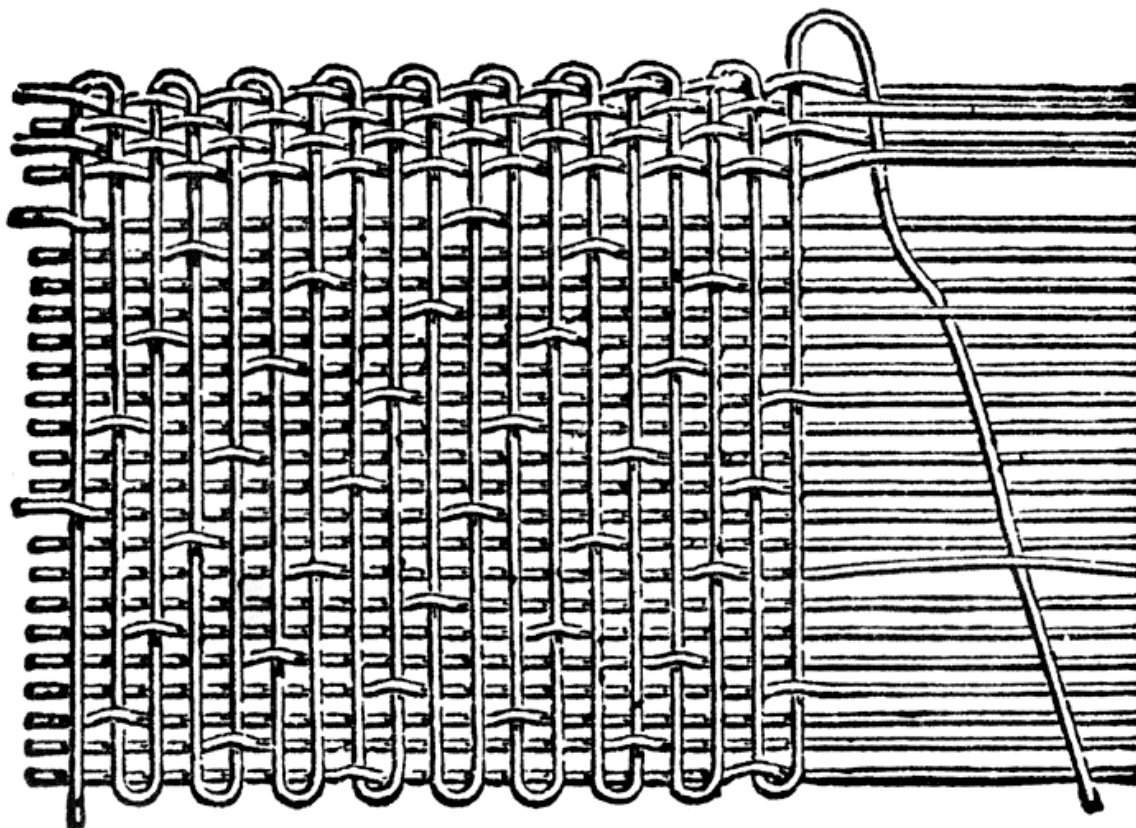
When you get to nine you have this number that's foreshadowing the ultimate end of the suit, and some end well and others end in complete destruction of the unconscious.



And so you can see how each number has gone in a completely different place, but it means the same thing...it's like a foreshadowing in number nine and in ten it's like the seeing through of a process. So, thinking about the way that numbers work in the tarot was sort of how I wanted to look at patterns in fabric. And, I think, to get to social meaning, I want to show some interesting patterns—I've put some up on the wall—but we're going to have to start with solids.



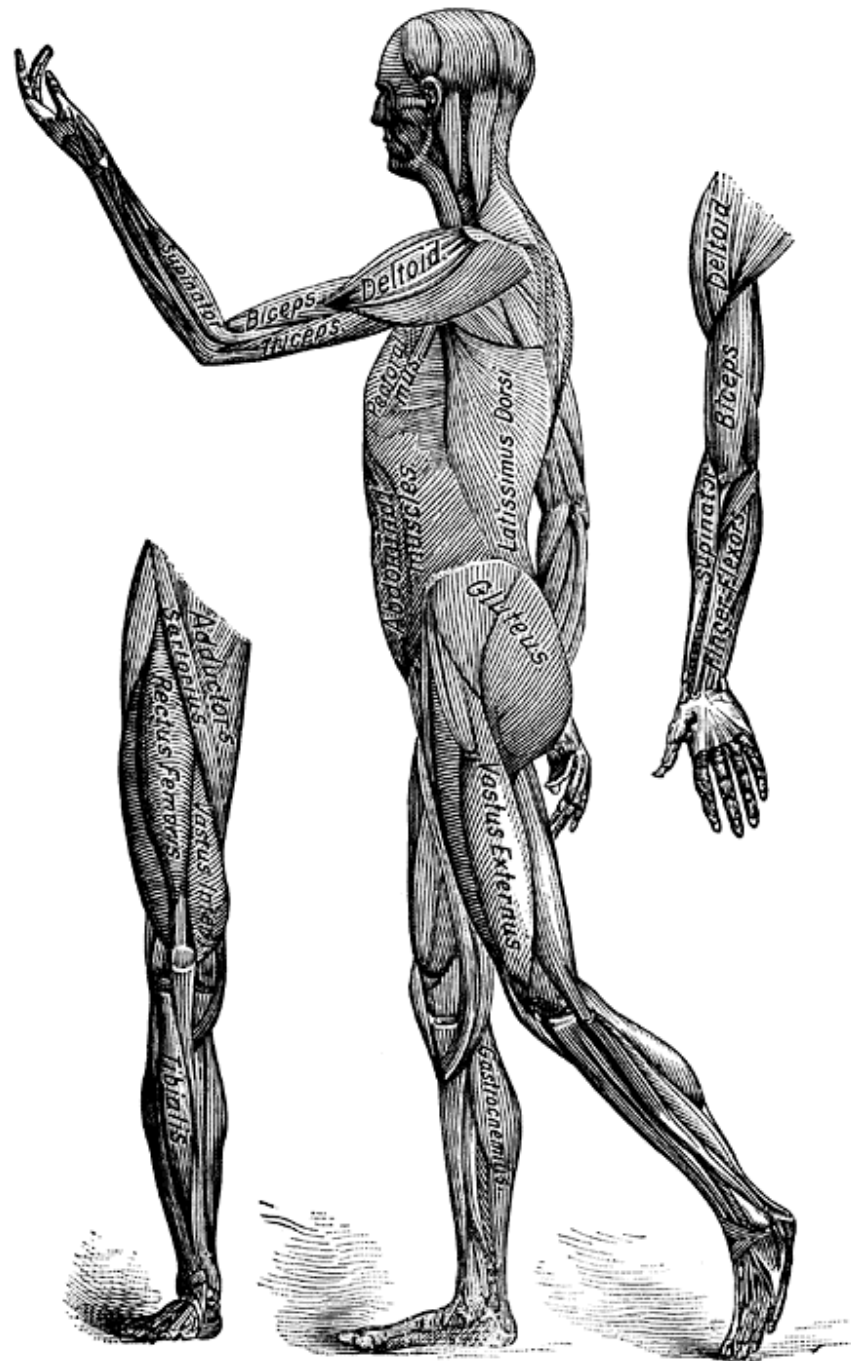
Yeeaaaassss... Fabric is woven, it's a gridded braid, it's strands.



