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Naturally Striated Muscle: Examining the Ideographic Crystallization of <Natural>

Dustin Briggs

In U.S. America and much of the Western world, natural is a venerated symbolic placeholder for any number of assumed virtues and ideals. Present conflicts have brought forward questions about what natural (which I argue functions as an ideograph) should mean in contexts that seem to call for a formal, enforceable definition. In this study, I use the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and the context of bodybuilding to work towards a theory of how ambiguous ideographs become “striated.” In this discussion I present instances where natural has been employed as a vehicle to cause harm, and I offer an advisement to rhetorical scholars on how we might approach striated ideographs in the future.

Introduction: The Stage

On September 27, 2013, one of the most hyped professional bodybuilding contests of all time was set to begin at the Paradise Casino and Resort in Las Vegas, Nevada. The event was marketed worldwide as the ultimate showdown between two legends: Jay Cutler vs. Phil Heath. Cutler, four-time champion and the most recognized name in the sport, made his long awaited return from a devastating bicep injury. Meanwhile, Heath, “The Gift” and reigning Mr. Olympia champion, became the dominant presence in the sport. When evening arrived, both men earned slots in the highly competitive final grouping. As the final tiered assemblages were called onto the stage, fans loudly implored judges to crown their favorite. In the end, Heath retained his title with his massive 23-inch biceps and miniscule 29-inch waist packed into a 5'9" 255 lb. frame containing only six percent body fat (Smith, 2013). Heath also won \$250,000, the largest prize ever awarded in a bodybuilding competition. Like all Olympia events, neither competitor was subjected to drug testing.

Meanwhile, just two weeks prior, urine tests were administered to participants in the Victorian Natural Physique Championships in Melbourne, Australia. One of the competition's top performers and favorites, Marc Marcoccia, registered a testosterone count of 16.9:1, nearly three times the allowed amount, and also tested positive for a banned steroid (“Hall of Shame,” 2013). After deliberation, the International Natural Bodybuilding Association (INBA) committee banned Marcoccia for life from natural bodybuilding events, forfeiting his chance to win

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the prize: a 10-foot trophy. Never again could Marcoccia claim to be a “natural” bodybuilder. Today, Marcoccia is a highlighted entry in the INBA “Hall of Shame” where bodies deemed to be unnatural are disgraced.

This essay discusses rhetorical and philosophical constructions of the term *natural* and the consequences these constructions might offer. Seemingly, bodybuilding, and the structures it creates around what is natural and what is not, may hold insight into what influences larger perceptions about what a natural human body is and is not allowed to be. If we investigate the process further, it is possible to learn what can happen when powerful, value-laden words such as natural are regulated.

Within bodybuilding circles (and elsewhere), bodies are lumped into particular categories. Within these categories, they may be venerated for their appearance and accomplishments, or discarded and shamed for their actions or attributions. The difference in the categorization of these bodies is often not necessarily factually grounded. Rather, it depends on semi-arbitrary definitions involving subjective types of evidence. Interpreting this evidence means embarking toward a determination of whether a body is natural or unnatural, a designation that offers a potential lifetime of reverberating consequences. It is this meaning-making potential that assures defining natural within bodybuilding, or choosing not to do so, will offer consequence far beyond the awaited results of any individual competitors’ urine tests. Natural, when used as terminology to hierarchically segregate human bodies, demands investigative attention.

In this essay, I use the context of bodybuilding to provide a larger argument about what occurs when constructions of a value-laden term, in this case *natural*, crystallizes. I first discuss how natural functions as an ideograph (McGee, 1980). Next, I return the conversation to how <natural> is deployed in bodybuilding subcultures. Following, I trace histories of formalized use of <natural> within (and extending beyond) bodybuilding in order to illustrate the power of this particular ideograph. Then, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) help me outline a further understanding of what is happening as “striations” (or clearly developed boundaries) appear around an otherwise ambiguous ideograph. I conclude by offering a directive for approaching crystalized ideographs in a “machinic” (Coonfield, 2006) way that may prove applicable across contexts. For communication scholars, I believe the way we discuss and classify bodies always has meaningful, material consequences.

