

Searching for the Everywhen on the Basis of the Findings of the Artistic Research Project *skin flats*

The Everywhen has a beginning that never ends. It is a space-time as much as a continuum of past, present and future falling together into one—this is one of the assumptions in the Deep Time theory finding its way more and more into scientific fields of research today.

Is Deep Time “living in the moment”—“life in life”, containing past information as well as future imaginations and inscribing itself into any physicality, into matter, thus writing history, presence and future at the same time? This would mean that any time, any space, any reality is accessible at any time, from any space, from any reality.

In a transdisciplinary approach of Artistic Research, this paper examines these questions on the basis of the project *skin flats*—an experiential image-video loop installation that aims at evoking an immersive state of meditative perception in the recipient. In particular, its creation processes are examined, in the light of positions from Cognitive Sciences and with a view to its contemporary movements in the context of Embodiment.

skin flats is a series of 60 image montages consisting of a series of photographic self-portraits—close-ups, taken randomly in chronological order, showing the skin of the artist from an abstracting perspective ...; images that ultimately transform into movement and, as an experiential image and video installation, aim at a culmination of meditative perception in the viewer ...

In the course of a two-year project that documents the chronological capturing of the artist's [audio-]visual observations of everyday life in the period 2019-2022, dozens of blurred self-portraits in the form of close-ups of skin emerged in 2021. For the artist, the photos “showed up”, as they were created through the accidental and unconscious use of the camera.

In 2022, all of the self-portraits were subject to the same sequence of image editing steps, slightly refined in 2024. The visual language is characterized by geometric, abstract, and simultaneously textured fields—as textured as the physical is, as textured as life is, as textured as death is and as textured as time probably is, containing all and everything and nothing at the same time. Is the latter true?

Their still photographic character and the formal language of image editing give the impression of flatness—this is what formed the title of the project: *skin flats*. Starting from this aesthetic approach and the accidental creation of self-portraits of non-recognizable skin, the artist continued to focus on creating “emptiness”—“the space between things”—; an aspiration she has been pursuing all life long. But perhaps this understanding of “emptiness” and the project's claim to make “emptiness” perceivable are entropic? Perhaps individual memories can never be “the memories of anyone at any time, in any place”?

In a further step, the 1c-image edits were arranged as montages in the form of triples and are now constellated in an intuitively found and random arrangement of fields of existence that overlap each other in the form of segments of appearance, reinforcing connotations of future, present and past and their “Inter-Influencing”.

In Hermeneutics, the term “poiesis” describes the creation of a reality by engaging with an object and understands this process as an interactive action constantly being in a state of flow and not depending on individual subjects. According to the Embodiment thesis from Cognitive Sciences, conscious perceptions and active interaction with an environment are

always mutually dependent. Findings from brain research support this view. There is also evidence that internal body signals, for example from the heart or intestines, activate a sense of the so-called self. Therefore, many contemporary scientists no longer see the brain as the “origin” of consciousness. Rather, it is fed from the entire body at every moment (Tschacher 2022). The question is: If there is an interaction between perceptions, are there interactions between phenomena of whatever kind?

The imagery of *skin flats* is a quasi automatically generated meditative space of self-viewing perspectives, created through Subconscious Image Writing and diving into collectivity by abstracting subjective experience. Although the montages are composed of self-portraits, they ultimately see themselves as “empty” works, elaborated from the artist's aspiration to let “non-individual”, “non-designed” works emerge, in a questioning of the artist as “genius”—another approach to creating art that has accompanied the artist for years.

The original chronology of the series of the self-portraits is given up in the overall plot of the project; now their random appearance in the montages lets go of our common understanding of time and creation. They switch places, can be seen only in sections—fields of individual human experience; of marginal personal perspective catching only a glimpse or a bit more, as if from one side, of what Deep Time might feel like, of how it might feel when everything falls together into one—in the Everywhen; only to lose that glimpse again—like phenomena that disappear only to reappear on the other side; like a glimpse always coming back.