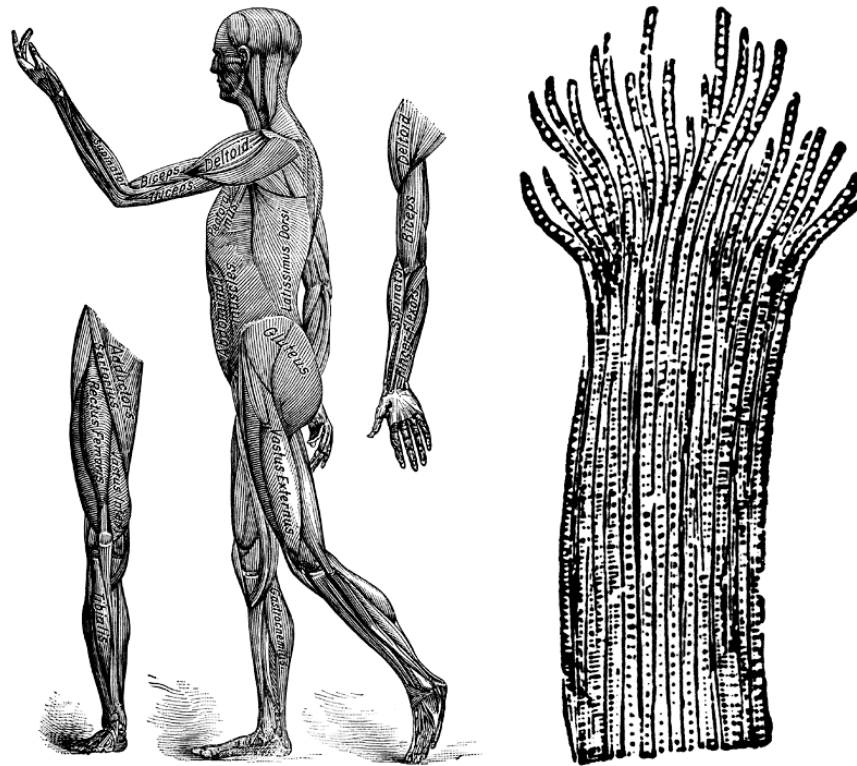
It's a weft strand passed amongst its perpendicular warp strands, and so I'm going to say that the strands represent our bodies, and that, just like our bodies, the strands that make up a fabric can be dissected into their components. Smaller wrapped fibers around still smaller wrapped fibers.



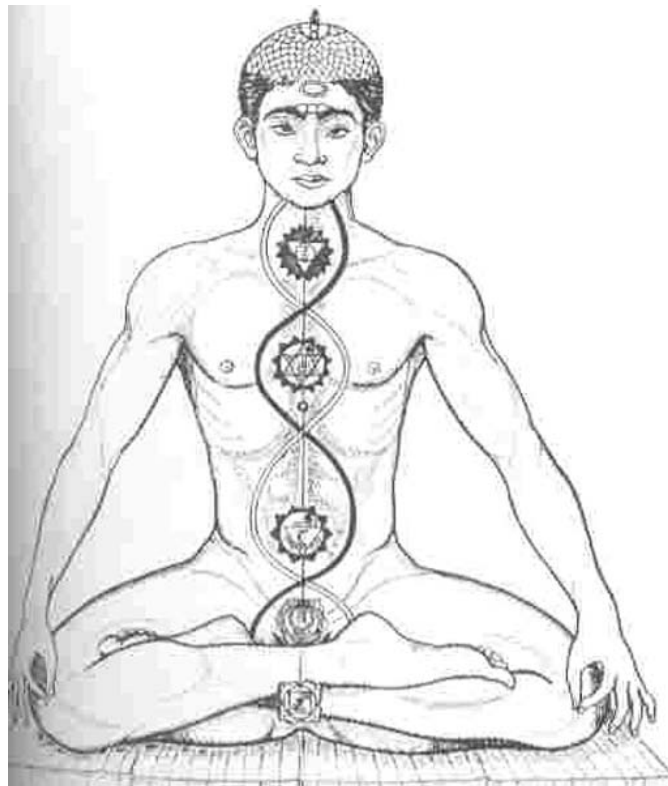
Yes—our bodies.