Statement of Authorship

Before progressing, I find it necessary to locate myself within this scholarship. I do this in an attempt show my relation to the subject, and to establish a point of reference as I refer to observations, practices, and decisions that I continue to encounter. First, out of respect for those who compete in bodybuilding, I do not consider myself a bodybuilder in any real way. I have for the last three years, however, undertaken an extensive body re-building project using bodybuilding techniques and philosophies. These practices first emerged as a health-related

hobby, and then evolved into a personalized approach to my life. At a particularly intense period of time, I ate very little and exercised away whatever I consumed. It was a grueling process of positive self-discipline, unhealthy commitment (nearing obsession), and enlightening self-discovery. I watched my body drop 30 lbs. (from 189 to 159) in two months. I then rebuilt my physique over the next several months through resistance training, goal-oriented planning, and a more realistic, but still restricted, caloric intake. Eventually, I achieved a more muscular frame at a lower percentage of body fat. Today, my pursuit of a re-imagined body continues, while my goals and abilities continue to shift.

Second, I do not claim my experience to be typical or representative of any level of competitive bodybuilding. I do feel, however, that my research and experiences offer me unique, if incomplete, insights into bodybuilding subculture. This experience also necessarily influences the ways I understand constructions of natural. I confront questions of my own bodily naturalness within a culture and subculture of muscularity and masculinity. From this experience, I learned much and realized I have much left to learn. Throughout this project, I offer a scattering of personal voice as a reminder that theoretical arguments naturally concern real people.

An Ideograph, Naturally

Renowned rhetorical scholar Michael Calvin McGee (1980) first used the term ideograph in “The ‘Ideograph’: A link between rhetoric and ideology.” Here, McGee uses *ideograph* to describe the entry of particular words into political consciousness. He contends that a few abstract, dogmatically drenched terms enter discourse in a way that captures, creates, and/or reinforces particular ideologies. McGee explains the ideograph as a way to understand the relationship between specific, pointed uses of political language and more abstract public ideologies.

Ideographs are uniquely potent elements of persuasion. Condit and Lucaites (1993) add, “Ideographs represent, in condensed form, the normative, collective commitments of the members of a public” (p. 83) and they “typically appear in public argumentation as the necessary motivations or justifications for action performed in the name of the public” (p. 84). Ideographs encapsulate thoughts, feelings, and politics into the needlepoint of a single word or phrase and become especially difficult to dismiss from a position of conventional ideology. Employed across rhetorical studies, ideographs (identifiable by their encasing chevrons) continue to be unearthed by scholars, in some cases, across disciplines. Examples include <liberty>, <property>, (McGee, 1980), <equality> (Condit & Lucaites, 1993), <human rights> (Stuckey & Ritter, 2007) and even <cigarettes> (Moore, 1997) and <schizophrenia> (Kim & Berrios, 2001).

Ideographs hold rhetorical and communicative significance because they allow communication scholars the ability to study political ideology by examining language use. Rhetorical critics can explicitly show how key words and phrases in political discourse reveal underlying cultural commitments and values. Through the ideograph, McGee (1980) offers a tool for understanding highly abstract concepts of ideology. This course of study is uniquely communication

driven and distinct from, perhaps, an etymological discussion of language; the difference rests with the creation and practice of meaning-making, not the temporal evolution of the word itself. The ideograph is a study of active rhetorical, communicative practice.

McGee (1980) stops short of listing particular itemized standards for ideographs. Rather, he leaves it up to the critic to argue that a term “shows mutability between contexts” (McGee, 1980, p. 8) that underscores the term’s rhetorical weight. It is through engagement with the places in which a particular term or phrase appears that proves its ideographic qualities. I argue that due to the inherently ambiguous and rhetorically powerful characteristics of <natural>, it too functions as an ideograph. In the next section, I illustrate the required mutability of <natural> in ideological discourse. I use this discussion as a precursor into my investigation of the term’s standardized usage within bodybuilding and its potential for impact in contexts beyond. McGee argues that the study of an ideograph should “never be limited to its use in formal discourse” (p. 9). Thus, I explore the various avenues where <natural> is used in and beyond discourses of regulation. I also highlight the connections and theoretical distance between <natural> and the human body. From here I focus on how <natural>, as an ideograph, becomes potentially dangerous whenever it enters into contexts that dictate what it means to be a <natural> human.

Natural in the U.S. American Cultural Consciousness

The concepts of <natural> and the human body are rarely more distant than one degree of separation, even if this degree is directly opposite. What is <natural> is distinguished from both the human and cultural, but also works as the concept through which Westerners culturally judge other concepts (Soper, 1998). <Natural> appears to be at once both essentially human and entirely human averse. Thus <natural> carries “an immensely complex and contradictory symbolic load” that continues to be difficult to sift through (Soper, 1998, p. 2).

Philosophers have long debated where exactly humans fit into what is <natural> with few agreed results (Vogel, 1996). In his own attempt, Foucault (1978) described the distinction between natural and unnatural (the perverse) not as any metaphysical requirement, but as an effect of discourse (p. 14).

