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Abstract:

This paper explores the complexity of collaborative authorship in the humanities, proposing the string figure as a dexterous model with which to map connections amongst a broad network of contributors. Drawing on the recent work of Donna Haraway, in addition to post-structuralist thinkers like Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, string figures (eg cat's cradle) are rendered as adequately supple and striated to the diagramming of creative synergy. To this end the authors deploy fictocritical and experimental writing techniques, as well as images, probing the complexities of joint composition. Their text takes on the shape of a string game passed back and forth across a motley crew of agents and actors.

Biographical notes:

Henry Adam Svec teaches in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Waterloo, Canada. His research interests include media archeology, popular music, and digital culture, and he has published articles in such venues as the *Canadian Journal of Communication* and *Popular Music & Society*. His first book, *American Folk Music as Tactical Media*, explores the rich diagrams of communication and media littered across the long American folk revival, from Alan Lomax's digital "Global Jukebox" to Bob Dylan's noisy typewriter. His second book, a novel, titled *Life Is Like Canadian Football and Other Authentic Folk Songs*, was published by Invisible Publishing in 2021.

Zach Pearl is an American-Canadian writer, designer, curator and emerging digital media scholar with a critical focus on the intersection of art, science and technology. He teaches in the Faculty of Design at OCAD University in Toronto and is also a PhD candidate and graduate instructor in English at the University of Waterloo, where his dissertation research examines the experimental "genre" of fictocriticism as cybernetic literature. His speculative writing on art and technology has previously appeared in *Art & Education* (e-flux/Artforum), *English Studies in Canada*, *Peripheral Review*, and various exhibition catalogues.

Keywords: String figures; authorship; collaboration; textuality; weaving; Donna Haraway.

The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (*text, fabric, braid*: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided – or braiding – voices form the writing: when it is alone, the voice does no labor, transforms nothing: it *expresses*, but as soon as the hand intervenes to gather and intertwine the inert threads, there is labor, there is transformation.

– Roland Barthes, 1974, p. 160

Looping

In Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (1991), string figures are partials within a broader spectrum of undulating, writhing “naturalcultural” generation. Alongside “Speculative Fabulation” and “Speculative Feminism,” for example, in Haraway's text these performative artefacts (involving looped string, hands, and intricate but ephemeral patterns) are facilitators of interspecies and ecological connectivism. Her interest (in string figures) is more aesthetic or metaphorical than historical or anthropological;

for the same motion of the fingers in typing, in typographically making discourse, also spin the yarn and shuttle the weft, manipulate their surroundings. In interstitial movements of crossover, the hands “make kin” with whatever they contact. Weaving a worldview, a circuit, a language game.

Communication qua communion:

The cyborg is text, machine, body, and metaphor – all theorized and engaged in practice in terms of communications (Haraway, 1991, p. 212).

For Haraway, the string figure takes on the shape of a methodological lodestar by which her trans-disciplinary storytelling can be mapped and constellated:

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before, or relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand, digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site, to craft conditions for finite flourishing on terra, on earth. String figures require holding still in order to receive and pass on. String figures can be played by many, on all sorts of limbs, as long as the rhythm of accepting and giving is sustained. (Haraway, 2016, p. 10)

The body of any discourse is like this, too – whole organs only sensible through their giving and taking, an imminent risk of collapse under the weight of so many suspended threads. The relished point of contact between them is ever so brief before they turn themselves inside out again; a catching, a looping; a tongue that dissipates as it speaks. Or a frozen one that goes “[silencesilencesilencesilencesilencesilencesilencesilence]” until you throw it into the frying pan, releasing its cacophonous sounds (van Herk, 1992, pp. 11 & 23).

Risk of dissolve gives urgency to the precarity of the string figure and to the cybernetic voice, when the essence of both are dependent upon perpetual flows of information.

Strategically mimicking the string figure, the book as a whole unfolds less as a stabbing set of essays than as a series of weaving catches and passes, in which

“each piece is self-sufficient, and yet ... is never anything but the interstice of its neighbours: the work consists of no more than an inset” (Barthes, 1977, p. 94). To deploy the fragment is to produce “a text with uncertain quotation marks, with floating parentheses” (Barthes, 1977, p. 106).

In articulating her theoretical formulations of posthuman assemblages, we follow Haraway’s voice (a line [of flight?]) in conversation with fellow voices (other lines); thusly extremely local and pragmatic ways of thinking – and making – and being-together take shape.

Haraway’s string figure is a kind of theoretical writing technology – an inscription medium, however low-fidelity – which must “furnish its own code either as model or anti-model as it undertakes its own critique, provides its own process of self-reflection ...” (Gibbs, 2005). SF proposes writing that postulates on the act of making as it happens, and a mode of critique that intentionally tangles narrative with theory in

the interest of generating “situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1991). Doing SF requires an embodied criticism – “the fictocritical”. Whether making string figures or writing SF, one shuttles the “recognition of difference” back and forth, between the warps of performance and theory (Kerr, 1996).

Staying with the Trouble, along with Haraway’s shorter earlier publications on the topic, has already ignited a creative burst of string figure application across the social sciences and humanities. Alyssa D. Niccolini, Shiva Zarabadi, and Jessica Ringrose (2018) have carried Haraway’s string figures into the gender studies classroom, highlighting the form’s compatibility with embodied materialisms in terms of pedagogy. Sara Tolbert and Jesse Bazzul (2020) deploy Haraway’s string figures (in conversation with Jacques Rancière) as a lens through which the politics of science education are reframed. Noel Gough and Chessa Adsit-Morris (2020) take up the “compositionist” angle in Haraway in their playful and polyvocal meditation on the applicability of her recent work to understandings of the writing process itself. And Sebastian De Line (2018) has explored the connections between Indigenous writers and Haraway’s work in terms of the larger argument about non-human kinships. This is only a small sampling.

