

## *Flechtwerk* or Weave Work: Interval, Event and Circularity

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The present paper traces the intermittent occurrence of the signifier of the weave and its variations like the mesh and the grid in notebook entries where the potential of the weave was neither assimilated or integrated with the author's creative agency but persistently deferred over a long period of time. Thus, the initial focus is upon the intervals between the appearances of the weave and their gradual increase in frequency in relation to the artwork where both can be seen as the emergence of the symptom. Here a parallel is drawn between Did-Huberman's study of Aby Warburg's Atlas Mnemosyne and the crowded montage of images on the board in the author's studio, the interstices between which also resemble an irregular weave or *Flechtwerk*. Continued deferral of the signifier of the weave was suspended with the three unforeseeable and contingent 'events': the etymological origin of the gate as a woven structure; a woven curtain in a Coptic Monastery separating the inner sanctum from the congregation; and sacking fissured by the interior pressure of plant growth. In addition to the psychoanalytic perspective of the signifier of the weave as symptom, we offer an alternative, but complementary reading of the weave and the mesh of enigmatic contingent 'events' as place holders that serve in the complex shaping of the singularity of the artwork and the practical knowledge of the efficacy of transformative repetition as Bruno Latour's notion of circulating reference.

Keywords: weave, interval, symptom, circulating reference.

*Este trabalho traça a ocorrência intermitente do significante da trama e suas variações, tais como a malha e a grelha, em registros de cadernos de apontamentos onde o potencial do trançado não foi nem assimilado, nem integrado, como parte da ação criativa do autor, antes persistentemente adiado durante um num longo intervalo período de tempo. Assim, o foco inicial recai sobre os intervalos entre aparições do trançado e o seu gradual aumento de frequência na relação com a obra de arte, podendo ambos ser vistos como a emergência do sintoma. Traça-se um paralelismo entre o estudo que Didi-Huberman fez de Atlas Mnemosyne, de Aby Warburg, e a montagem superlotada de imagens do painel no estúdio do autor, cujos interstícios também mostram semelhanças com um trançado irregular, ou Flechtwerk. O contínuo adiamento do significante do trançado foi suspenso com três "eventos" imprevistos e contingentes: a origem etimológica da palavra "gate" [portão] enquanto estrutura tecida; uma cortina tecida num Mosteiro Copta, a separar o cenáculo da restante congregação; e um saco perfurado pela pressão interior de uma planta a crescer. Além da perspectiva psicanalítica do significante do trançado como sintoma, oferece-se uma leitura alternativa, mas complementar, do trançado e da malha de enigmáticos "eventos": a de marcações que concorrem para a complexa conformação + da singularidade na obra de arte, e para o conhecimento prático da eficácia da repetição transformadora, como decorre da noção de referência circular proposta por Bruno Latour.*

Palavras-chave: tecer, intervalo, sintoma, referência circular.

Fig.1 *Curtain I*, 2022.  
Collage, 30x21cm.  
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Fig.2 *Curtain II*, 2022.  
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Fig.3 *Das Archiv*  
(*The Archive*), 2022.  
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## INTRODUCTION

Following Semper, the archaic weave of branches woven together into a wickerwork was the precursor of the wall as dividing space within an enclosure (Semper, 1851/1989). The German word for wall is *Wand* and the *Gewand* (dress) derive from the same root indicating the woven nature of wall, clothing and cladding. Baert, following Siegert, refers to the grid-like pattern of the weave as ‘the paradox of dealing equally with both occupied and empty spaces’ (Baert, 2021, p. 60). In the present paper we trace the cultural inheritance of the weave, and the various forms it takes of the plait, grid, mesh, membrane, net and text (*ile*), its appearance in our artistic practices, and later its entry into the work of the series of collages entitled ‘Curtains’ 2022 (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) and ‘The Archive’ seen in fig. 3. The signifier of the weave appeared in notebook entries over a long period of time, and in drawings where erased lines of writing were supplemented with vertical lines making of erasure itself a kind of weave that highlights the etymological and material relationship between text and textile.