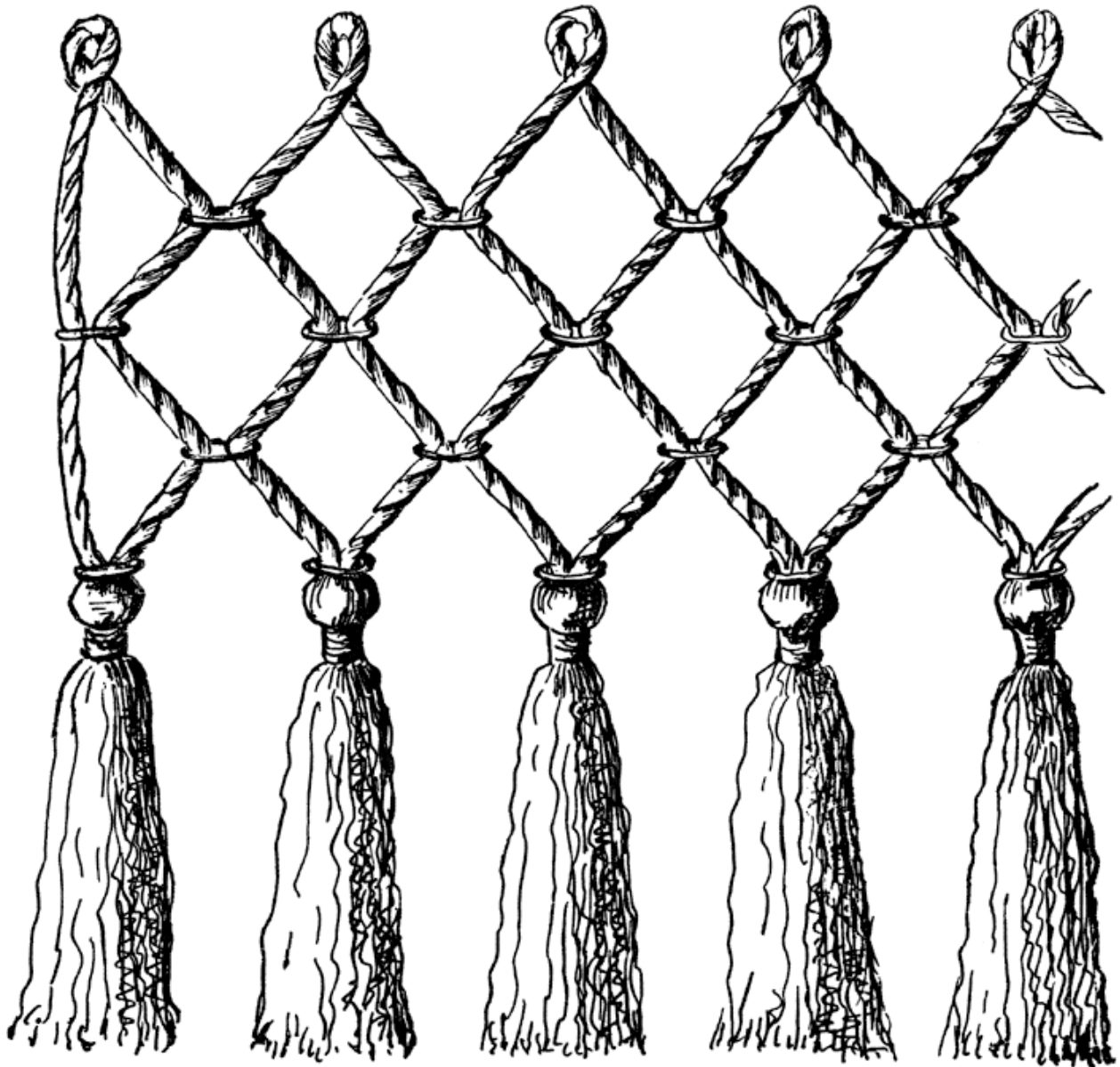
Yes, yes—ropes. And so, when we unravel a strand of yarn, or rope, let's compare that to seeing the body as a conglomerate of muscles, foods, fats, organs, and bones wrapped around a column of empty space.



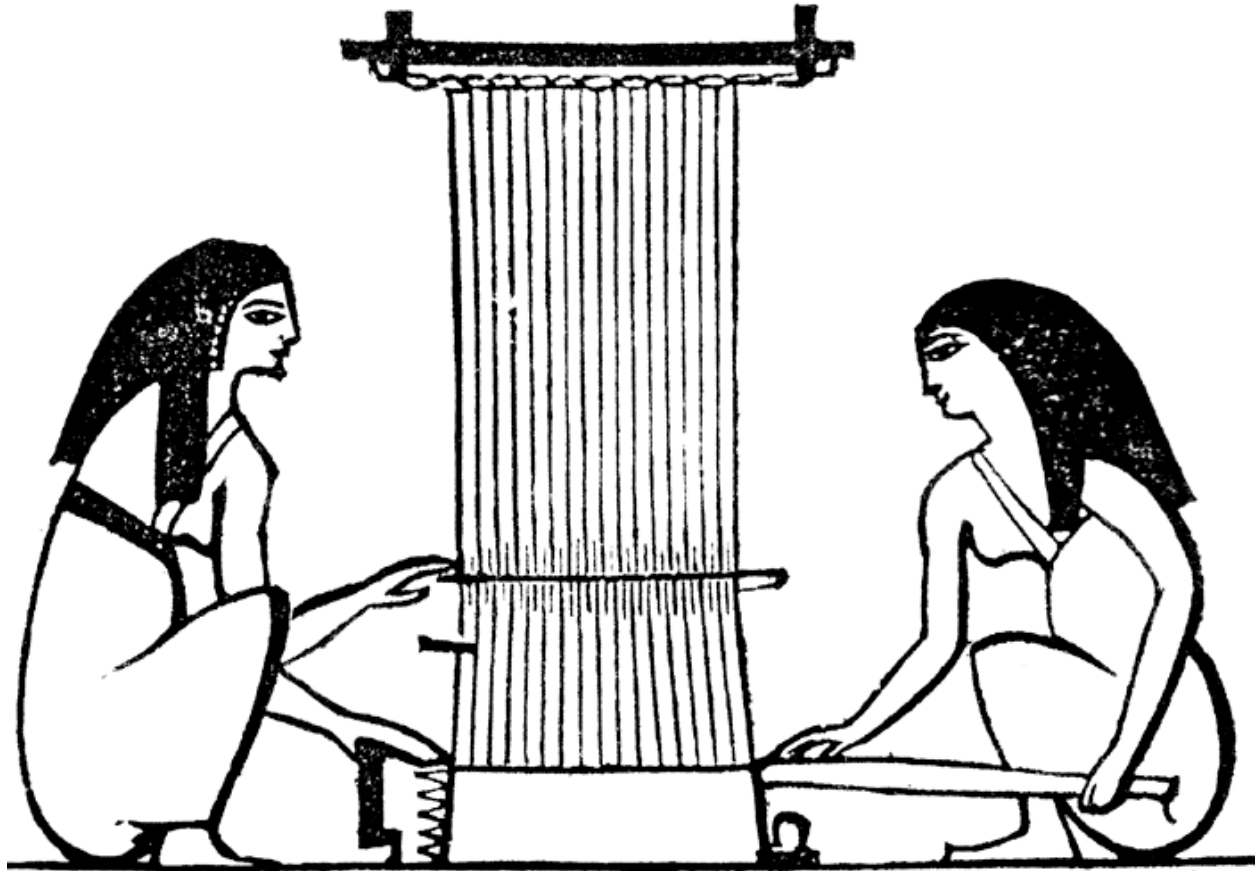
That's a close up of muscle tissue.



We are rope, the cord, the thread, the string and it tells our stories, and so in a weave, the weft is the self, for all—in your fabric, you're the weft and you are weaving through a lifeline of other bodies—you're weaving your lifeline through the warp of all the other bodies you encounter.



Yeah—that's not fabric but that's sort of, you know, stringy beginnings. Yeah, so, you're moving back and forth amidst the warp of the society, a field of bodies, other similar strings, cords, ropes.