We have been working on the string figure as well, looking beyond Haraway to the entire history of string figure fascination, namely the cross-cultural world-building activities that have often been associated with this medium. From late nineteenth century anthropologists, to mid-century filmmakers, to contemporary artists and critical theorists, it has occurred to me that this tradition (across which string figures have been dissected, categorised, mapped, and deployed) might be worth investigating from a media-archeological perspective, a lens through which dreams, desires, and discourses

dalliances, derelicts and diffractions

...

“Diffraction is also an apt metaphor for describing the methodological approach that I use of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter.” (Barad, 2007, p. 71)

Relations of difference are the only means through which bodies come to matter, through which discourses survive, even fictocritical ones.

do tend to play as significant a role in media-historical change as actual institutions or devices in themselves (see Parikka, 2012; Kluitenburg, 2011; Huhtamo, 2011). String figures have been simultaneously media, users/performers, and techniques through which crucial questions have been probed. What does it mean to make (or to become) art? Where does the subject end and technology begin?

How to substantiate? How to
refabricate the unfashionable “real”?
(Jones, 1992, p. 28)

What does it mean to be (or to become) connected, intertwined, and entangled with and in other actants and agencies? What medial anxieties and desires have been extended and palliated by discourse on string figures? Does string itself have something to teach us about *digital* media culture? In 2019 I was awarded a SSHRC Insight Development Grant to pursue this research, which would make possible travel to archives and conferences, acquisition of various research materials, and employment of research assistants.

Which is where, however, my trouble began. Despite the fact that I was already well attuned to Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s “schizophrenic” or “rhizomatic” take on authorial status, I was not myself accustomed to collaboration as a writer. There were not several of me; there was one.

But in writing, “there isn’t a subject; *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 18).

So, what role, indeed, would my talented graduate research assistant be playing in the research process?

To play a role is to assume form; pull the strings taut and wide for all to see. “Desire evidently passes through these positions and states or, rather, through all these lines [of flight]. Desire is not form, but a procedure, a [collaborative] process” of stretching out (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 8).

On what pages were the established models for this kind of collaboration clearly set out? I consulted colleagues who had held similar grants, but the advice was not consistent. I am not sure that my colleagues grasped the tangles, the traps, which I could already see surrounding my labours. It is one thing, for example, to make photocopies or scans, or compile bibliographies, or organize Dropbox folders of photographs taken in the archives. But what happens when a research assistant begins *to write*? What happens then? Will they need to be credited as co-author? What will this mean for my Tenure & Promotion file?

Passing/to-and-fro

In the peer-reviewed article “Toxicological Studies on Cutworms VII: Microplot Field Experiments on the Effectiveness of Four Experimental Insecticides Applied as Rye Cover Crop and Soil Treatments for Control of the Dark-Sided Cutworm,” published in 1971 in the *Journal of Economic Entomology* (Harris, Svec & Sans, 1971), three photographs are presented with the study. Figure 1 is a wide-shot of dozens of “microplots” of leafy, waxy tobacco plants in Southwestern Ontario, where the research was conducted, revealing the broader ecology of the experiment. Figure 2 is a closer-range image of a single plant growing within a long, sandy bed; “untreated control plot,” reads the description.

So much of earth history has been told in the
thrall of the fantasy of the first beautiful
words and weapons, of the first beautiful
weapons *as* words and vice versa
(Haraway, 2016, p. 118).

“Authorship” – a linguistic tool for digging
and dividing up knowledge, like land, with
geometric precision.

Finally, in figure 3 we see an image of the “Dursban rye treatment; ½ lb AI/acre”. In this example the tobacco plant’s foliage is comparatively abundant, overflowing. In fact, the second author of the study – in plaid short-sleeve shirt and chinos – is gently bending back the stalk of the plant, perhaps so the authors’ results can be more clearly perceived. His face is shadowed by the blunt brim of his straw bowler, but I know that this is my grandfather.

It is not clear to me what the logic of the author ordering was on this publication. C. R. Harris is listed as first author, H. J. Svec as second, and W. W. Sans as third. It is possible that Harris and Svec considered their contributions to be equal, and thus opted to list their names according to alphabetical order, whereas Sans’s contribution was agreed to be lesser, thus relegating his name to the bottom. On the other hand, maybe the contributions of each were in fact unequal; Harris’s being greatest, and diminishing down the line. Yet, it is not impossible that all contributions were equal, or even that Svec and Sans had done the bulk of the work but that Harris, for example, applied for a grant or held the doctorate, and thus his name was given greatest priority in the order. Finally, perhaps the research – informed by knowledge of relevant literature, parlayed by earned discipline in the methods of entomological research – could be framed as the contribution of a broader collective, of which Harris and Svec and Sans, as merely the hands or tools carrying out the design, were collecting the data.

*I do not want to be an author. I want to be a
weed.*

weed | wi:d |

noun

1 a wild [idea] growing where it is not wanted and in competition with cultivated [knowledge regimes]: “keep the seedlings clear of weeds.”

2 {British informal} a contemptibly [fickle writer]: he thought [manifestoes] were for weeds and wets.

verb [with object]

1 remove unwanted [contradictions] from (an area of ground): I was weeding a [conclusion].

2 (weed someone/something out) remove an inferior or unwanted component of a group or collection.

A footnote added to the end of the authorship muddies the waters even further: “The authors acknowledge the technical assistance of G. McFadden, B. Shoemaker, H. Simmons, and F. Zadel” (Harris, Svec, & Sans, 1971, p. 493).

The body of the text offers no solutions either. The methodology and analysis are rendered drily, objectively, as though devised and conducted by a non-human, or at least objective, machine.

Yet paradoxically, each of these texts calls attention to itself not merely as a machine but a fictional work. That is, either through the direct intrusion of the authorial voice or by some more complicated arrangement of formal structures, these texts signal to the reader that they are artefacts of human creation (Porush, 1985, p. 19).