Metaphorically Walter Benjamin bound memory, dream and text work together in the image of weaving that makes the weave a multi-mode artefact. The Latin word for “text” (*textum*) means something woven...’ (McCole, 1993, p.267) Another manifestation of the weave or *Flechtwerk* is seen in the irregular grid of masking tape between images fixed to a board in the studio. The board on which, what we have termed ‘charged images’ (Pigrum, 2021) are arranged along with other images in a crowded montage continually changed, photographed, and changed again in configurations that avoid definitive closure.

Pigrum and Stables have pointed to the interest artistic processes have for qualitative inquiry particularly in terms of liminality, thresholds and closure. In the article they point to the ‘prolonged metonymy of unwinding’ and ‘the contiguity of signifiers in a state of suspended awareness’ of their potential that at some point comes into focus (Pigrum & Stables, 2005, p. 4-5). In the above paper, Pigrum’s notion of ‘*Das Gegenwerk*’, a concept Wuthenow used to describe the notebooks of Paul Valery (Wuthenow, 1997, p.158), employs the two meanings of the German word *gegen* as both towards and opposed to, giving us *Das Gegenwerk* as a towards the work that is opposed to definitive closure. As such, it also has a relationship to Didi Huberman’s ‘survival of images’ in Aby Warburg’s Atlas Mnemosyne (Didi-Huberman, 2017). Massumi, writing about the psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger, describes what we perceive as the coming and going of the

weave as ‘the continuance across things...of the middle’, the liminal, where appearance and disappearance cross...’ (Massumi, 2004, p. 20) We lingered over the appearance of the mesh of masking tape and its images, sometimes removing fragments and pasting them into a notebook, photographing and photocopying a section, and fixing it to the board.

In the paper we describe how the repeated deferral of the weave was eventually subject to a threshold where three pivotal events announced its potential as the signifier of a symptom that gave rise to formative acts. However, while we characterise the signifier of the weave as symptom we also view it and a mesh of three events from the perspective of the exercise of human powers of judgement that Scheffer quotes Nietzsche as stating, “sharpened and practised to the highest degree, reject[s], select[s], knot[s] together... [and] are culled out of many beginnings’ (Schaeffer, 2000, p. 228); beginnings that we relate to Latour’s circulating reference (Latour, 1999).

## LINGERING OVER THE SIGNIFIER

One of the earliest entries on the weave in the author’s smaller notebook series is in Notebook 12, 2006<sup>1</sup> with a note on the lace in a painting by Kandinsky, then again five years later in notebook 27, 2011, in an account of various forms of lace making. In notebook 28, 2012, there is a five-page reflection on Benjamin’s ‘*Penelopewerk*’ or the work of the wife of Odysseus who wove during the day what she unravelled at night to postpone the demands of the suitors. Again, an interval of five years passes before reference is made to one of Anna Opermann’s ensembles showing a piece of curtain with ragged holes, one of which is patched up with thread. This was followed by the acquisition of a bag of lace remnants and a mixed media piece entitled ‘*Tageskarte*’ or Day Ticket. From this point onwards, the time lapse between entries becomes shorter. In Notebook 43, 2017, the collage ‘Tandelmarkt-gasse 5’ is mentioned in which there appears a rent, a frayed edge and hanging threads. This is followed by a recollection of builder’s nets seen on a visit to Lisbon. In Notebook 60, 2019 there is a rough drawing for the first painting that includes frayed and holed fabric. Notebook 66, 2021 contains an entry on the ‘affective charge’ of a thread-like vein of red marble that runs in an irregular line, around the marble cladding of the walls of the Baroque lecture hall of the Academy of Science in Vienna. In subsequent notebooks references to the weave become more frequent.

It becomes evident that for long intervals of time the actualization of the potentiality of the sig-

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1 All notebooks mentioned are unpublished and in possession of the author. To date there exist seventy-seven of the smaller series of notebooks and fifty four of the larger series.

nifier of the weave and its variations was repeatedly deferred. A possible answer to this deferral can be found in Bryant's book on Deleuze where he describes this discontinuity as a 'hollow' or hole where what is found is the unexpected 'event' that eventually induces us to re-think 'our experience on the basis of this sign,' that gradually 'forces itself to be taken notice of' (Bryant, 2008, p. 132), or the question, in the words of Roberto Calasso, of 'what is trying to repeat itself here?' (Calasso, 1994, p. 196)