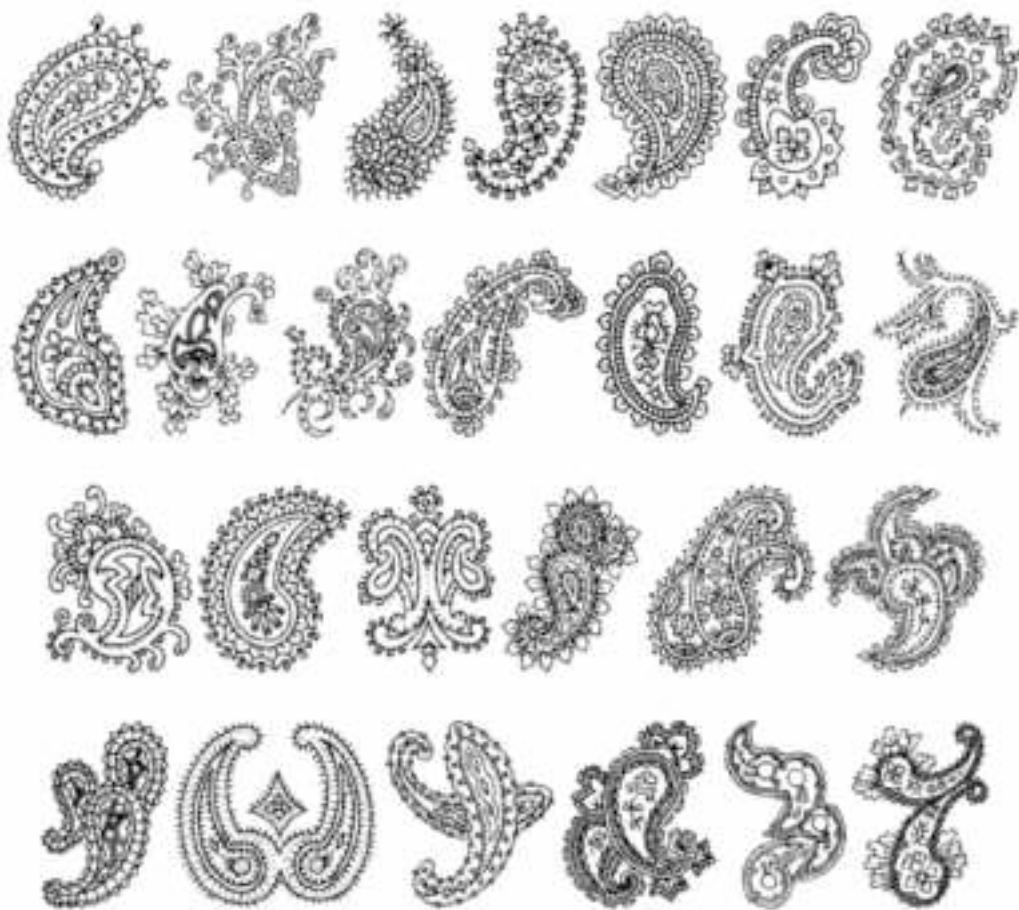
With a solid fabric, all the bodies and strands involved, they weave and it becomes essentially uniform, it sort of has this Dr. Bronner's All-Is-One sort of thing going on. It posits that we are all essentially the same, and it's very yup—don't sweat the small stuff, you are part of a fabric. And so the bodies and cords are all made of the same stuff—we're all in this room, we're the fabric of this room. The weft becomes lost in the warp, vice versa, it's the sameness, it's beautiful, it's peaceful, it puts it in perspective—the universe stretches on for yards and yards.

I want to put out two things that are kind of side notes at this point. One is that perhaps the tighter and smaller and more invisible the weave, the more the evidence of the human hand leaves the fabric and the closer it comes to losing all individuality and embracing the universality of solid fabrics. Contrasted with a chunkier weave, a more distinct physicality, the more that you can see the warp versus the weft, the more that you can distinguish the strands from each other, the more a solid fabric seems to say “we are all made of the same stuff and we're in it together, but we're also distinguishable from each other.” So, looking at fabrics with a tight weave as being more, sort of, “lose yourself in the universe,” and more distinct weave like “c'mon humanity, we're all—all is one.” And then also looking at knitting maybe as a specific way of weaving where the yarn of the self is cast onto the yarn of the self. So you have a string that is building a fabric by building on itself, and I think this represents an introspective self-supported textile. The uniformity of a knitted scarf is a self reflexive—reflective oneness, like the self building an integrated identity. I'm embarrassed to say this here but I feel like, as I was writing this, I had a goofy note to include the *Weezer* lyric about destroying the sweater by pulling the string as you walk away...it's a valid way to destroy a sweater, but in terms of my crackpot theories that I'm backing up with Weezer quotes, it's a good way of representing what I'm talking about. The unraveling of self when you destroy a knit, so it's not tethered to its own history, memory, or integrated structure anymore, and you're reducing a lived lifetime back to the essence of just being a cord, a body, without the built identity of the sweater. So, knitted yarn can be kind of crazy...



Alright. The title of this section of the lecture is called “On Jeggings: How Different Patterns Happen.” And this is kind of a divide between a pattern that is printed on a fabric versus one that is woven into the fabric. And, to illustrate this, I brought a couple of pairs of jeggings, that—this first one is printed on the fabric, so you can see it doesn’t go through, it’s all on the surface. This is unworn, I’ll pass it around. So building on what I’ve said about solids, patterns represent immediately a more individualistic impulse, or at least they might, they might be used to talk about how we live as individuals. Patterns are differentiated color areas, and I want us to consider how they were created on a fabric when we consider what they might mean. So the first example, that pattern printed on a solid weave, you start with the solid fabric, the field of oneness that I just talked about, and then through ink or dye you impose color differences onto this field. I’d like to posit that whatever pattern you put on the fabric to an

extent is a conceit, it acts in reaction to the oneness of the field, and whatever it's trying to say, it says in the context of humanity's oneness. So you have the solidness of a fabric, and if you're dying it after the fact that it's been woven, you're putting something onto the idea of that oneness. So perhaps all prints are lying to themselves or trying to trick us. In the case of the jeggings that are going around, quarter jeggings that are going around, I would like to say that they are definitely playing some kind of funny joke on many levels and to be kinder, I think that prints in general are trying to play with us, their essence is solid but they are saying patterns can rest on top of our lives arbitrarily. Alright—jeggings—they're playing a funny joke on many levels. Prints are trying to play with us. Their essence is solid, they're saying that patterns can rest on our lives arbitrarily, like we're not composing the patterns ourselves. Prints take the stance that if your life is part of a pattern it's beyond your control and your part in it would be unrecognizable if you were to remove it from the whole. So powers beyond humanity are responsible for prints, it turns out. In the textile universe that I am building... And it can make for, you know, super funny undies, or deeper ideas. I think that paisley prints can be an especially interesting and complicated contradiction. I brought an example of paisley—I'll pass this around as well. The essence is a super flamboyant, decorative, individual blossom unit in a paisley, and it sort of represents the flaming self in this way. And the fact that you have this incredibly individualized shape so specifically printed on a solid seems to posit the question of what it represents—is it some sort of collective imagination? Does it stand for human wonderment of the individualized self, even as the physical self is dwarfed by the scope of humanity? Is a paisley all about the pantheon of gods and goddesses moving through us in ways we'll never know? It's very complicated, it's one of my favorites.