Even when the previous publications of authors involved in the study are referenced or cited, aside from the coincidence of the names, there is no indication that there is a biographical connection between the past and present authors:

The dark-sided cutworm, *Euxoa messoria* (Harris), has been a serious pest of flue-cured tobacco grown in Southwestern Ontario since 1961. DDT provides effective control either by early spring application to the rye crop grown in rotation with tobacco or at higher rates by direct application to the soil (Harris et al. 1968, 1969), but because of its persistence in soil, less residual insecticides are required. Laboratory and field studies indicated that Dursban® (O,O-diethyl O-(3,5,6-trichloro-2-pyridyl) phosphorothioate) and Bay 37289 (O-ethyl 0-2,4,5-trichlorophenyl ethylphosphonothioate) provide equally effective control at lower rates of application (Harris & Svec 1968, 1970; Harris et al. 1969). (Harris, Svec & Sans, 1971, p. 493)

This governmental research network morphs and modulates according to the conventions of citation, Harris at times comes to subsume the others under an innocent “et al”, the inconsistency of the reference section, however, begs the question: Who is responsible?

And why? Why be responsible in writing? Is there a moral imperative to inscription beyond communication itself? Surely, the act of reading must involve an element of risk – a risk inherent in the act of writing; the promise of authority already being suspect.

The risk inherent in “not decisively [being] any one thing” (Kerr, 1996) is that meaning making itself becomes play, and the text is a poseable, multiple, articulated thing – an autopoietic “device or armature” through which “practices of the self” are invented and revealed (King, 1994, p. 15).

Characteristic postures include crossing the boundaries of academic disciplines and fiction; structuring the work around a number of subject positions; dwelling on the “I” of writing and what [Esther] Probyn has called the “problem” of autobiography in cultural studies: working on the contradictions between theories of subjectivity and the experience of everyday life (Kerr, 1996).

There is nothing out of the ordinary in this scientific publication from 1971 and these features of the presentation would also not be out of place in 2021. However, the numerous dilemmas that intersect with the problem of attribution in multiple author publications – having to do with ethics, reputational capital, the structural hierarchies of academia, and more – are more of a post-war than transhistorical problem in academic publishing. As Claxton (2004) has explained, the ballooning of multiple authorship dates only back to the mid-century rise of the infamous “publish or perish” mandate, emerging as the still-dominant paradigm of numerous scholarly disciplines. Nonetheless, sociologists of science, in addition to editors and scientists, have devoted much energy in recent decades to the devising of solutions related to issues such as “gift” authorship and the attributional vagueness, in a variety of scientific fields (see Borenstein & Shamoo, 2015; Brand et al, 2015; Grieger, 2005; Resnik, 1997; Rennie, Yank, & Emanuel, 1997).

To be: *Really in the weeds.*
Or: *In the thick of it, now.*
Ergo: *The wilderness.*

“Nature” is problematic because it is so close together, thick with unsuspecting alliances. Like fingers clawing in dark earth, brushing against nightcrawlers and mites and fungi, there are few true spaces that exist between beings to distinguish them, *attribute* them. Most everything is currently being touched or awaiting being touched by some other force in its immediate environment, comprising a circuit of sensation. The pea flowers exist only in complement to the ants outlining their sepals and the invisible rays of sun bouncing off their petals to make indigo.

But the pea patch, for one such as I am, is dangerous ground, and a very small area on which to base very large assumptions. Nevertheless, we are talking about propagation, the propagation of an aesthetic position that has been encoded in our concepts of [authorship and earth] (van Herk, 1992, p. 162).

One possible solution that has received traction is the contributor model, recommended by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (2019). Rather than simply indicating authors in a list (which is interpreted differently according to disciplinary convention anyway), the ICMJE has suggested that collaboration can also be framed as *contributions*, additionally involving a more specific taxonomy. For example, the contributor of methodological framework could be thus indicated; as could the contributor of data collection; as could the contributor of the literature review; and so on (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, 2019).

Methodological Framework — Nature.
Data Collection — Couplets of Moist
Eyeballs that connect to (Equally) Moist
Receptors Housed inside thick Grey Matter.
Literary Survey — the fingers, the toes,
the hairs at the nape, the lips, the longest
lashes, all nerve endings that have produced
feedback to establish the boundaries of Self,
etc.
Narration — Self-Nature (Autopoiesis).

The story in my family is that my grandfather, Henry J. Svec, in fact did do much of the work in his collaborations with Dr. C. R. Harris. I want to make clear that I am not sure of the veracity of these claims; it is possible that minor sleights or resentments, perhaps unavoidable when working

with a single collaborator over the course of two decades or so, have been magnified and distorted out of proportion through the act of telling.

Every telling is an exercise in eclipsing
one's own tongue, wrapping shapes around
old ideas – string games in the mouth.

What is certain is that my grandfather had been trained as a gardener in Czechoslovakia, but that his first job in Canada was as a servant for a Canadian ambassador who resided in Quebec. He then worked with my grandmother in the fields of Southwestern Ontario, picking and pruning in the stone fruit orchards of Kent County, and finally finding (miraculously, really) a government job in a greenhouse, assisting white Anglo-Saxon men with doctorates in the pursuit of their research programs.

“Every shadow shadows shadow. A shade
cast upon different light: rippled light upon
shade.” (van Herk, 1990, p. 111)

Without a strong command of English, and without any other possibility, really, of an institutional home, my grandfather needed Dr. Harris. The degree to which Harris needed him is unanswerable, given that both are dead. Would more detailed description of the division of labour answer our questions? Or would this move conceal as much as reveal? And to what degree does the contributor model map onto the humanities as well, where sometimes the nature of collaboration is less settled or rigid?

Weaving

The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away. We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think. Also because it's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking. To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 3)

Deleuze's and Guattari's famous admission, that “each of us was several,” that there was therefore “already quite a crowd” is nearly a cliché in the poststructuralist archive of authorial attributional reversals, [*though shockingly no less relevant today*]. They playfully acknowledge the disconnection between the form and content of their radical philosophical experimentalism, on one hand,

the looping finger, straight and taut as it
revolves in its primal yet mechanical
rhythm, winding up the tension that will
become a wish-image, a sign,

and the stupid conventions of the publishing industries, on the other hand –

the intervening, “pick-up” finger, typically
the middle or longest of the phalanges,
which can be used to delicately carry and
pass one line beneath the tension of an
Other.