#### EVENT

Calasso writes, 'in the idea of repetition lies our entire relationship with the past; figures detach themselves from time to time as if from an immense lapse of memory, in eager anticipation of reappearing.' (Calasso, 1994, p. 196) The first event of reappearing was the effacement by imprinting black and white paint onto reproductions of Rodin's sculptures and decorative artefacts that created the series entitled 'Gates' (see Figs 4 and 5). This series was followed by the event of the curtain hung in between the chapel and the inner sanctum seen in a Coptic Monastery, followed by photographs taken of the holes in the sacks placed over the rose bushes during the winter months in the former Hapsburg Royal Gardens in Vienna.

In Semper's *Der Stil* (1860), three strands are required to form a mesh. Semper writes '*Zum Geflecht gehören wenigstens drei Stränge die abwechselnd übereinander greifen...*' Or a braid or mesh that includes at least three strands that overlap alternately (Semper, 1860, p. 183). Three strands that join, separate, and connect. For Semper this basic *Geflecht*, weave or mesh is, as mentioned earlier, at the origins of architecture. In the section that follows we look more closely at the three strands of the mesh that gave rise to the 'Curtain' collages, but before doing so, we should bear in mind the words of Hayden White concerning 'Transitions' where he states:

A "transition" is precisely what cannot be presented in any medium... because it is what happens "between" two states considered to be relatively stable... This moment cannot be represented because it has the same status as the blank space that divides two frames of a movie film. The moment in which something becomes something else or something other than it had earlier been cannot be presented in verbal or visual images because the moment is precisely a moment of absence of presence, the moment at which one presence is drained of its substance and filled with another'. (White, 2010, p.305)

In other words what we cannot show in a freeze frame is the moment in-between potentiality and actualization. But now we will look at why the Gates and the door have the character of a weave.



Fig.4 *The Gate I*, 2022.  
Mixed media, 30x21cm.  
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Fig. 5 *The Gate II*, 2022.  
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Siegert observes that the first form of the door was presumably the gate (*Gatter*)...'. The fold with a gate was recognised by Semper, according to Siegert, 'as the most original vertical spatial enclosure (*Abschluss*) invented by man' (Siegert, 2015, p.193). At the same time, the door is, what Musil in Siegert described as, 'a movable board set in a wall'. A door, according to Teyssot, offers, 'the means to settle within, but it is also what permits one to step out, to cross the border, to unsettle' (Teyssot, 2013, p. 269). This unsettling has the connotation of the uncanny. In Pigrum 2021 there is the following passage:

'...a door becomes the interface between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the familiar and the unfamiliar or uncanny; a door (w)as part of the kind of wall we call a hoarding....the door in the hoarding could not be opened...a front door painted red, with the house number 8 above a brass letter box...Crossing a gap in the hoarding beside the door, I walked around to the other side ...and lifted the flap of the letter box. Inside was an envelope containing a collection of 1950s pin-ups or "bathing beauties", each torn in half (Pigrum, 2021, p. 20).

The *unheimliche*, or uncanny happenstance "finding" of these images and the charge they emitted, acted as the immediate impulse for a work. In Pigrum (2021), the notebook entry at the time of discovering the envelope is as follows:

The power of the door is overwhelming yet its significance is unattainable – a door, once the front door of a house that is now part of a fence ... I shall never have, and in some way never want to have, knowledge of this strange combination of objects and events... It is similar to the unknown that exists behind every window, behind every other human being who, although they are in some way connected to me, can never be fully grasped... I accepted what lay in the letterbox and removed the photographs from the envelope.... (Pigrum, 1968, pp. 32-33)

This event had that 'unsettling' nature of the unpredictable and enigmatic quality of what Glucksmann-Buci (2013, pp. 60-61) calls, 'the double-edged power of vision: amazement interwoven with strangeness and the unknown,' or the 'powers and potentialities of the gaze in all its polysemic forms'.