Here's some more of them.

POLKA DOTS



OK —paisley's a polka dot form pattern in that you have these individual units, these moments of—bursts of individuality and flamboyance in a solid field—and when that happens on a print I feel like the same question is posited—what is the individual—what is the pattern of an individual doing on the integrity of connectedness,

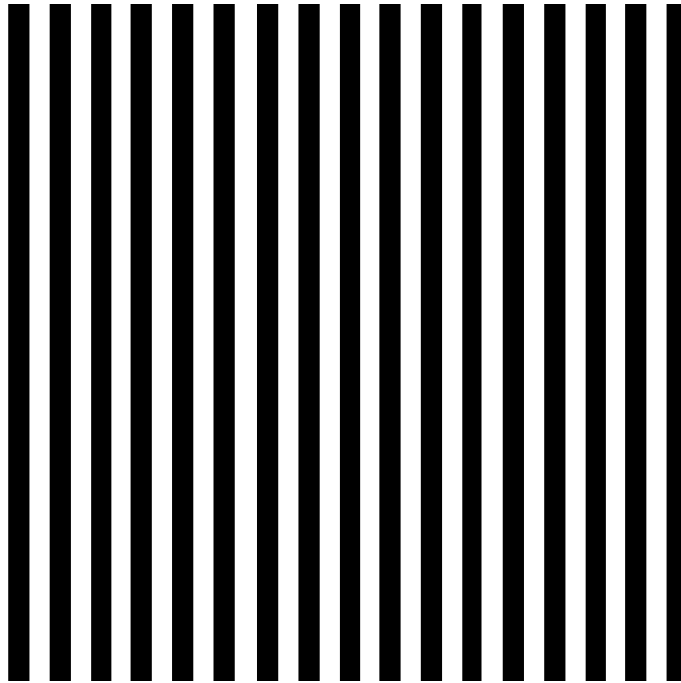
oneness. Tie-dye, as evidenced on the wall, is a pattern imposed on solid fabric that poses a much different set of questions, I think. Although it could be argued that this is also a model of gods, dreams, and superior forces, the way tie-dye goes about itself is more of an adjustment of a solid rather than a contradiction, plunging the humanity of the weave into a free-form astral mood soup... is what I wrote? Yes. And furthermore...but without solid boundaries, one color flowing into the next can represent a humanity moving through different aspects, different colors, different moods, different eons, rather than the contradiction of something defined on something rather undefined.



Yes—more tie-dye—if you didn't see it on the wall, now you can see it...on the wall.



Alright—after giving prints their due, most of the rest of what I’m going to be talking about are woven patterns, as represented by this pair of jeggings, which I will also pass around for inspection by the jegging monitors of this room. Woven patterns embrace the idea that we are all connected, woven through each other’s lives, but also present the individuality of the bodies involved by colored cords forming distinct entities. This is sort of behind the notion of—or the expression “dyed in the wool,” as being—whereas a pattern that is printed on the fabric that’s already a solid is sort of a contradiction to itself, when the cords going into it are already a certain color and making a certain shape, it reflects a different idea of the world where the individual shapes the pattern. And then you start to see social relationships develop between these patterns when you think of these blocks of color as people or animal friends or things we commune with.



I think the easiest place to start with this is stripes, because you start with something that is a collection of individuals, one is distinct from—each one is distinct from its neighbor. So, I have a stripe on the wall too, and you start to see how these colored blocks on a fabric when it's woven in, each one is one of us, and we're all in this room together.



Then you get things like pin stripe which is also stripes—it's all stripes involved here, but then I can't help but read something like pin stripe as...well, you know, it's super go-getter, and I can't help but read it as lines alone on a field, you know, whether it's thin blue lines on a red field or something that's really wool and business, like up here. But this is—it seems like a pattern of you against the world, much like things like when a fleck—colored flecks, like a confetti sort of weave...flecks on a field, stripes on a field, they almost seem like lonely patterns to me, where you have a stripe unconnected to other stripes, giving it a go on the field—just got a little lonely there.



To, sort of, take the stripes to a different place, I think it's interesting, because you have the idea already that these patterns are woven into the fabric and then you start to see how they become shapes and those shapes play with each other, and I would like to say that a zigzag takes the stripe of just being in a room with someone or in a conversation, and it's more of a hug, it's an embrace, it's physicality.

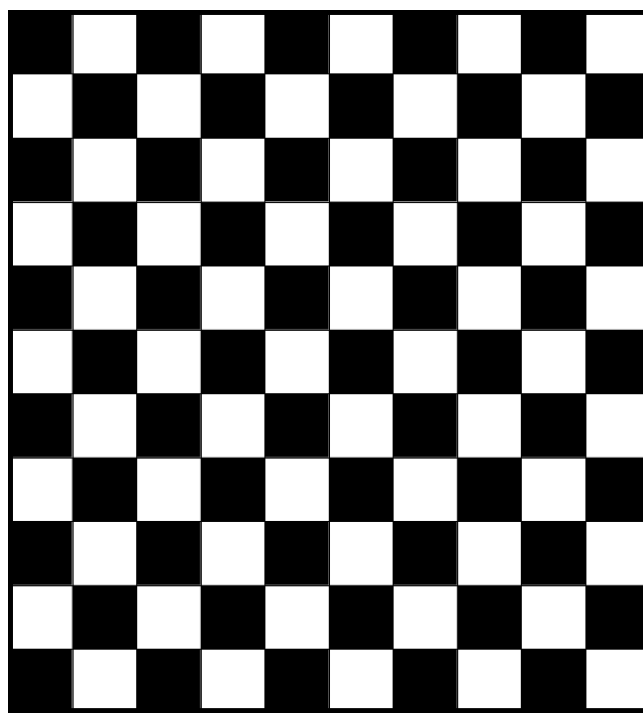


It's a zigzag—it's open arms, it's open legs, it's a stripe trying to embrace its fellow stripes, and it's starting the act of tessellating, which, stripes tessellate—they, you can put as many as you want next to each other and it will keep going, they fit together, and a zigzag fits together in that way and we'll be working our way through some other tessellating patterns...in a minute we'll be working our way through other tessellating patterns.