The U.S. American public understandably seems to struggle with conceptions of <natural> as well. <Natural> is as complicated as it is common, as Soper (1998) states, “its complexity is concealed by the ease and regularity with which we put it to use in a wide variety of contexts. It is at once both familiar and extremely elusive” (p. 1). We grasp at <natural>, but distrust whatever we are able to capture. At the same time, this difficulty does not seem to have dissolved collective interest. In 2008, Mintel’s Global New Products Database found that *all-natural* was the second most used claim on new U.S. American food products (Shanker, 2008). U.S. Americans largely agree that putting <natural> things into our bodies is preferential action. What exactly these <natural> things are, however, is less widely agreed upon. To this point, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

has refused to provide any enforceable directive over what “natural” should mean in relation to our food. Many are unable to define <natural> beyond a terse description of “not artificial” (Shanker, 2008). Our knowledge of <natural> is discerned from contrast with what it should not be.

This discernment is often attempted by valorizing <natural> as a theoretical set thought to be given before human contact. If we have not messed with it, it is <natural> and so, better. This is consistent with Testa and Harris’s (2005) analysis that found that “people regularly claim that the natural is superior to the artificial or synthetic without any real grounding for the separation of the two” (p. 178). The question remains: How much human interference is enough to make this type of binary distinction? U.S. Americans have a longing for the <natural>, but have difficulty pinning down what exactly this desire looks like.

This difficulty is likely lodged within a paradoxical historical understanding of <natural>. As Eder and Ritter (1996) demonstrate, current conceptions of <natural> find their roots in a flawed imagining of an ecological nature. This presumes all nature to be space defined by its lack of human interference even as nature is delineated and created through this same human interference. Simultaneously, there is said to be an internal part of humans that must remain tethered to the natural world. This explains, in part, the collective desire to consume “natural” food items. Somehow nature is, in a sense, both that which we are not and that which we are within. <Natural> is human-made, but somehow what <natural> describes is devoid of humanness. <Natural> is thus never fully reachable for humans. The closer humanity comes to the <natural>, the less <natural>, and less desirable, the thing becomes.

This contradictory definition leaves <natural> as an idea that can only be viewed and understood from a distance. For Sider (1995), this means analyzing *perfect* naturalness is not possible, for naturalness will always remain a relative matter. It is, then, more right to question to what extent <natural> can be attributed at all to nature, since delineations are at best inconsistent and likely a product of convenience and agenda. It is unfortunate then, that when naturalness is named and enforced, it is often done in binary ways. Legally speaking, a person is either a naturalized citizen or they are not. Similarly, a plot of land is protected natural environment or it is not. A bodybuilder’s urine and blood reveal that his/her body is <natural> or it is not. The disparity between the continuum of where <natural> exists and the dualistic way it is deployed may account for much of the confusion surrounding what the ideograph can and should mean.

Meanwhile, the impossible desire for a distinct semantic ownership of <natural> persists, and its meaning inspires widespread discussion. Being one of few places where naturalness is explicitly defined, bodybuilding has long been determining what is and is not <natural>, especially in relation to the human body. This is especially ripe ground to attempt to answer one of the culminating questions of debates surrounding <natural>: What is <natural> and unnatural, and does either designation constitute a moral argument for or against it? For this reason, I look to bodybuilding to help grasp the potential of a formalized <natural>.

Incarnations of Natural within Bodybuilding Subculture

The appreciation of the display of aesthetic muscular form in the Western tradition dates at least as far back as ancient Greece. Compared to humans, gods were depicted in Greek art as more powerful and more perfectly proportioned. The gods showcased their supreme energy in their stature, strength, and muscularity. This represented a distinction between the two types of beings, but allowed for the possibility of direct physical interaction between humans and gods. As athletic competition gained popularity throughout the Greek empire, sculptures of the gods began to depict a transcendent human potential for strength and robustness. To become better built—to emulate the gods—was to become more perfect.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, bodybuilders, known as “physical culturists” continued the tradition of perceived superiority of built bodies (Liokaftos, 2012). Bodybuilders were even used as living models of anatomy in academic settings. These “improved” bodies were not understood as markedly unusual or strange, but rather as useful enlargements of the <natural>. In this way bodybuilding was not understood as an attempt to defy nature or a <natural> body, but rather as a way of more fully resembling a <natural> human form. This form became understood as what humans *should* be, or should at least aspire to be. The <natural> body of the industrial age became one that closely resembled the classical body from art history. There existed both current and historical models for this achievement in art and literature, and a science-endorsed outline on how it could be achieved. This early era of bodybuilding becomes especially important to this study for two primary reasons:

1. The era demonstrates direct historical precedence for the categorization and segregation of bodies through the use of an ideographic <natural>.
2. This era shows the propensity of bodybuilding to intervene and influence dominant dialogue about all bodies.