In a short stretch of text, they offer an ideological critique of this academic and literary doxa, but also an argument for the power of art (and philosophy, and music, ~~and anything else~~ or **any text too**) to undo those conventions despite their persistence. In other words, despite the limitations and obfuscations of the tag “by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari”, the text itself does the work of ~~highlighting~~ **jeopardizing** and pushing beyond those limits.

The matter, however, is more intricate and stubborn than otherwise fellow-travelling poststructuralist critiques of the author. Roland Barthes (1977) went so far as to proclaim the death of the figure. Michel Foucault (1977) sought ~~a more historical analysis to~~ **jeopardize history by revealing it as narrative**; Foucault’s approach considered the discursive and institutional production of the author as an object of knowledge through which certain kinds of texts are gathered and connected; in other words, rather than the biographical author, Foucault shifts attention to the “author-function” that is an effect of [a] ~~particular codes and conventions, practices and texts~~ **SF, one that renders all images and word-images as programmable extensions of a universal body; a technology in its most basic conception, for better or worse**. However, in his lyrical conclusion to the essay, the death drive, or authorless utopianism, again rears its head again: “We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity” (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). Comparatively then, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s rich opening paragraph of *A Thousand Plateaus* frames the matter relatively modestly and empirically: (a) Deleuze and Guattari wrote *Anti-Oedipus* (just as they have written the sequel); *and* (b) the thinking and writing they have done in the production of the present text challenges the self-same identity of the authors themselves, as well as the boundaries between this present text and others to which it connects. As they wrote in *Anti-Oedipus*, “Desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down” (1987, p. 8). And above we see the desiring-machine of the author-function breaking down in comic fashion. However, the breaking down of a machine is not the same thing as its obliteration or disappearance.

[W]e can sketch the ambivalence in slightly different terms: if the human observer is merely neutral with respect to the world he describes – essentially a device for receiving

and processing information received about the world – then the universe, and humans as objects in that universe, should be amenable to description by totally deterministic logical systems. But if the human observer somehow creates or affects what he observes, then his descriptions are never free from his own paradoxical presence and the contingencies attendant upon his humanness (Porush, 1985, pp. 46–47).

“Writing is upheld not by the subject of understanding, but by a divided subject, even a pluralized subject, that occupies, not a place of enunciation, but permutable, multiple, and mobile places ... ” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 111)

Of course, the heady days of French theory are far in the rear-view mirror. The current question is whether these insights can inform a workable response to the problems of attribution introduced above. How might the humanities contribute to this ~~issue~~ **entanglement** which, though perhaps a bigger ~~problem~~ **apparatus** in the hard sciences, exists also in the disciplines more conventionally to do with interpretation and meaning, in which the roles and components of collaborative research projects are perhaps ~~less discrete and divisible~~ **assemblages, and constellations** (of the pluralised subject)?

Just as there can be no end to reimagining the possible combinations of creative and intellectual labourer, there must be no end to reimagining the mechanisms by which these combinations might be ~~categorized~~ **apprehended and defined enacted**. The proposal of the present authors is that the image of the string figure is one workable approach, particularly well suited to the blurry and messy work **of making theory** being done in the humanities.

As Marshall McLuhan hyperbolically argued in his 1962 landmark *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, the alphabet combined with serial industrial production (aka the printing press) has historically fostered linearity, the division of labour, and abstract categorical thinking. Without wanting to follow McLuhan all the way on these points, it is nonetheless worth considering the limits of language to accurately acknowledge the dynamics of a collaborative creative relationship. Alphabet writing in Indo-European derivatives indeed moves from left to write, beginning to end, across an ordering of either diminishing or increasing importance. These capacities predate the printing press of course, dating back to the birth of writing proper, when ancient Sumerians began imprinting their economic records first through the collection of clay balls and, later, through the graphic replication of these tokens on two-dimensional clay inscription surfaces (Innis, 2007; Schmandt-Besserat, 2010). String, however, though of course it also plays an important role in pre-modern communication history by way of the Incan quipu, is capable of multi-dimensional mapping.

[E]xperimenting and theorizing are ~~dynamic practices~~ **braided desire lines** ~~that play a constitutive role in the production of objects and subjects and matter and meaning~~. As I will explain, theorizing and experimenting are not about *intervening* (from outside) but about *intra-acting* from within, and as part of, the ~~phenomena~~ **figure** produced (Barad, 2007, p. 56).

The art of the string figure is a particularly vivid illustration of the ways in which this medium, unlike print, can draw limbs, and bodies, and hands, and ideas, and images, into intricately (and even moving!) maps and diagrams.

The pros of the string figure model of attribution are several. First, this form of diagramming duly acknowledges the intricacies of the labours of both researching and writing, the ways in which collaboration in and of itself (à la Deleuze and Guattari) can complicatedly entangle if not outright dissolve the identities of the writing and researching subjects. Second, however, and unlike the contributor model, the string figure model is inherently flexible and stretchable. Just as string itself is capable of being woven and pulled in nearly an infinity of directions, movable by both hands and feet and mouth in the rendering of movable images, the string figure model of attribution might similarly render the nearly infinite ways in which intellectual and/or creative output can nearly infinitely unfold differently depending on the project and the nature of the group thereby engaged.