But I'd just like to take a small side note to another way that patterns happen, which is adornment on a fabric, such as something that is sewn on, like a sequin, or embroidered in, thread. And I believe that these changes—I can pass them around as well, it's fun to—this lecture would ideally happen in a fabric store, where you have the idea of a fabric being already woven—a solid—it's like a combination almost. Patterns by adornment, such as embroidery, sequins, and studs, I think that these changes to the fabric represent a little of each of the previous discussed categories. They're somewhat supernatural, they impose on fabric structures of add-ons, and yet they can integrate themselves into the weave of the textile and often act as agents of individuality.



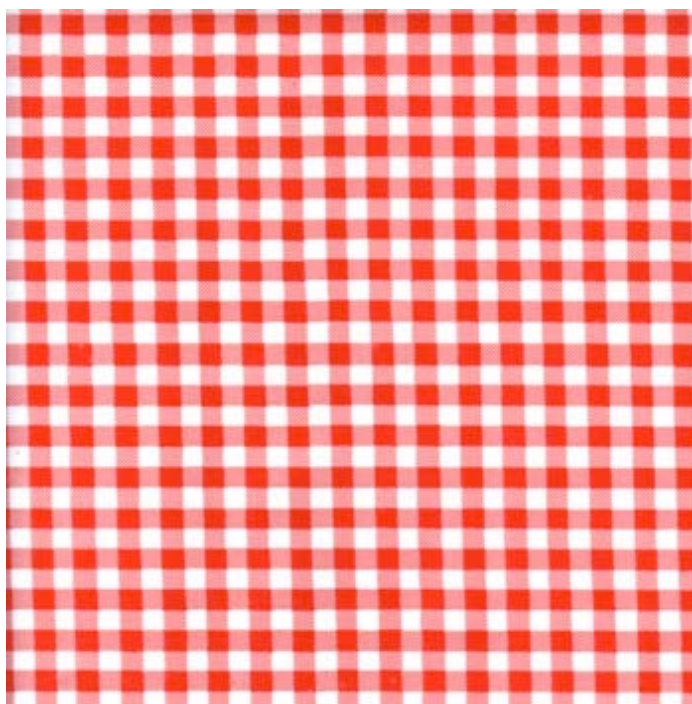
It thrills me to offer the suggestion that in the theater that is textiles perhaps embroidery represents a greater purpose and sequins are magic. Onward, before we get too distracted by some shiny propositions. Let's start reading some dyed-in-the-wool style patterns, and I think we're going to start with the checkers that you see up.



And I feel like checkers take the notion of a stripe and start getting more familial with it, the self becomes a checker—a square, and you're surrounded by other squares which are distinct from you but also totally supporting—got your back, in this way.



Then you have interesting things like herringbone, which is sort of a zigzag and it's sort of a checker, I picture it as a familial embrace, or working the body as a unit of support that leans on its surrounding units.



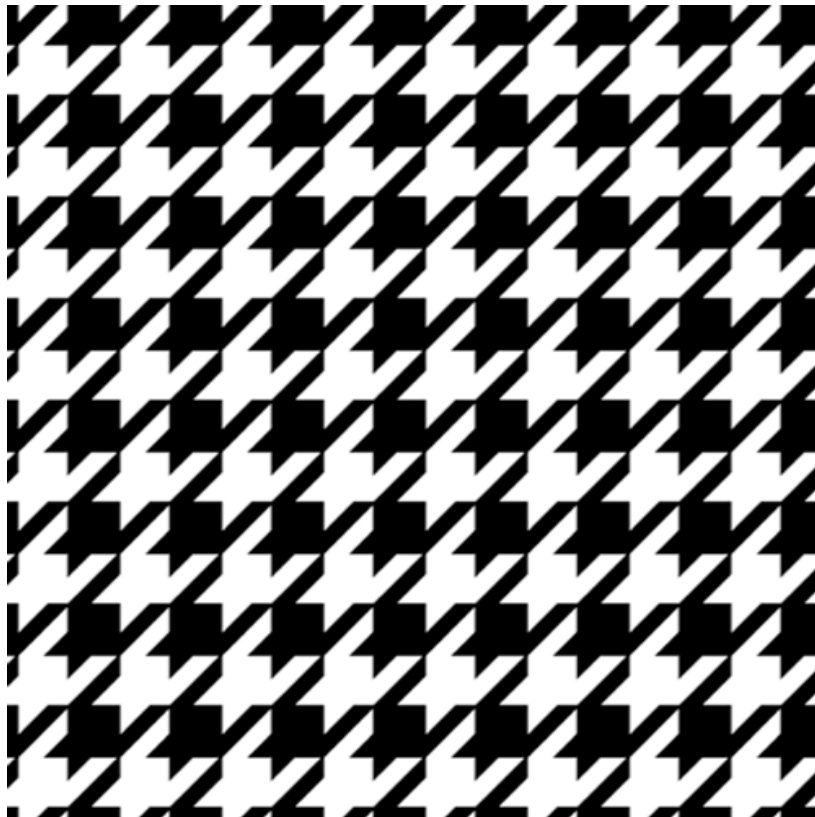
With gingham you start seeing the potential of checkered pattern as well, where it's sort of the integration of checkers and stripes, where every square on this could be viewed as two stripes feeding each other, and the result, the baby that happens from all—from stripes meeting and passing and conversating with each other, so when you could say that you have undefined red stripes and undefined white stripes in this and when they meet they make extra red stripes or sort of red and white stripes, or extra red squares, sort of red and white squares, or white squares. And this sort of builds up into plaid.



Yes—it builds up into plaid.

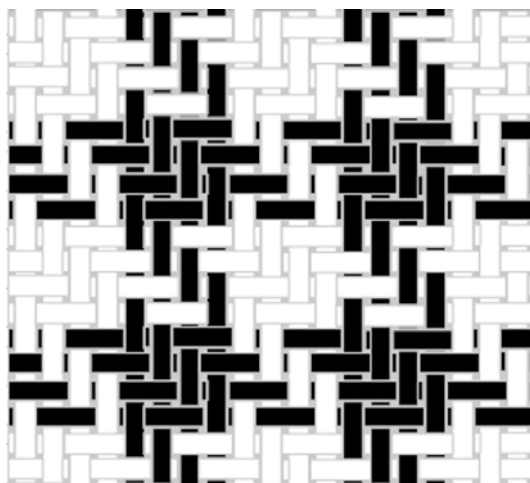
I think the plaids that I have today are all examples, like I have this scarf that pretty much simply illustrates the meaning of stripes and what happens, and, positing that stripes are individuals, and the meaning of stripes is a conversation, or sex, or intimacy of some sort, psychic connection. This one is, I feel like I, once again when there's large swaths and small swaths I can't help but—I know the large ones and the small ones are both stripes but can't help but read the large ones as a field. And so I feel like a plaid like this, you have individuals moving in