This second reason deserves further explanation. Although only certain bodies practice bodybuilding directly, and even fewer might classify what they do as bodybuilding, all other bodies are implicated whenever a standard emerges and moves. During this era, bodybuilding both created and extended its influence by crafting a public forum for built bodies, by standardizing the ideal body, and by generating a scientific method of achieving this body. By the early 1920's, nearly all of U.S. America and Western Europe incurred extended exposure to the intense bodily awareness resulting from the growing physical culturist/bodybuilding movement. Witnesses could no longer be considered casual observers to built bodies. Onlookers were forced to locate themselves within an aesthetic/<natural> vs. malformed/unnatural hierarchy and adjust their behavior accordingly (or not).

Modern Bodybuilding Subculture

Today, <natural> is understood differently in bodybuilding circles. <Natural> exists as a less ambiguous threshold when it comes to weight lifting and muscle-

centric sports. Lifters are <natural>, or *natty*, until they are not. Once they leave this designation they often cannot return to it. The moment this identity of natty is shrugged off is often the same moment when the athlete pricks him/herself to inject his/her first dose of testosterone or other anabolic-androgenic steroid (AAS). This begins a lifter's first "cycle," or regimen of various substances, that accelerates the muscle building and recovery process. These substances were once referred to as "juice," and now primarily as "gear."

This moment is also, from a phenomenological standpoint, an intensely complicated one. Though the threshold of <natural> is forever passed, it does not always symbolize a moment of loss. To an openly geared lifter, this moment is about moving to a different realm of competition. The transition allows the body to surpass the constrictions of genetic destiny. As insinuated in my introduction, prize money, awards, and venues for recognition are all greater for geared athletes that achieve bigger, more muscular physiques. This is because of the enormous revenue associated with the untested division of professional bodybuilding, especially within the sports supplement industry.

Many professional bodybuilders earn their primary income through sponsorship. When bodybuilders appear on the labels of sports supplements, or endorse them in advertisements, they send a message that connects the athlete to the product. Since most professional bodybuilders are not subjected to any drug testing, a public insinuates that these athletes have achieved their physiques primarily through the use of the <natural> products being marketed. Though it seems illogical that these results can be achieved "naturally," a general lack of understanding about nutritional supplementation makes it difficult to unequivocally reject the products. When this reasonable doubt is coupled with a desire for the bodily ideal established through bodybuilding, it is easy to connect the athlete's success to the product.

This presumption works to the advantage of supplement suppliers. Sports supplements only have to prove to the FDA that they are safe for human consumption, and will not cause a positive drug test, in order to make the shelves. The products sport scientific-sounding and intriguing names like "P6 Black: Androgenic Nootropic Matrix" and "N.O. Explode: The Pre-Workout Igniter." Such products often do not need to authentically demonstrate that they perform any significant muscle-building benefits, and companies are largely permitted to conduct their own lab tests for effectiveness. For this reason, producers only need to inspire a belief that the product *could* work if used correctly. The most active ingredient in any of these supplements will almost always prove to be marketing success.

These products are especially appealing to those who have not crossed the threshold of gearing. Individuals who do not want to deal with the potential effects of AAS, human growth hormone (HGH), or other drugs may turn to supplementation as a safer and legal way to increase their lean body mass, trim fat, and bulk up (Black, 2013). Supplementation allows athletes to maintain their <natural> status in the ways they view themselves and also in regard to the rules of their respective sports. This is an especially important factor in drug-tested amateur

and professional sports, and reserves a moral high ground for <natural> athletes emanating from our cultural adoration of <natural>.

Even holding knowledge about the limited effectiveness of sports supplements, I confess I spend a considerable amount of my restricted graduate student income on these products. The desire to achieve quicker gains in strength and muscle mass is alluring even if it exists primarily in myth. I am excited for the debut of the acid-green “Iron” series from MusclePharm for the sole reason that it is the first supplement line ever endorsed by bodybuilding legend, Arnold Schwarzenegger. I am willing to spend \$40 on a small tub of “Resurrect PM” powder because record eight-time Mr. Olympia Ronnie Coleman is flexing on the label. And yet, I snicker to myself when I am near someone who purchases a product I have decided is only a box of nonsense, while trying to ignore that a majority of my purchases are products “on sale.”