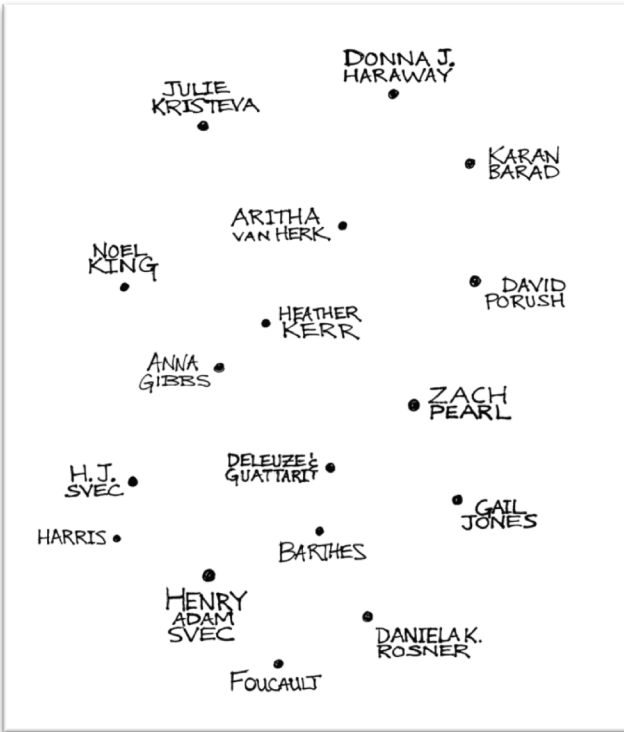


Fig. 1. Constellation of writers and writers who are quoted in the text

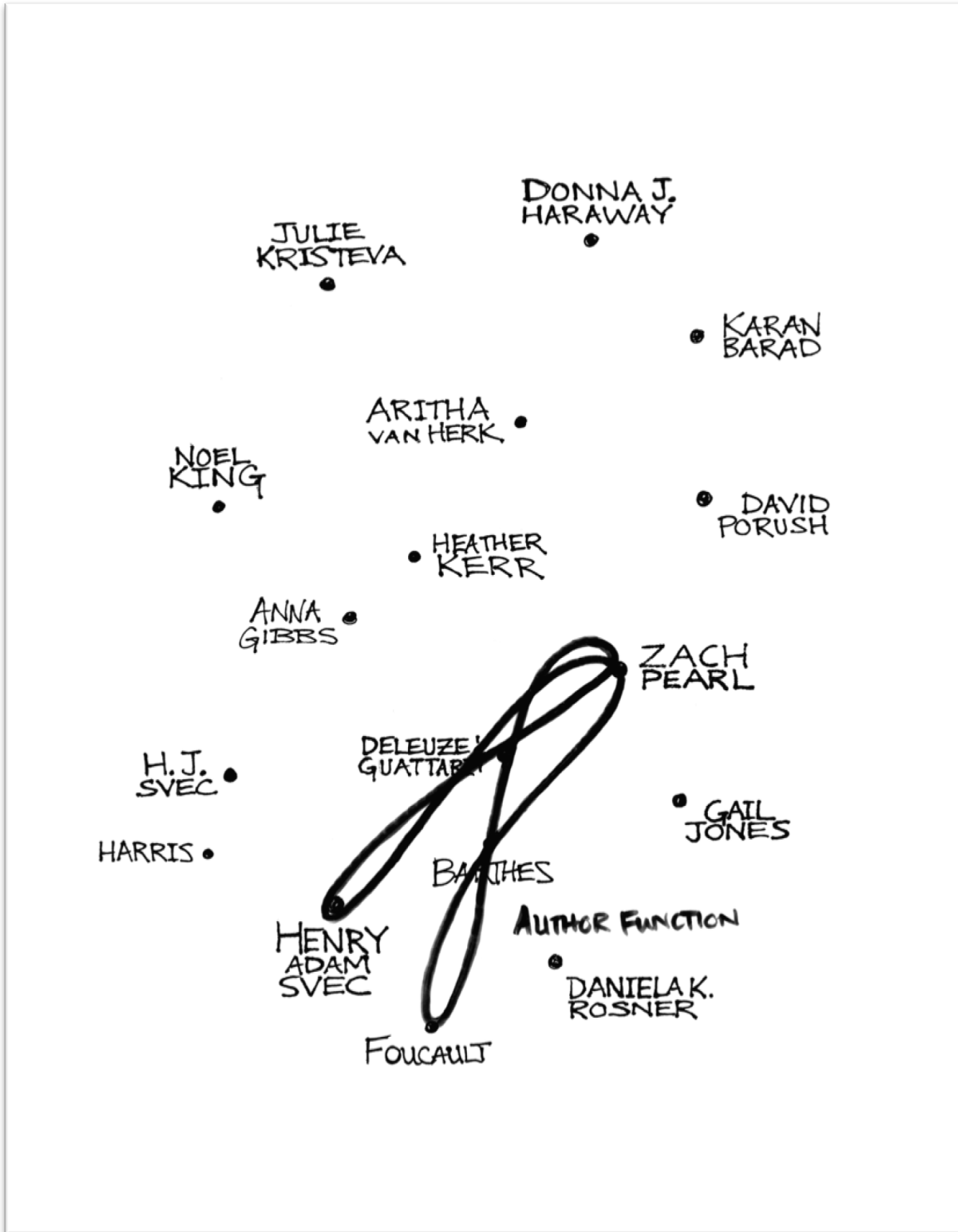


Fig. 2. Illustration of SF of the author function in the text