parallel and occasionally, occasionally meeting and conversating. And then I've got an interesting plaid on the wall that's more about different types of conversating—that red one, is everyone checking that out? Yeah—totally. And next to it that yellow one is kind of an interesting extension of pin stripe where you have very solid and direct lines crossing each other but nothing really extra special happens when they cross, and almost they're like “see ya...” which kind of relates to the pattern that we have on our public bus seats here in Chicago, which I saw—it's lines that pass each other but before the lines meet—that cross of lines meeting—there's little breaks between them so the lines never meet. So you have lines that are supposed to meet that never quite do, which I think is kind of interesting for the bus. I also started quacking about it on the bus the other day—“I'm doing this lecture, look at the bus seat pattern, what if that's all about this...” and then someone starting quacking in on the bus and by the time he got thirty minutes into counter-quacking me I was like this is why that seat pattern is on the bus and we don't talk about it. But it was interesting, it was good. We'll open this up to discussion and debate soon after this... But you have with plaid everything from that sort of stripe overlap on the yellow to a more conversational thing to a very rough woven, which I think, I will continue to call individualistic or individual focused sort of weave, and then sort of amazing and confusing notion threads that run through as evidenced by this plaid, plaid-ish sort of thing that I will also pass around. Why not—it's great.



And I think that somewhere between checkers and plaid and zigzags and tessellations, you end up with tessellation patterns that are sort of like hounds tooth, where you really have to link the check—the checker of the check—you see the body as a body, and I'm super fascinated by complicated tessellations like hounds tooth because when it converses with other bodies it fits into each other in this way, and so you have this idea of physicality, an idea of bodies fitting into other bodies, and I think, when I wrote the proposal for this lecture I was like, I think that tessellating patterns and things like hounds tooth and zigzags—they get a little trans it that way, where it's acknowledging that our bodies fit into each other, and complicating and ungendering a shape in this

way. I feel like a tessellating shape is a shape that to some degree has freed itself from gender because it fits into itself over and over again and in every which way.



And then also it's interesting to look at it as a pattern on the greater picture, and then it's also amazing to break it down and see how it's woven in the fabric and, in that way, how it's dependent on the other shapes around it and is replicated in the other shapes around it in this kind of beautiful overlap, underlap, idea sharing.



And then, then we get into the realm of patterns that I'm completely fascinated by and that I collect and hoard, maybe could be a good word for it, but also don't quite understand the rules for—they repeat and they tessellate and I feel like the distinct colors are very much about the individual as bodies but I sit in my room and think about what they mean on a social—but I don't quite have a conclusion to present to you, but I will pass around a few that I am particularly enthralled and puzzled by. Oh—and there's one on the wall—can you grab that one that's a zigzag with stripes? Ah you can pass it around, that's all I was going to do...



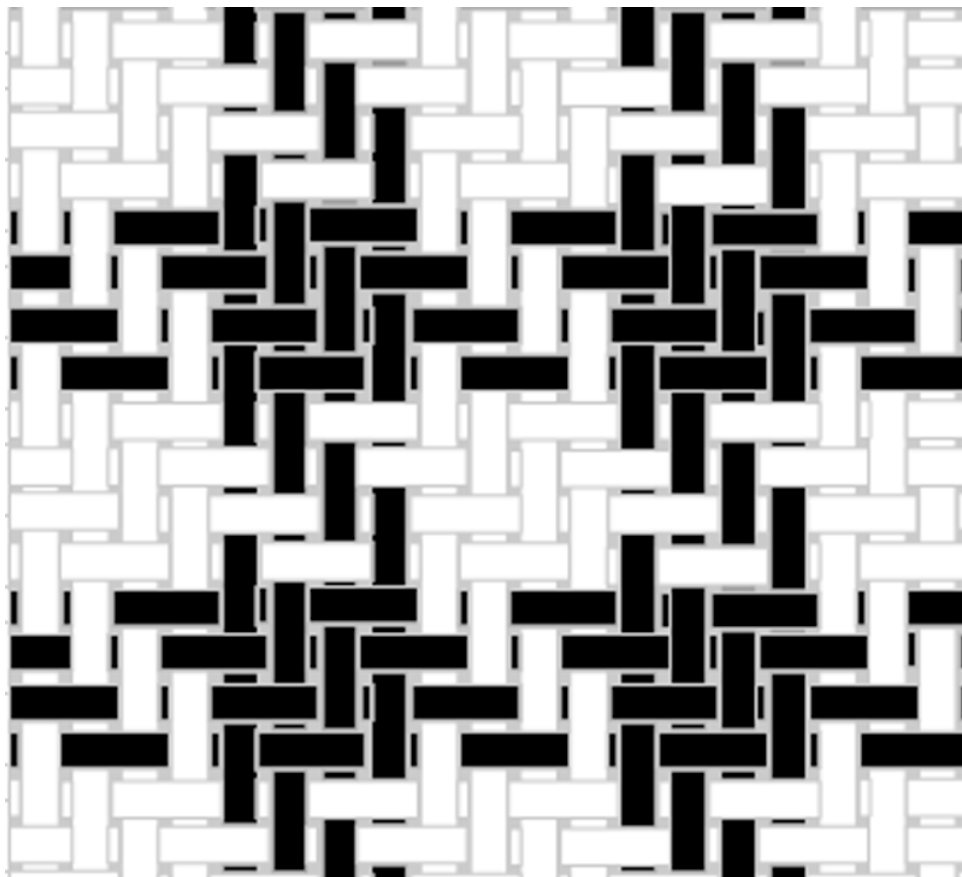
I think that at this point I would like to at this point if people are interested in that I would like to ask if, what people are seeing in fabrics in this system, or if you see fabrics in this system, because I am unsteady on these relationships. I think that I understand stripes as individuals and I understand the overlap of tessellating stripes, but I'm also interested in what else gets seen when these patterns interact. So don't be shy.

Audience member 1: Such a visual topic—it's kind of hard to—it helps to...

Fake: Yeah...it helps to be touching something.

Audience member 2: So when you were showing the hounds tooth weave, so does hounds tooth, is it constantly changing, are there different types of hounds tooth or is it just—I was squinting my eyes and it didn't look like the hounds tooth before it...I was just wondering if there were lots of different kinds of hounds tooth.