The allure of the athlete selling his/her results as <natural> is often too much to resist for athletes who are unsatisfied with their current results, and/or for beginners looking for an easy fix to an extended period of sedentary behavior. The buyer essentially hopes to buy AAS in a form that does not legally count as AAS, does not require needles, and does not affect any inward or outward perception of self. The ideographic power of <natural> embedded within a muscle-building product inspires hope that a legal, safe, magical pill/powder exists that can take an unassuming physique and craft it into the most muscular body in the gym. This allure is often enough to try just one more product. The ideal is to be perfectly proportioned, perfectly symmetrical, and to somehow remain perfectly <natural>. Sports supplements claim to hold the possibility of gaining advantage without the forfeiture of moral superiority that accompanies a failed drug test.

Competitions that use such tests have very particular guidelines to determine whether a competitor is <natural>, challenging the ambiguity of an ideographic <natural>. Bodybuilding first regulates <natural> by creating separate divisions for tested and untested competition. Tested competition essentially determines the (un)naturalness of a body. Until this determination is made, a competitor assumes the benefits of <natural> status regardless of an appearance that might suggest otherwise. Competitors are deemed unnatural when they are caught violating one of many specific requirements¹ of their sport. Blood and urine tests can be administered every 60 days that an athlete remains in the professional circuit (“Banned substances,” 2008). There is even a complicated formula available that is used to help determine a competitor’s natural physical potential for lean mass. The formula takes into consideration height in inches, ankle circumference at the smallest point, wrist circumference, and body fat percentage to predict the maximum lean body mass (Butt, 2007). With this formula, someone who

1 Long lists of banned substances include: stimulants, including ephedrine or cocaine; narcotic analgesics, such as methadone and morphine (though codeine is acceptable); evidence of anabolic agents, such as clenbuterol or a testosterone count greater than a six to one ratio; diuretics, such as furosemide and mannitol; HGH; blood doping; and many others.

is 5'9" with above-average wrist and ankle size would reach a maximum body weight of 203 lbs. at 12% body fat. Surpassing this by a statistically significant margin would suggest a competitor is not, by current bodybuilding standards, <natural>.

Bodybuilding's governing bodies often disagree about what constitutes an acceptable claim of <natural>. For example, the Natural Physique Association (NPA) operates under a "lifetime natural" policy and adheres to the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) standards of testing. This includes a full-spectrum urinalysis for banned substances, including recreational drugs. NPA also uses rigorous polygraphic and forensic testing (in the form of a 90 minute, \$600 athlete-pay exam) that has an accuracy rate above 98%. Despite these rigorous standards, rival division British National Bodybuilding Federation (BNBF) claims moral superiority because competitors are tested both during and after qualifying competitions (NPA tests only during competition). Of course, the NPA retorts that these tests are not WADA certified like the type they conduct, and are thus less reliable (Garratt, 2014, p. 2). These arguments are further complicated because most natural bodybuilding organizations do not have the budget to consistently test competitors up to the standards laid out in their protocols.

The pretense surrounding the argument about whose <natural> is superior is largely defunct for one primary reason: There exists no test anywhere that can fully validate claims to lifetime naturalness by any significant standard (Garratt, 2014). Therefore, divisions who claim a more realistic standard for determining naturalness have, ironically, a more accurate assessment of who within their competitions is at the moment a <natural> competitor. Even so, this more narrowed claim remains inconsistent. Masking agents are designed to be ahead of current testing procedures. Likewise, testing facilities can only search and detect the presence of substances known to exist, and can only punish those currently banned. At best, claims of <natural> within these divisions function as claims that they are presently unable to prove incidence of disallowed substances.

Competitors outside of the regulated/tested incarnations of the sport are upheld as the closest human offering of an ideal physique, but they are not required to disclose to their following how it was actually obtained. In fact, cultural forces strongly discourage athletes to be honest about any drug usage. Disclosure of drug use can result in persecution and loss of sponsorships. Although debates rage over what constitutes a <natural> body on one side of the sport, the untested division thrives off of the ambiguity that comes from not regulating <natural>. Unbridled by constraints, testing procedures, suspicion, and infighting, corporations and untested athletes (to a lesser extent) reap the financial benefits of deniability.

Impact on Bodybuilding Subculture

In less formal arenas, definitions of a bodily <natural> play out quite differently. In the training rooms where muscular bodies are molded, questions of naturalness arise as bodies compare themselves to other bodies. Here, people with different commitments to <natural> practices interact without any clear

designation of who fits where. Those who are less muscular often critique the larger lifters, and justify their own bodies by accusing the other of being unnatural. The assumption is that anyone could achieve that level of result if he/she were willing to make the moral concessions. This critique is rarely done in front of those being “accused” for reasons relating to fear of bodily harm, inability to substantiate accusations, and lack of any real consequence for evidence that proves someone’s “unnatural” body.