In a resumption of the chronological approach, the wall installation of ca. 5 x 12 meters consists of the 60 image montages sequenced in rows, in the form of high-gloss digital prints on alu-dibond. The pictures still create a flat impression—just like static representations do; due to sometimes marginal differences between them, some of them might look the same, but they are not. In other phases, a kind of development, a kind of movement of or in time may be perceptible. After having been created as individual images, they now form a series without a beginning and without an end; and fall together into one single work. Although the rows still form a series of static representations, this arrangement of the 60 montages, in combination with their formal character, evokes the option of endless reading, thus not only enabling a suspension of the linear passage of time, but also having the ability to induce the viewer's experiencing of finding her-/ himself in stillness, in living existence, maybe in the key of an axis where the experience of Shifting Temporalities can emerge.

But how does this “emptiness” act in time? The static materialization of the wall installation seemed to be only part of the overall research process. Ultimately, the static images asked to be transformed into movement and, in the experiential videos created from the 60 still image montages, the search for the “empty” culminated in a meditative reflection of the so-called self on the basis of moving images on a “classical” time line ...

First, a 30-minute video was created—*skin flats 0*, the full version master –, again an unintentionally created sequence using the chronological order of the 1c-image montages, in which a classic fade into black and back was applied as the ever same form of transition from one still to the next to become an endless video loop of long stills without any change of rhythm in time. From the master, three further loops—*skin flats part I, II, and III*—were created by cutting the master into three parts of roughly the same duration; shifts in the fades in the individual parts led to barely perceptible, yet existing rhythm changes. They were solely caused by the quasi-technical synchronization of the duration of the individual videos. In terms of content, the cuts were just as unintentional as the creation of the master video in its

chronological image order, in its rhythmlessness playing along a linear timeline.

Now the static wall installation had found a moving image extension; the video loop master and its parts complement the rows of static prints. When played simultaneously on black 4K-flat screens hanging in their own row at some distance from the installation of the 60 image montages, they are still never simultaneous. Now they not only tell of movement in time and not only examine the interchangeability of manifestations, in a generalization of the specific and the nesting of actual states and processes in it—now they perform it, aiming at opening the way to a perception of the “emptiness between things”, thus finding back to their specificity through the eyes of the user.

In the beginning of 2023, the project still followed the approach of exploring “emptiness”. Not least due to the unexpected occurrence of life-threatening cancer in the artist and severe emotional turmoils, including the fear of death and a complete helplessness in the face of the paradox of the proven need to cultivate hope and courage to strengthen health and healing and having to let go in the end anyway—whether one survives illness or not—, an attitude of meditating in “emptiness” basically did not lose any importance or meaning; but psychological storms in realizing the possibly timely circumstance of having to face death came to the fore. The “space between things” and its exploration that had accompanied the artist throughout her life—thus, the entire approach to *skin flats*—entered a previously unknown dimension.

From one day to the next, the theme changed from researching “emptiness” to “fullness in emptiness”; it virtually reversed itself, within a fraction of an instant—as if the duration of an artistic development process was reduced to zero. An unexpected plot point had changed the story; a storm-like turn had occurred, which at the same time felt so light and fully transparent in its logic as it appeared in a sudden, unexpected and abrupt way—as if through a kind of Acceleration.

After a period of closely looking at the emotional states that had so unexpectedly arisen in the patient, the artist decided to base the new dramaturgical framework on the five psychological phases of dealing with grief (Kübler-Ross 1970).

Now, the artist considered adding a dynamic soundtrack that would translate the very still visual language into each of the five different dynamics of the acts. She felt inspired by the sensual and passionate electronic music of the singer and composer Annabelle Galea from Malta publishing under the label CHILD and her ambient sound pieces filled with melodic piano and guitar sounds. The feeling of being strongly touched by this sound language was an important phase in searching for “fullness”; it left clear traces in exploring it and, in all its passion, significantly contributed to the conceptual elaboration of the five rhythmic phases; for the project to eventually find back to the never ending beginning of *skin flats*—in a continuous search of the “silence of emptiness” and the “unboundedness of fullness”, the idea of adding a soundtrack to the meditative imagery dissolved into a transparent breeze of clarity ...

This coming back to the beginning was not a re-finding of the same beginning, a new beginning was found, although aesthetically it might not have shown ... The project was no longer the same. Finally, in 2024, the silence of the master *skin flats 0* asked for shortening of its loop duration so that the recipient can hold the concentration needed to stay in immersive experience without being transported by a soundtrack. With an overall loop duration of ca. 14 minutes and—again defined by editing necessities only—lightly re-edited blends, it found its final form. Consequently, the splitting into the parts *I*, *II*, and *III* led to three new loops of an

approximately even loop duration.