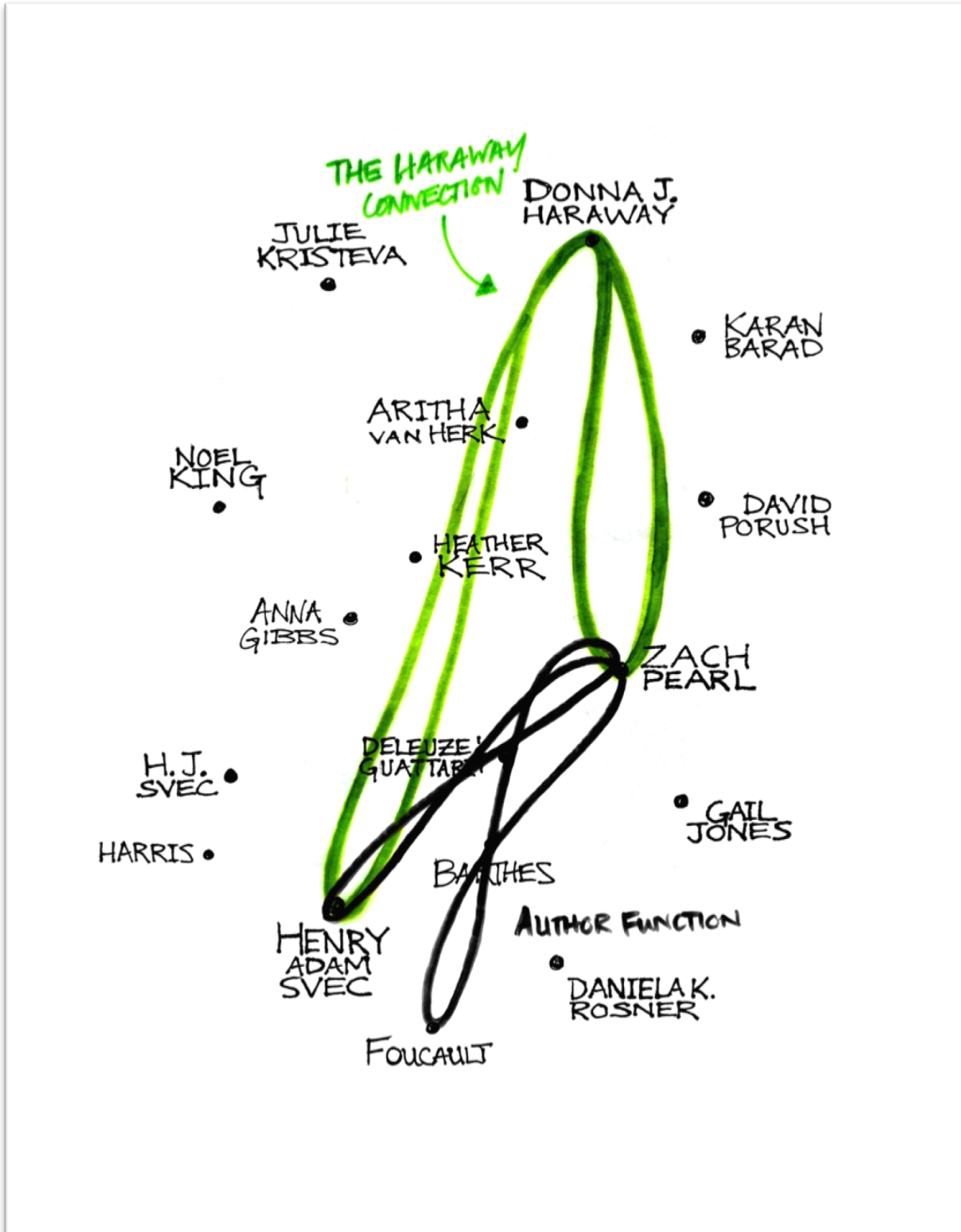


Fig. 3. Illustration of SF of the connection to Haraway's SF articulation layered on top of the author function and constellation of perspectives.