Both the door as gate and, as we will see presently, the Curtain in a Coptic Monastery, were in the order of an encounter with *tuchè* or the ancient Greek word for luck that 'relies on the 'external con-

tingency' of happenstance encounters in the everyday. Following Lacan, Bowie glosses luck or *tuchè* as '*what may chance to break in upon us at any moment*' (italics are mine, Bowie, 1991, p. 103). Nussbaum, in her book on the dimensions and problems related to *tuchè* states, 'we must always be on the lookout for what is there before us in the world' and adopt 'a stance of openness towards the world and its possibilities' (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 300). Boothby (2021) relates the encounter that is *tuchè* to the experience of anxiety that Lacan would relate to affording a view of the unexpected, that prompts us to act in order to bring about a transfer of anxiety.

#### 'NOWNESS' OF THE CURTAIN

On a visit to the Coptic monastery in Obersiebenbrunn, close to Vienna, on enquiring about the significance of the curtain in the middle of a partition situated in front of the congregation, I was told the curtain separates the congregation from the zone of sanctity housing the divine presence and has its origins in the ten curtains, coloured purple and scarlet with trimmings in gold, described in the book of Exodus (The Authorised Version of the Bible, 1954, Exodus 37, The Tabernacle verses pp. 8-38). The curtain that gives onto the inner sanctum is only drawn aside once a year by the high priest who performs the ritual sacrifice of the Passover. For the author, the sight of the curtain in the Coptic chapel was in the order of an intense experience of the charged image.

When closed the curtain conceals the entrance to the inner sanctum, when drawn aside it gives onto the threshold of the space beyond. Teyssot states that Walter Benjamin was deeply interested in places of transition such as the threshold, stating:

The Threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* (threshold) is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses. On the other hand, it is necessary to keep in mind the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context which has brought the word to its current meaning. (Teyssot, 2013, p.87).

The curtain in the chapel in the Coptic monastery sets the scene and structure of the interwoven nature of concealment and unconcealment, of presence and absence. In an article in German by Claudia Blümle on De Chirico's painting, 'The Riddle of the Oracle', we see two curtains, one that opens onto a landscape, and one that almost completely conceals a statue in white marble of which only the head is visible.



In the de Chirico painting, an open curtain on one side invites the viewer to lose herself in an infinite distance and on the other side with a desire to see the full extent of what is behind the curtain (Blümle, 2016). Rudy, writing about art in the middle-ages, places the role of the curtain in visual works of devotional art as in front of an 'object of import' and its drawing aside as revelatory (Rudy, 2015). The curtain in the Coptic monastery serves as both a border and a threshold. Teysstot states that: for both Simmel and Benjamin, the border reveals itself through an "in-between condition". Any threshold or marginal zone induces a reciprocal state--it looks two ways at once' (Teyssot, 2013, p. 270), like the Janus head. We now turn from the curtain in the Coptic chapel to the holed sacks in the former royal gardens in Vienna.

**'THE INNERMOST IMAGE OF WHAT HAS BEEN':  
THE SACKS**

The function of the sacks, in what was once the gardens of the Hapsburg Royal Palace in the centre of Vienna, and in Schönbrunn Palace gardens on the outskirts of Vienna, are to protect the rose bushes from the rigours of winter. The rose bushes are first covered with heavy-duty paper bags and then sacks. In spring the new growth of the rose bushes penetrates the paper bags, frays, and eventually perforates the sacking. The holes are of different sizes, some are small fissures, and others gaping rents from which hang loose threads.

In an essay entitled 'Drapery of the Sidewalks' Didi-Huberman also refers to, the 'shapeless sacking' used to channel the flow of the gutter into drain outlets in the streets of Paris. Didi-Huberman describes the sacks as 'archaic objects' and 'time imprints', as '...never far from a hole, whether manhole or sewer vent': a hole that is the liminal zone between 'reality and disappearing'. Didi-Huberman, describes the abject sacking in terms of 'interface and fold, extension, envelope, inherence, entrails and surface' (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.269), terms equally applicable to the sacks covering the rose bushes. In the series of collages entitled 'Curtains', an image inheres in the hole cut out from the photocopy of the holed sacks. Holes for which there can be no question of invisible mending.