Without the immersion in Annabelle Galea's passionate music and the dramaturgical unfolding of acts that intervened deeply in the artist's way of being and thinking, the project would never have found its way into the context of a deep connectedness with a sense of “fullness” and “emptiness”, the difference between and the oneness of them. Without a “living it through”, *skin flats* would not be able to radiate it. The preference for the term “void” over “emptiness” would not have arisen; and an entropic belief in an interchangeability of phenomena without any meaning, without any cause, without any consequence, thus without any particularity, would not have dissolved. The “void” may appear as “emptiness”, but it is always full of “abundance”. “Emptiness” is never “nothing”. “Nothing” itself is “something”. There is no “emptiness”, there is only the “empty”,—the “void”—, rich of “fullness” which is nothing but “abundance”; perceivable through interconnection; through Embodiment.

On-the-fly, the given speed of human perception from a linear time perspective seems to be too slow to perceive such a profound inversion as it took place in *skin flats*; in most if not even in all cases, realization takes place retrospectively. Sometimes it is described as a “spark” or a Eureka moment—a retrospective experience of having gained already “hit” knowledge, combined with a feeling of triumph in the face of the “won” knowledge or simply a feeling of joy in the sense of the ancient Greek expression “I have found (it)”.

Through the occurrence of a crucial turning point in the plot of *skin flats*, “fullness” emerged and immediately swapped places with “emptiness”—in locality, on a horizontal line of geographical coordinates that—in the cultures having conditioned the artist—is usually drawn from left to right. Viewed in linear time, generally also perceived as a horizontal development, the actuality of “emptiness” moved into a specific past—into a linear past as such and into the *biographical* past of the author and the project.

After a second cancer operation which was hardly survived by the artist, the project deepened further. The direction stayed the same but it delved even more into the exploring of “fullness in emptiness”—and the sensing of it in all its physicality. “Fullness” now finally gained vast priority over “emptiness”, and—following the spatial association in common usage of the term “priority” as “above something”—“took top position” in a vertical line of physical coordinates as well as in a value concept.

“Emptiness” lost its *actual*, thus hitherto *current–present* meaning for the individual and the project. If, in the sense of objectivity, so-called *real* truth—as it appeared to the patient—had been found, this would have been a realization of *universal*—does it really exist?—as much as *actual* knowledge.

Particularly in the context of value changes and movements between consciousness and subconsciousness, it should be noted at this point that more recent assumptions in the so-called Western hemisphere regarding a “vertical” arrangement are strongly derived from and shaped by the vertical axis in the Freudian superego / ego / id-model; however, it can also be found in archaic systems of thought of many other cultures and religions, e.g. in the idea of the World Tree in Shamanism and the practice of travelling between worlds along this vertical axis. In this sense, *skin flats* engages with the Shamanic technique of Climbing the World Tree that turned effective through the artistic production process itself and holds the optional quality of staying active in the viewer's perception.

In many archaic cultures, this method is not perceived as the only option; this journey

can take place through various, also non-linear techniques; the axis of the World Tree is only one of a series of possibilities. A rotation, a shear or a shift consisting of the combination of different movements can be further paths of travel, which—just as in the “spark-like” Eureka moment experienced in *skin flats*—are undertaken simultaneously in addition to horizontal and vertical movements and their reversals; it could be a further level created by them through their simultaneousness or a whirling out of them like a hurricane; Acceleration might take place in the center of the light cones from the Theory of Relativity that can coincide at one point.

In physics, the term “acceleration” stands for any change in speed, be it an acceleration, a deceleration or a change in direction. In the plot points that unexpectedly occurred in the artist's life, thus in the development process of *skin flats*,—at least—one hurricane-like twist was contained, embedded in the linear plot.

*Catastrophe is the past coming apart. Anastrophe is the future coming together.*¹

Individual memories are simultaneously universal, and they inscribe themselves into matter. Memories live in all things. Memory lives in all things. Memory is inscribed in the physical, and its origin of creation may never have ended, may never end. Deep Geological Time, its interferences with “Human Time”, and vice versa are central themes in current discussions about the definition of the Anthropocene. The interdependency of influences is written into matter and works in multiple ways. The past influences future developments that are already creating presence and do have an influence on the past, with all their interconnected information nodes. This assumption might already be included in Chaos Theory.