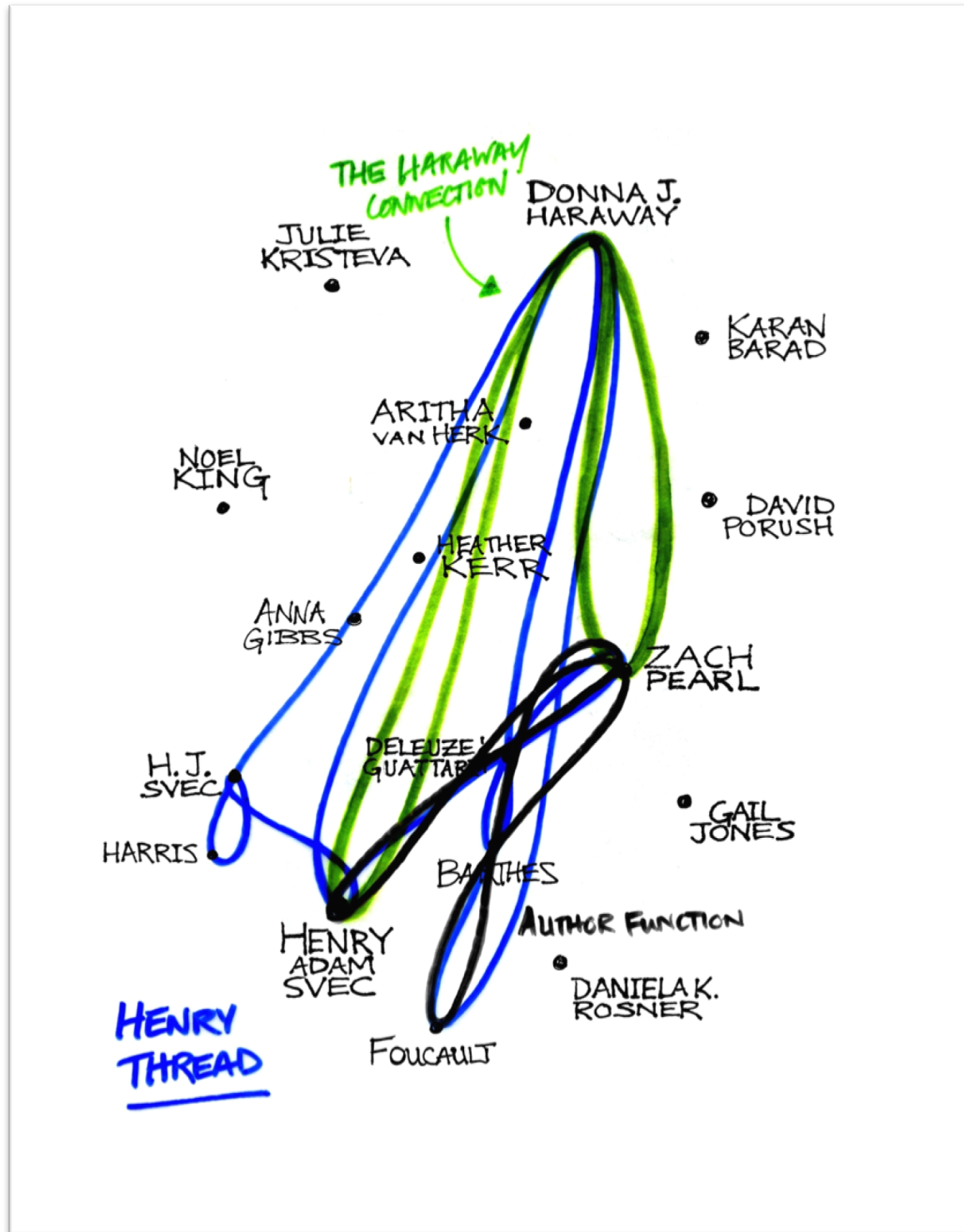


Fig. 4. Illustration of Dr. Svec's weaving of his own voice with that of others in the text.

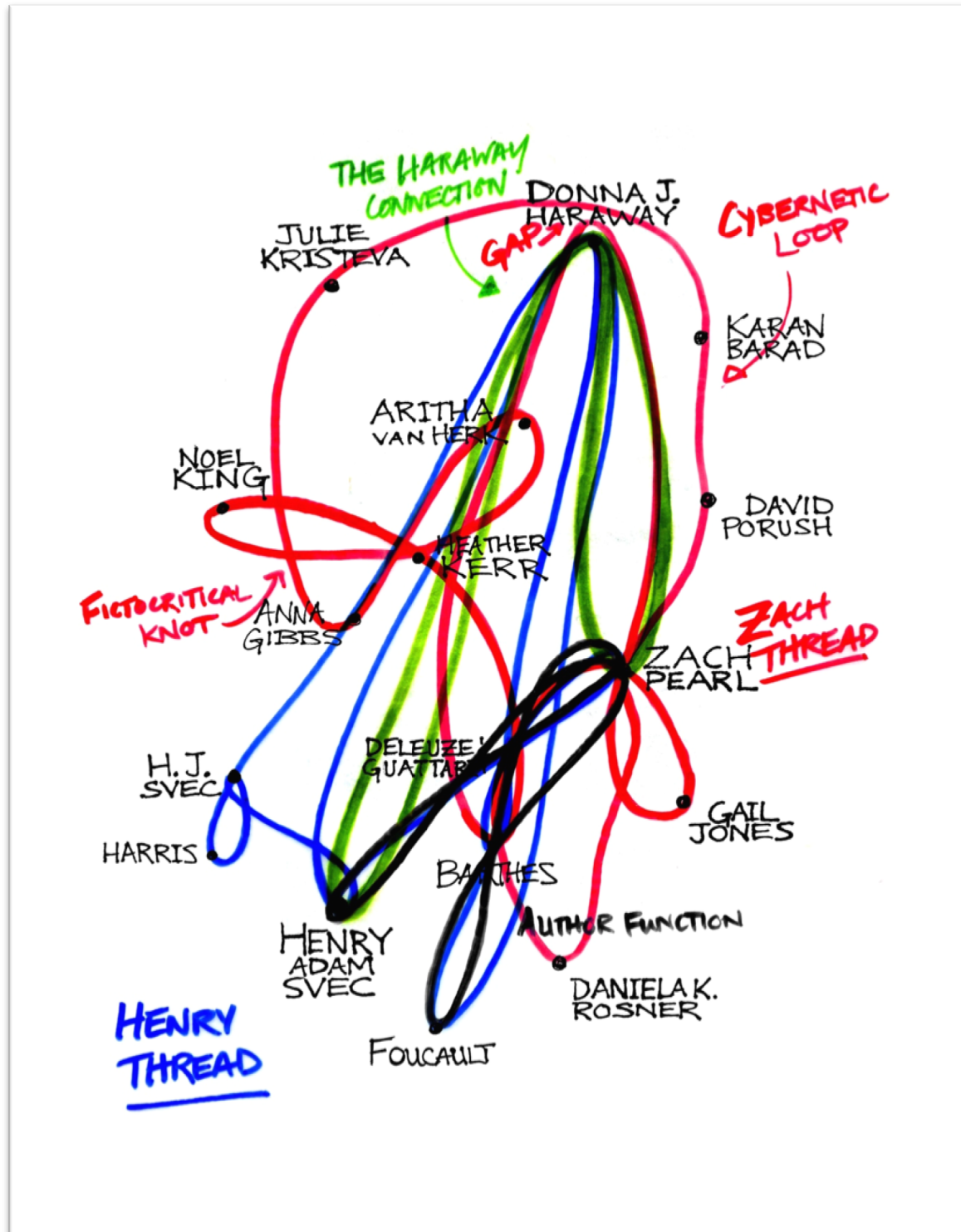


Fig. 5. Illustration of graduate research assistant Zach Pearl's weaving of his own voice with that of others in the text.