Though there is certainly no formal testing done in this space, distinctions develop. I recall asking training partners if they think “that big guy has been gearing,” while admiring (or *’miring* in bodybuilding circles) what I regard as the big guy’s aesthetically superior physique. If we agree he is a longtime or extreme user, I no longer feel as much shame when he lifts more than me or if he has a more sculpted core. Though, in most cases, he likely does not care what I think of him, the practice of making these distinctions is an interesting one. This is especially salient if we consider <natural>’s function as an ideograph. Why, as a cultural collective, should we feel the need to determine who and what is <natural>? What does it mean when we reassure our own bodies by painting another body as not (or less) <natural>? Who is immediately dismissed or abjected as unnatural? Such questions are immensely consequential, but perhaps not so easily answered.

<Natural>, as an ideograph, remains both imminent and illusive despite attempts to tie it down. Though the way we have positioned <natural> as it relates to (Western) humanity makes it theoretically impossible, we still encourage and enforce naturalness between human bodies and on human action. When we corral the ideograph to mark which bodies are <natural> and which are not, we engage a deeply problematic potential. Likewise, leaving the ideograph without any formal regulation might also create potentials for harm. Thus, regulation of <natural> has proven to be a difficult (if not, futile) practice. In the following section, I apply an existing framework to this phenomenon.

Smooth and Striated Bodies

Delineating <natural> is far from a benign performance. I have shown that the fluidity of <natural> makes delineations complicated and possibly arbitrary, but proven that these designations are still attempted. I have also demonstrated <natural>’s function as an ideograph in U.S. American culture. If <natural> can be both ideographic and deployed as definable term, the potential certainly exists for the rhetorical weight of the term to enact discriminatory action against any body that does not fit within a conventional construction of <natural>. In fact, this country has a long legislative history of doing exactly that. However, operating without any standardization of the ideograph offers free political reign over a word that holds the benefits of an extremely persuasive, positive connotation. Total disbarment of regulation creates a similarly dangerous potential for misguidance through intentionally dishonest employments of <natural>.

The process of capturing an abstract <natural> and regulating it mirrors Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) descriptions of smooth and striated spaces. Smooth

and striated spaces are opposite, but co-constitutive dynamic areas of thought, regulation, and ideals. These spaces exist because of, and in spite of one another and serve to alter the understanding of what a practice or belief means. At the most simple level, a smooth space is one that is without demarcation, borders, or regulation. Deleuze and Guattari offer the uncharted ocean as a model example of a smooth space. Before humans were able to map or find locations in open water, we were forced to assume the ocean continued endlessly, with an immeasurable vastness and uninterrupted continuity.

A striated space is created when a smooth space is captured, charted, and regulated. The ocean lost much (but never all) of its smoothness with the development of navigational instruments. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe this process as the enactment of an apparatus of capture. Through this apparatus, smooth land becomes the striated square plots of territory we can spot from above. Similarly, work is only distinguishable from other activity when it is given a name, a market value, and determined to be the result of surplus labor. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, however, there is never such an easy distinction between a smooth and striated space, nor does there exist any perfectly smooth or completely striated space. The two create one another even as they work to be distinct. As borders are added, the once-smooth space gains demarcations and inscriptions of striation. Concurrently, new smooth spaces are formed between the marks that did not exist, or at least were not noticeable, prior. Discovery of these smooth spaces also works to highlight and create the understanding of their borders. Striated spaces are thus recognized through the co-creation of the smooth.

The distinctions between smooth and striated play out in exceptionally nuanced ways. Perhaps it is useful to consider an image of what a theoretical striation, or capture, of <natural> might look like. Imagine a starting location of smooth space that includes products, people, and practices without enforceable evaluations of their <natural> worth. The development of a mechanism that values <natural> above unnatural offers the first striation in this otherwise smooth space. No matter where the divide occurs, we are now left with a grand but permeable theoretical distinction between the two (<natural> and unnatural thoughts, beings, and practices). This grand distinction offers little clarity across contexts beside the presumed division arising from the semantic differential. This striation also offers the potential of violence as “<natural> practices” begin to crystallize and push those who do not fit towards the margins.

When applied to our specific context, this vague striation likely looks similar to the standard of <natural> that is supposedly forever broken when a loaded syringe is plunged into skin and has its contents forced into human tissue. Though, theoretically, there is a divide between bodies that fit this definition and those which do not, this striation does what all striations do: create more patches of smooth space where the definitions are not so distinct. The primary stitch is far from a perfect divide, and it leaves a number of practices and people fighting to be on the correct side of the theoretical chasm even as the borders move.