Didi-Huberman in his essay asks how the sacks thrown onto the gutters of Paris, '...offer to the present – to the modern, if I may say so – the chance to grasp, if only by a ragged thread, "the inmost image of what has been"? Here Didi-Huberman, borrows a word from Walter Benjamin, the adjective *innerste Bild* or 'the inmost image of what has been', and

'the silent motion that transforms them', a motion of 'tactile sensuality' and 'visceral reality' (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p.271). Tim Ingold states:

But if it is the weave of the mesh that holds the components of the assembly together, it is also because of the wear and tear, the fraying and eventual breakage of its constituent lines that things fall apart...Wear and tear holds the promise of renewal (Ingold, 2021, pp.219-220).

A renewal that takes place in the interval.

**PROBING THE INTERVAL**

The interval is 'an intermediate zone', an interstitial zone, like the prolonged intervals in-between the appearance of the signifier of the weave and its variations and derivations that, with the mesh of the three events mentioned above, underwent an intense contraction; a contraction that eventually took the form of the mixed media work Portal I and the painting 'Portal II' (see Fig.6 and 7), and two notebooks devoted almost entirely to reflections on the weave. With this transition we are, as Massumi quoting Whitehead says, 'on the 'utmost verge' of events taking shape in their own 'process of self-completion' (Massumi, 2015, pp. 207-208); a process of self-completion best described by Virginia Woolf in her Dairies where she writes:

...would like to come back to diverse notes she had made 'after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould transparent enough to reflect the light of life and yet steady, tranquil compound with the aloofness of a work of art. (Woolf, 1975, pp. 13-14)



Fig.6 *Portal II*, 2022.  
Oil on Canvas, 145x95cm.  
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Fig.7 *Portal I*, 2022.  
Mixed Media on Paper, 160cm x 120cm.  
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The painting entitled 'Portal II' was initially inspired by a photograph taken of the broken mesh of a wire fence in the interval between the encounter with the curtain and the holed sacks. Initially, the broken, disjointed mesh of the wire, was photocopied, taped to the board in the studio, removed and used as the impulse for a painting where the image filled the entire canvas. Onto the structure of the mesh was superimposed a still from a film by Tarkovsky of a man standing in the frame of a doorway with his back to the viewer. This image had previously used in the centre of the mixed media work Portal I, seen in Fig.7.

The source of Portal I was the structure of a reproduction found by chance made in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by members of the Farrer family in Little Gidding (Hampton, 2015, p. 57). In Portal II the image of the man in the doorway passes into and out of the tangled, disjointed wire, or what Tarkovsky termed the 'perforated nature of existence'. Tarkovsky states:

...what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but it is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame to infinity, a pointer to life', and on the next page, 'Once in contact with the individual who sees it, separates itself from its author, starts to live its own life, undergoes changes of form and meaning. (Tarkovsky, 1989, p.118)

This-Evensen describes the function of the opening in the wall that is the door in terms of the 'frame motif' that, he states:

conveys the feeling of entering *through* something, the split motif of passing *between* something, the deep set motif of entering *into* something...consciously or unconsciously we transfer our experiences to the motif we see. (Thiess-Evensen, 1987, p.259)

In the 'Curtain' collages the hole in the sackcloth encloses another image, but does this constitute the image of the sackcloth as a *parergon* or frame? Following Derrida 1987, we ask, 'Where does a *parergon* begin and end?' The image of the holed sackcloth is a photocopy where the hole has been cut and placed over another image. So, which is the *ergon*, the work, and which is the *parergon*, the frame? Or are they both something in-between a work and a frame? or an 'undecidable' *Terrain vague*.

The Gates, the image enclosed within the hole in the sacks and Portal I and II achieved closure. Conceived spatially, closure is a limit. Conceived of in terms of temporality Critchley states:

Closure is the activity or process of bringing something to its conclusion, completion... (however) closure must be rigorously distinguished from the concept of end; for an end signifies the completion of the act and not the act of completion. Thus, on a temporal level, closure signifies a state of being prior to the end, the bringing of a process to its conclusion. Closure, in both the spatial and temporal context, delimits both "inside" and "outside" of the closure. (Critchley, 1992, p.62)

Critchley states that closure always fails to circumscribe completely, always leaving openings that offer 'the promise of a new beginning'. If we think of the completed work as what Derrida referred to as a 'minor structure necessarily closed' (Derrida, 1987, p.54) then we can think of the signifier of the weave as a symptom opening continually beyond closure as the repetition of the unalterable nature of the unconscious that is at the same time not immobile, but through repetition with difference presents itself in different guises giving it the character of *Das Gegenwerk*, of a 'towards' that avoids definitive closure.