Fake: There are, and there are lots of different ways to weave it, because the finer the strands the more detail you can get, so that of course impacts it. I think that if we go back to the hounds tooth weave slide which was one or two from the end—(thanks so much Rebecca, you're a champion) you can see that, we can squint and get it to tessellate in this way, but it's also far more abstract, but, you know there's sort of a hounds tooth replication going on in this, I'll toss over at you—and you can kind of see how it gets woven over and over again, and then also that's interesting in its overlap of kind of plaid overlap of stripes and bringing that into a weave that is a tessellating hounds tooth pattern.



Audience member 3: I'd be interested to know what you think about camo, because it's kind of a print but it's also repeating and it has a really specific purpose to it to blend in and not be an individual.

Fake: Right, so, I'm going on the fly here but, you know, most of it has a distinct—the one that I'm thinking of is that classic green blobby army camo and it seems almost like it's usually a print on a solid, and thinking about it as a blending—its purpose, it's fabric with a purpose to blend in, but it also is the pile on of blobs, it's very mappish in a way.

Audience member 3: There's also ones that look super digital...

Fake: Yeah, there's digital ones now too.

Audience member 3: They're kind of beige to fit in with the desert, like with little squares all broken up but from far away they kind of make the blobby pattern.

Fake: Yeah—I would say that...it's interested to think about that with the similar colors too, maybe you have some distinguishing but...still thinking about it, the little wheel is turning, right back here.

Audience member 4: Suddenly it brings me to think about animal prints, because in a way those are camouflage as well, those are an equally camo print, but we don't think of them that way...I don't know, I mean maybe, I don't really know what I brought that up but...

Fake: There's also some animal prints that, ones that are strange fake snake skins or something, that you see a tessellating pattern in it too and it's a print, so it just seems to be this—when you get past this “I'm gonna take on the spirit of the snake” you do have something that's invoking a tessellating integrity and the way that a snake's scales would embrace snake's scales or zebra stripes sit next to zebra stripes and having that pattern relate to a body on a field.

Audience member 5: Do you think fabrics can have qualities that get evoked by things other than, maybe proximity to other elements in the design, because thinking about camouflage I thought about bright neon orange fashion camouflage, and to me that's humorous fabric because it's ironic, right, because it's camouflage but it's so ugly and bright that visually you...

Fake: Yeah right

Other audience members: Except for deer...

Audience member 5: Well, a deer wouldn't think it was funny...

Fake: Fashion slash deer camouflage.

Audience member 6: I wonder if part of the reason you're analogizing patterns and bodies is—to me it seems like there's something about a pattern that's distinct from language. If something that's inherent to language is spacing, things having distinct spaces between each other, there seems something insistently anti-linguistic about a pattern—this woven quality that means you'll never know the point of separation or fully be able to tease apart that rhythm that you're talking about.

Fake: I agree with that, and I think you said that so awesomely articulately. I definitely think there is something about visual impact that is beyond language that I can access in language that leads me personally to draw and also to be super interested in patterning and how it works. Not that—there's a lot of things that patterns can't do, conversely that language can do.

Audience member 7: I've been thinking a lot about, I mean, you did a preface about traditional woven patterns and how there is a need for more of an exploration of that against it, but I was also thinking a more generalized thing...we had a friend who learned how to weave and was learning—it took a lot of patience, because the variation of exciting patterns you could do with weaving just didn't compare to what you could do with dying or batik or printing, and then I started thinking about 80's T-shirts, you know when the really big bold prints came out and the big printed words, and it was like woah—that's crazy people are wearing that shit—and then you still think in certain not quite so industrialized nations you still have people who have this really deep attachment, like long term attachment, to very specific woven patterns that don't really change, that have a much longer memory...you know and so the printing, the artifice of being able to print on something, it's so much more instantly gratifying, you know and what does that say, where have we gone with our patterns—you know, we don't have the memory, we don't have the patience in the modern world to have that kind of relationship with these much less exciting much less instantly gratifying forms of weaving...that's what I'm thinking about with this stuff, and what does that say culture and us and individuals and us as collective community...

Fake: Yeah—there's that, there's also—I would say that, although, I think that I trip out most about a woven pattern, where I'm like—oh it's in the fabric, the idea of the pattern being dyed in the wool and put in the fabric appeals to me so much more than—I would say it's two different fields of questions too though on the line that I'm going in. There is so much more work into figuring out how to weave a pattern into something, but also it's two different kinds of work and also I'm not a specialist on it, so... zip, but yeah that's a super interesting thing to think about and consider.

Audience member 8: Can I ask you what your interest in fabrics is based on?

Fake: I got into it because they look so good... I think that one of my favorite things has always been arranging scraps and patterns together from when I was a kid, my favorite toy was this bag of rags that I had that I would dump all over myself and arrange. So I'm not really sure where the interest comes from, I know I haven't pursued it in a serious way but I'm totally visually excited by it.

Audience member 9: You know our life is so asymmetrical, where art and our plan is always symmetrical, you know, when our living existence is always asymmetrical and scrappy, when you use patterns...it's a mismatch—that's what I'm interested with patterns myself, and you're passing around these patterns they're so, you know, mixed up...

Fake: It's true! Ok—yeah—maybe winding down...

Audience member 10: Yeah I have a question so, certain patterns have social connotations within the actual pattern, in the fabric, like let's say camo with the military, pin stripes and business, things like that...have you ever run into a pattern where you felt like the social connotation of the pattern was mismatched to how you felt about the actual weave interacting or the forms in the pattern?

Fake: Yes—sometimes I have...I'm trying to think of a good example of that...

Audience member 10: Because you gave the example of the bus and you said that it actually made sense to you...

Fake: Yeah, and I think that's also something with this very structure that I am laying out, part of it is that it can confound itself, I can put out these rules and then it can flip it and reverse it and that's, it can deconstruct itself as a pattern, which is interesting, to have something that's really fluorescent and wild and all over the place somewhere where you wouldn't expect it, like a library, is a weird place, but what happens then, it kind of wilds up the library in a way, and puts the bodies back in the library, or...in the fabric, in the library...fabric, bodies...

It's something that I'm totally interested in, it's interesting to give a lecture on something I'm not totally concrete on.

Andy Roche: What about argyle which is a pattern which is only ever shown in one stripe?

Fake— Yeah, um...

Roche: What's that about?

Fake: I almost included an argyle because I felt like, for me the essence of it is a checkerboard pattern in a diamond shape but then with the stripes running through it, so I was going to use it as an example of, you have a familial pattern like a checkerboard with the self, individual lines imposed on it, so you have individuals moving through family structures and the overlap of all the different communities we become part of. I only found ugly argyles, I don't have any really that are... presentable... I have a lot of argyle socks, and it just seemed like—here let's pass the underwear around... but I think that that is kind of what argyle is about a little bit, you know based on this quacking... we can keep going but, thank you so much, thanks.