The hope is to escape being pinned down or penned in as new applications for <natural> are found. In bodybuilding, this fear appears in the form of questions like: What happens if I accidentally come into contact with a banned substance? What if I have a medical condition that requires me to use these substances? What if the standards shift so previously acceptable practices are now banned? If the bodybuilding community suddenly revokes my distinction of <natural>, how am I now understood?

As striations of <natural> increase, a population becomes more easily defined as unnatural. Within a cultural landscape that prefers <natural>, this has proven to be a dangerous place to be found. We need only look at U.S. American judicial atrocities such as The Indian Removal Act of 1830, The Dred Scott decision, The Chinese Exclusion Act, and Japanese internment during WWII to understand what violence can accompany a label of unnatural or “not naturalized” (for more, see Black, 2009; Cave, 2003; Fehrenbacher, 1981; Graber, 1997; Luna, 1998). Thus, the question follows, when an ideograph becomes striated, is the only possible outcome further oppression?

When Ideographs Striate

Further striations work to limit the smooth space of becoming,² and are often resisted as vehicles of oppression. Supposedly all-encompassing categories (such as natural vs. unnatural) demonstrate how striations can take this oppressive form. Without leaving another option, striation can oblige a person to choose a distinction they do not fully avow to, or force them to endure marginalization. In a bodybuilding context, these striations mirror closely the categorizations between tested-natural and tested-fail.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also remind us that striated space is “where all progress occurs” (p. 486). Thus striated space, even for an ideograph, can offer considerable potential. Before praising striated space for this distinction, it is important to note that there is more reservation in the way Deleuze and Guattari deploy progress than in the way progress is typically understood. For progress to exist, there must first be standards by which it can be measured. For this reason, it would be impossible for progress to occur in anything other than the striated space formed by possibly problematic demarcations. This does not mean progress should be assumed as always troublesome either. It is not absurd to argue it would be progress if measures were enacted that used <natural> to discourage dangerous activity or that more equally compensated competitors with sponsorships. However, such action could potentially eliminate venues for pushing culturally imposed bodily limitations, and further stigmatize particular bodies as unnatural. It is likely impossible to effectively enact measures that distinguish between the productive

2 Becoming, as used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is a quest toward desire that is created not out of deficit or lack of something, but out of a pursuit of something other than an already determined role. Becoming can only occur in smooth space because if delineations already exist, one is only able to move between provided categories.

and the problematic variables at play. How then are we to act in a responsible way in relation to ideographical striations if a “smooth space alone is [also] never enough to save us” (p. 500) as Deleuze and Guattari suggest? Perhaps there is a way.

Conclusions: Toward a “Machinic” Deployment of Ideographs

The ways bodybuilding creates smooth and striated understandings of <natural> both encourages and stigmatizes performance-enhancing drug use. To achieve something that resembles the bodies being displayed on stage, AAS, HGH, and other substances become necessary. As bodybuilding evolves, bigger and bulkier athletes are winning events. Many within the bodybuilding community even refer to the current era as the age of the “freaks” and “mass monsters.” The increased size of bodybuilding champions makes it continually more difficult for those inspired by these winners to reach anything resembling this physique. Also, the sport has reached new heights of popularity (Stokvis, 2006). What started with strongman-turned-bodybuilder Eugen Sandow in 1890, and was revived by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the film *Pumping Iron* in 1974, has evolved into a phenomenon as its sequel *Generation Iron* is released forty years later. As a result, more young athletes are using more substances than ever before (Vereen, 2014).

It must also be noted that there have been significant advances in the science of anabolic substances since the sport’s inception. Some argue this makes them safer and better understood than they are portrayed to be. Bodybuilders also point out that pharmaceuticals are only a small part of a larger equation that involves genetic disposition, intense discipline, and constant innovation. This, however, has not prevented the type of stigma that follows those who are recognized as geared athletes. Those who choose to break the threshold of <natural> can expect to face contempt and litigation if caught. Even those who have not used these substances but have a certain appearance must fight to maintain freedom from the stigmatizing effects of an “unnatural” or “geared” label.

Contested understandings of <natural> exist as potential arenas for resistance, reclamation, and potential problem. A new striation of <natural>, legally dictated, may discourage youths from harming their organs with potentially dangerous substances. On the other hand, desire for this formalization of <natural> must be tempered to recognize the potential of such striations to violate human rights through their precedence. The historicity of <natural> must be continually recognized. This indecision is one that could easily lead an otherwise concerned individual down a path of inaction that continues toward an equally problematic status quo. The given options appear to be a paradox, but they do not have to be.