On the board in the studio there is an arrangement of what we have termed 'charged' images' (Pigrum, 2021), subjected to arrangement, rearrangement, occasional removal and destruction, insertion in a notebook, or as the ready-to-hand image in the composition of a work that, smudged with paint, is most often returned to the board. On removing an image from the crowded montage of the board another image appears, and beneath this, the board as a palimpsest of images (see fig.8 below). Didi-Huberman, writing about Aby Warburg's Atlas Mnemosyne, states:

The Mnemosyne Atlas... is in its way, an avant-garde object. Not because it *makes a break with the past*, of course (a past into which it ceaselessly plunges); but because it breaks with a certain way of *thinking about the past*... The Warburgian break consists precisely in *having thought about time itself as a montage* of heterogeneous elements'. (Italics are Didi-Huberman's) (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p.317)

Didi-Huberman continues: 'This is the anthropological lesson of the 'survival of formations', which 'find(s) such a strong parallel in the meta psychological domain of the form of 'symptom formations' mentioned earlier.



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Fig. 8 The Board in the studio. Photograph Derek Pigrum. All rights reserved.



THE SYMPTOM OF THE WEAVE  
AS 'CIRCULATING REFERENCE'

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There is a bridge that exists between the unconscious symptom that Didi-Huberman refers to, our notion of *Das Gegenwerk*, and Bruno Latour's, 'circulating reference'. Bersani views this bridge as residing in the nature of the unconscious 'because (or not only because) it is the hiding place of the repressed; rather, the unconscious... is the reservoir of possibility, all that might be but is not,' and continues on the same page, 'Lacan places the unconscious between perception and consciousness...(where) it transforms subjecthood from psychic density into pure potentiality' (Bersani, 2008, p.25). Kochan quotes Latour on 'circulating reference' as phenomena that 'are not found at the *meeting point* between things and the forms of the human mind; phenomena are what *circulate* all along the irreversible chain of transformations'. Kochan goes on to state that 'phenomena ... circulate through a complex multistage sequence of material practices...'(Kochan, 2015, p.105). Although Latour is writing about science, following Kochan we perceive a vital link here to the way we have traced the transitional appearance of the weave in a slow process of emergence that gathers transformational momentum within practices that have their foundation in the contingent nature of what the world bestows, notebooks and the spatial configurations like that of the board and its palimpsest of images are drawn ever deeper into a growing, overdetermined array of associations that, at the same time, repeatedly postpone the actualization of potentiality. Here, then a link is suggested between Didi-Huberman's symptom and Latour's 'circulating reference.' However, it is important to make clear that 'circular reference' in science has the goal of replication with identical results, while the artistic processes described are based on the contingent, enigmatic and often uncanny encounter that draws into its rhythm of deferrals and intervals the transition to the shaping of the complexity of the symptom and the singular work of art that is seen below entitled '*Flechtwerk*'.

CONCLUSION

The weave stands forth in all its complexity as something that arrived unexpectedly and began at intervals to repeat itself in the notebooks, and in the margins of other things, other images. While the appearance of the image of the weave was lingered over attentively it was repeatedly deferred. Eventually the appearance of the weave increased in frequency and intensity. With the occurrence and interweaving of



Fig.9: *Flechtwerk*, 2022.  
Oil on canvas. 194cm x 112cm.  
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the mesh of three events, where each one was a variation on liminal spaces. At the same time, each one existed by virtue of a surround or frame that became the source of the emergence of the signifier of the weave as both symptom and *Gegenwerk*, or the work towards the work that avoids definitive closure. It has been suggested that, in addition to the emergence of the signifier of the weave as a symptom in the perspective of Didi Huberman on Aby Warburg's Atlas, the theme of the weave can also be seen from the perspective of what Bruno Latour describes as, 'circular reference', that explores and operates with an object or image coming from the outside that possesses a potentiality that only gradually moves towards actualization and a closure that leaves openings that offer 'the promise of a new beginning'.

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