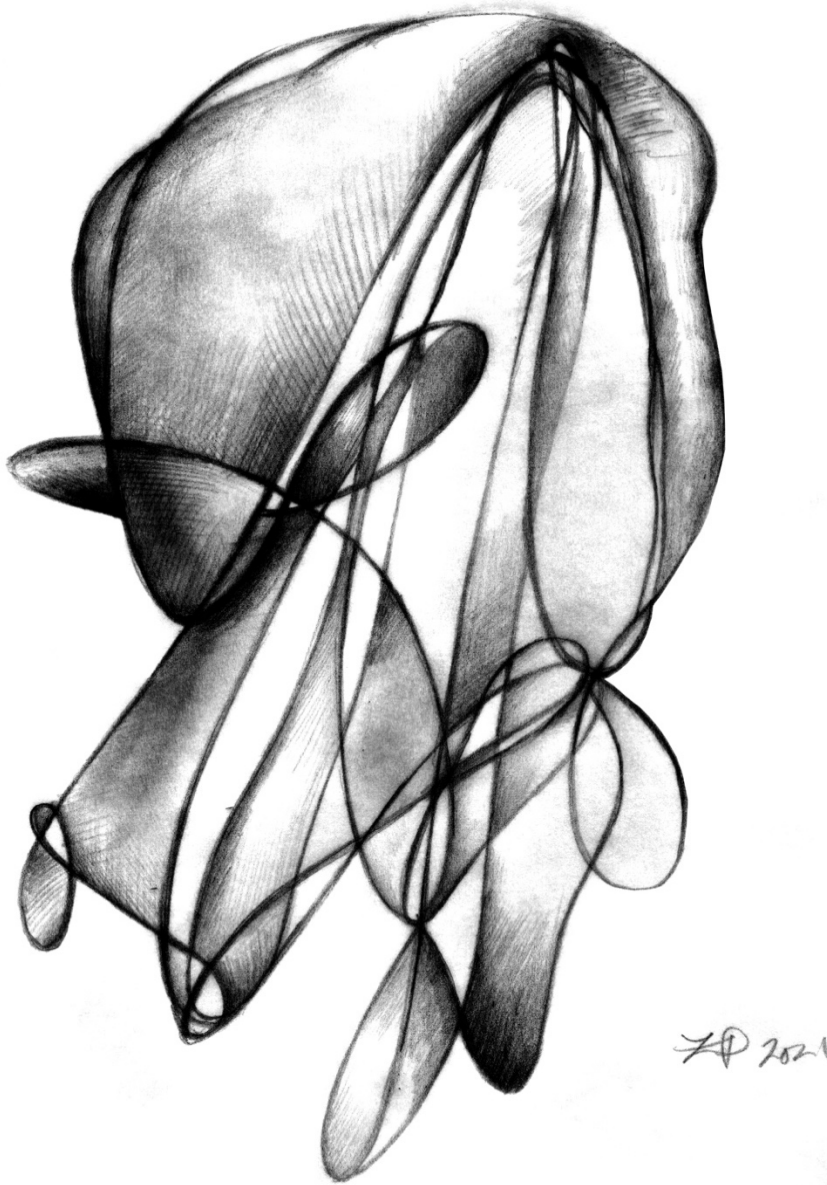


Fig. 6. Dimensional rendering of the SF discourse presented in the text; darker areas loosely represent where voice and authority have been repeatedly crossed or layered.

Knotting/tying-off

Receiving a research grant implies a Before and After timeline; there is BG – before the grant – and AG – after the grant. The research proper has not yet begun in the BG era; one merely has at this point a premonition and a literature review. [Although, it should be acknowledged that there is embodied “data” in the waiting and the spaces between the research.] In any case, the granting itself, from the point of view of the granting institution, at least, and the positional ideology thereof, is the inciting incident in the origin story of the research project. By receiving the grant, the researcher is able to launch into the AG epoch, at which point the hunches, promises and bluffs are transmogrified into actionable items.

Before earning a master’s degree in curatorial practice, and long before weaseling my way into an English doctoral program to propose experimental art writing as a form of digital media literacy, I did my undergrad in design. As has been customary since the late 1990s, going to design school meant being exposed to design thinking pedagogy – a methodology that focuses on iteration, collaboration, and empathy as the main principles for “generating possibilities” rather than solving problems. But most importantly, design thinking is feedback-driven – the process first forming a loop and eventually a matrix, a figuration. Thus, these eyes and hands have already been schooled in the craftwork of SF:

For design, the cat’s cradle suggests working across heterogeneity: enacting contaminations that create opportunities from each encounter (Rosner, 2018, p. 85).

Of course, this fantasy of the granting industries belies the messy natures of intellectual and creative work. For, certainly, by the time the research proposal is finally sent, there has already been digging, scraping, etching, and assembling; even in the case of a sole-authored study, there has already been collaborating. Therefore, by the time my research assistant, Zach, entered the picture, there was already quite a crowd indeed, even if Henry Adam Svec was the Principle and Sole Investigator on paper.

Autoethnography is also a popular companion method to design thinking pedagogy, and it makes traditional

authorship suspicious. Figures ranging from Roland Barthes to Lucy Suchman were spoken of in my education as demigods for their ability to “write themselves into their work” while maintaining critical perspective (notably, not “critical distance”). While the user *is* the focus of the design solution, the design thinking method actively acknowledges the designer, or artist or writer (what difference is there, really, these days?) is also a user; a “you”, a “them”. Therefore, the maker is also *of matter* to the research and subject to its distribution, and “the [subsequent] radical move[s] to provoke design insights through embodied encounters” (Rosner, 2018, p. 37).

I can trace over his contributions, can follow the threads of his discourse back to their sources, and on from there, but of course I cannot be sure what Zach makes of the weird way of working we have managed to weave together. We have agreed to let my name go first, out of convention. May the maps and meanderings we have co-harnessed, however, serve as a gesture towards other paradigms.

For my thesis project, I did an installation. Admittedly, looking back it on it now, it was quite confused and tawdry. But my professors showered praise on me out of sympathy and the earnest belief that my idealism would settle down at some point – yield clarity.

The installation was sculptural: Gold and black sculptures of circus figures made of paper hung from the ceiling, and each crumpled bit of paper was part of Derrida’s essay on *différance*. Did I know what I was doing then? Certainly not. But the gesture feels familiar still – still relevant. My point at the time in literally stuffing sculpture with text was to draw attention to the fluidity of material, and that solid matter was, significantly, inherently textual. Decades later, it’s clear to me that this relationship also works in reverse; the written text is also a substance that can be twined between

fingers and strung carefully across a given surface.

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