Here I apply what Coonfield (2006) calls a “machinic understanding” to ideographs juxtaposed to the “instrumental” way concepts are often deployed. Coonfield suggests that we focus too much on “What IS it?,” and in doing so, we “thus delineate everything in advance of the answer” (p. 297). In our context, this practice “instrumentalizes” <natural> so that it must be considered only within already existing modes of dialogue. Coonfield argues, instead, that we should move toward the machinic and ask, “Of what is it capable? With what else does or can it

connect?" (p. 298). In considering the capacity of <natural> in specific, contextual relationships with bodies, we perform a much different action, one that focuses on *potentials* and not categories. What <natural> can do is realized as the "function of its capabilities under particular conditions as it enters into relations of composition/decomposition with other bodies" (p. 296).

As communication scholars, rhetoricians, or even aspiring body-changers, we must not limit constructions of <natural>, or other ideographs, to what "it is" now or even for what (or whom) it was intended. We must instead search for its productive, liberating potential. In this search lies hope for an agency that looks to the future without a total dismantling of, or a return to, past deployments of ideographs. To take a machinic approach means that we must examine the potential of <natural>, not as a definitive state of being (as it has been deployed), but as an ideographical springboard of potential that comes into relation with particular bodies. Through this lens, bodybuilders can be openly *unnatural* in their actions but still be understood as important, <natural> variances of bodily experience. All types of bodies are allowed to be <natural>, even if <natural> must mean different things in relation to each body. I believe it is possible for a body to both stretch understanding of human capability and still matter individually.

The potential striations of <natural> may hold difficult consequences, but they are not required. What if, instead of focusing on the striations that have been, we instead ask, like Coonfield, "what can it [<natural>] do?" I contend that in answering this question we are affording a chance to "become" in a way that only the newly created smooth space can allow. Such becoming allows us to ask questions about where the value for <natural> or any other ideograph has arisen, and what it is now doing. It leads to questions about why the borders around naturalness are located where they are and about consequences that may arise from their deployment. It allows for works such as this essay that critique any understanding of <natural> that claims to be *self-referentially <natural>*. This implores audiences to explore the affective and intensive potentials of an ideograph to ask how they might be re-organized or even disorganized to foster a more just and usable platform for human action. What if "unnatural" bodies were understood as a fleshed critique of the assumed <natural> body? These bodies might then become recognized as dynamic conduits of becoming.

Again, ironically, this smooth space of becoming is only possible because of the striated spaces that come from constructions of the term. This should not dissolve our vigilance toward recognizing striation and regulation of ideographs. However, this recognition prevents the debate from being reduced to simple if/then scenarios. The external consequences of regulating such a term do not become void. In this case, it does not make concern for the safety of those who may be influenced to use certain substances less legitimate. Ideographs are not required to function as a word reduced to only inclusive and exclusive capabilities, even if this is how they are sometimes deployed. Instead, ideographs represent a cultural text rich with both potential for becoming and progress. These are the political ingredients required for the complicated play between smooth and striated spaces. If this play is encouraged

over simple formalization of the term, hope is not inherently tied to any one of an ideograph's determinations. Just as a smooth space may never be enough to save us, a striation need not be the instrument of our demise.

Closing Thought: My Body as Illustration

As an illustration of the approach I advocate, I end this discussion by examining an implicit question of this essay. Though I have talked about my experiences, I have not disclosed whether or not I consider myself to qualify as *geared* or *natty*. It was my performative intent to avoid making this distinction. By choosing either characteristic, I make a decision to enact a conception of the ideograph of <natural> that is instrumental and not machinic. If I present myself as a geared athlete, I perhaps gain further credibility and insight into the topic in the eyes of my audience at the cost of a set of presumed legal violations. If I claim <natural>, I free myself of the stigma that comes along with a geared or unnatural body identity but potentially further crystallize problematic conceptions of <natural>. Either choice only functions to reinforce ideas of what <natural> *is* rather than what it *can do*. By choosing not to align myself in a category in this essay, I force potentially productive questions to be asked instead of defaulting to existing answers: Why does a body's <natural> status matter? Who is not <natural> to me? How does my perception of this essay change if I read it from either identity designation? What shared conclusion might we draw if we substitute the <natural> of bodybuilding to <natural> as it is invoked in discussions of the bodies of sexual minorities or the bodies of people with disabilities? The blurriness that comes from these questions is the smooth space of liminality that emanates from the potentially harmful existence of a striation of <natural>. From here we are free (in a limited sense) to reconsider how future striations might function towards more inclusive, less stigmatized deployments of ideographs.

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