Individual experience in time could be called a memory as the most tiny physical quantity of physical existence contains such a volume and quality of information that it is not perceivable by the human brain. Moments are already gone while humans are still experiencing. Presence might be an existence in an Everywhen that humans cannot actively remember, but which they can maybe live in the “here and now”.

Some memories may evaporate, some may stay, perhaps all will stay; maybe they have always existed. Can it be scientifically proven as a fact—true [?]-that memories / memory are / is saved in everything and that they live in everything?

If memory is written into physicality you will probably always live through it. This is maybe why the Everywhen is considered the same for everyone and everything in this falling together of temporalities and states of matter—in all its physical and biological manifestations and those of individual human realities, conditioning, and beliefs. *skin flats* looks at such individual memory in the light of an Everywhen existing in everything, everybody, and in every time.

Not only going through individual grief and looking into the face of death might induce a sensuous consciousness of interferences and “Inter-Influences” of future, presence and past and their falling together into one. Creating the individual does have an impact. Or, as Chaos Theory puts it: “Whatever we do affects everything and everyone else, if even in the tiniest way. When a butterfly flaps its wings, a breeze goes round the world.”

In recent years, studies from various scientific disciplines seem to confirm this famous

1 Sadie Plant and Nick Land, “Cyberpositive”, in: *Unnatural: Techno-Theory for a Contaminated Culture*, ed. Matthew Fuller, 1994; quoted in: Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, (eds.), *#ACCELERATE: The Accelerationist Reader*, Urbanomic, Falmouth 2014, 3.

postulate that explains the Butterfly Effect so aptly. Not only in the context of Artificial Intelligence and assisting technologies a multiplicity of aspects of “Inter-Influences” are examined:

Phaenomena that establish mutual realities are strongly investigated in the context of Neuroplasticity. In this context, the studies carried out in the Waisman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Buddhist monks that provided evidence-based proof on the effects of meditation techniques on neuronal plasticity are still viewed as groundbreaking (Davidson / Lutz 2008).

In Positive Psychology, it is a long-established premise that changes in attitudes, ultimately of states of biological health, can be achieved through mental training.

The most recent streams of thought regarding the term Embodiment centrally concern core questions of contemporary philosophy of mind (Beckermann 2001) as the body-soul problem of philosophy is addressed: How can one imagine the interaction of “body”, i.e. body, brain, matter, and “soul” (here understood as cognition, psyche, thinking)? Although the theory of Embodied Cognition is still a paradigm in the making, its assumption that the so-defined soul is embodied, introduces a reciprocal, quasi-dualistic causal connection that goes beyond the traditional reductionist positions of Idealism and Radical Constructivism as well as Physicalism, which is often found in Neurobiology today (Tschacher 2022).

In Empirical Aesthetics the embodied reaction to aesthetic stimuli is investigated, be it in the visual arts (Tröndle et al. 2014) or in musicology (Wald-Fuhrmann et al. 2021). The viewer's entire physicality plays an essential role in the visual (Zickfeld et al. 2020) and acoustic experience (Tschacher 2021).

[Deductable references ...] to physicality play[...] a role in contemporary cultural-ethical theories and radiate[...] as ecological thinking in nutritional guidelines (organic cultivation, vegetarianism) as well as an ideal of sustainability in politics in general. The 4E Cognition approach (Newen, De Bruin & Gallagher 2018) aims at providing a comprehensive theory for further insights and ideas of the Embodiment perspective, and it has been suggested to add yet another E for “ecological” (Rietveld, Denys & van Westen 2018) (Tschacher 2022).

These are only very few examples out of the multiple research approaches to phaenomena of Embodiment in the contemporary light of perspectives on “Inter-Influencing”.

The Artistic Research project *skin flats* understands itself as an approach to immersive experience in the context of Shifting Temporalities; trying to evoke meditative consciousness of “being in being” in recipients by taking them on a journey into their individual Everywhen.

The research results from observing and analyzing the production process of the artistic installation *skin flats* led to the conclusion that out of a position of “non-attachment”– by immersing in a state of perceiving from a “space between manifestations”–, the “stillness” of the “void” can be perceived; “abundance” can be realized; by simultaneously living “emptiness” and “fullness”–through “connectedness”.

skin flats dedicates itself to the uniqueness of this spark of realization that never existed as it is gone while perceiving it; and which does not exist yet as it is an imagination.