

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

The simultaneous existence of emptiness and fullness must not be a paradox—they can be one and the same

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ABSTRACT

The “everywhen” has a beginning that never ends—this is one of the assumptions in the deep time theory not only referring to geological time. Does it really contain past information as well as future imaginations, inscribing itself into physicality, matter, and thus writing history, presence and future at the same time? Discourses surrounding the “anthropocene” are still in their infancy; the polychronological concept of “deep time” as known not only from Māori indigenous cultures has developed over long periods of time. If the everywhen is a space-time where everything—all times, all places, all matter—can collapse into one, then what is it that arises—“emptiness?” Or is it entropic? And, can human consciousness access such everywhen? The paper explores the above questions on the basis of examining the creation processes of the image-video installation *skin flats*, in the light of positions from phenomenology and with a focus on embodied cognition.

Keywords

Everywhen, Emptiness, Void; Fullness, Abundance, Time, Polychronology, Anthropocene, Aitologies, Embodiment

1 Introduction

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

The paper explores the above questions on the basis of examining the creation processes of the image-video installation *skin flats*, in the light of positions from phenomenology, and with a focus on embodied cognition.

skin flats started from close-ups of skin. For the artist, the blurry photographs “emerged” as they were created through the accidental and unconscious use of the camera. In a purely formal approach, the “self-portraits” were transformed into abstract images of flat geometric and simultaneously fuzzy field character—this is what led to the project title.

The artist continued to focus on letting emptiness appear; a “nothingness” between things—an aspiration she has been pursuing for decades.

But perhaps this understanding of emptiness and the claim to make it perceptible are entropic? Does emptiness have a form? Can it be given a form? Can it be contained in another form if it itself has no form? *The ontological opposition between physical mass and space* is a paradox and remains one of the recurring conflicts in the arts. [1].

In an intuitive and randomly discovered way, the individual edits were arranged into triples. In these montages, they overlap and form segments of phenomena

that—for the artist—connote future, present, and past, as well as their “inter-influencing.”

skin flats turned into a quasi-automatically generated space of self-reflective perspectives, created through “subconscious image writing” and an “immersion in collectivity” by means of abstracting subjective phenomena. Although the montages are composed of specific self-portraits, they ultimately see themselves as “empty” pieces, elaborated from an aspiration to let “non-individual” work emerge, not least in a questioning of the artist as a “genius”—another approach to creating art that has accompanied the author for years.

The original chronology of the photographs taken is given up in the overall plot; the random appearance of the edits 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 subjective perspective catching only a glimpse, as if from one side, of how it could be perceived when everything falls together into one; only to lose that glimpse again—like phenomena that disappear to just reappear on the other side; like a fleeting glance that keeps returning ...

The wall installation, measuring approximately 5x12 meters, consists of the 60 montages, which are arranged in rows of alu-dibond prints in chronological order of their creation. The triples form a sequence without any beginning or end; the individual edits fall together into a single work, now appearing simultaneously in chronological and non-chronological order.

This arrangement, in combination with the work's formal language, suggests the option of endless reading and thus once again allows for a suspension of linear time in the viewer's perception.

But how does emptiness act in time? The static representation of the search for an everywhen seemed to be only part of the overall research process.

Ultimately, it asked to be transformed into movement, and in the resulting experiential videos, the artist delved further into meditative reflections on the so-called self ...

First, *skin flats 0* was created, an approximately 15 minutes video—again a sequence without any intentional content. A classic fade into black and back was used as the ever-same form of transition from one triple still to the next, leading to an endless loop without any change of rhythm in time. By simply cutting this “master” into three parts of roughly the same duration—*skin flats part I, II, and III* were

created. Shifts in the fades caused only by technical reasons led to barely perceptible, yet existing rhythm changes.

The static installation had found a moving image extension; the original 4K video and its parts complement the rows of the prints. When looping simultaneously on flat screens hung in their own row at some distance from the installation of the panels, they are nevertheless never simultaneous. Now the images examining their own interchangeability not only tell of movement in time, but—in a generalization of the specific as much as the nesting of specific phenomena in the abstract—they perform it, with the aim of opening up a dynamic path to perceiving an “emptiness between things;” and thus letting still moments find back to their specificity through the eyes of the recipient.

Not least due to the artist's unexpected, life-threatening cancer diagnosis and the severe emotional turmoil, including the fear of death and the utter helplessness in the face of the paradox of the proven need to cultivate hope and courage to strengthen health and healing, only to ultimately have to let go—whether one survives illness or not—the meditation on emptiness lost none of its significance; however, its exploration, which had accompanied the artist throughout her life—and thus her entire approach to *skin flats*—entered a previously unknown dimension. From one moment to the next, the theme changed from the exploration of 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 thunderstorm-like turn had occurred, which at the same time felt so light and transparent in its logic as it appeared in a sudden, unexpected and abrupt way—as if through a kind of acceleration. A situation had inverted, as had a mindset:

Emptiness is never “nothing.” Nothing itself is “something.” There is no emptiness, there is only the “empty,” the “void.” In itself it is rich of fullness, which is nothing else but “abundance,” perceivable through connectedness.

Thomas Metzinger attributes a distinct phenomenal quality to emptiness, which he describes as a certain openness to the world that is related to knowledge, [a ...] space defined by the ‘possibility’ of acquiring knowledge [2].

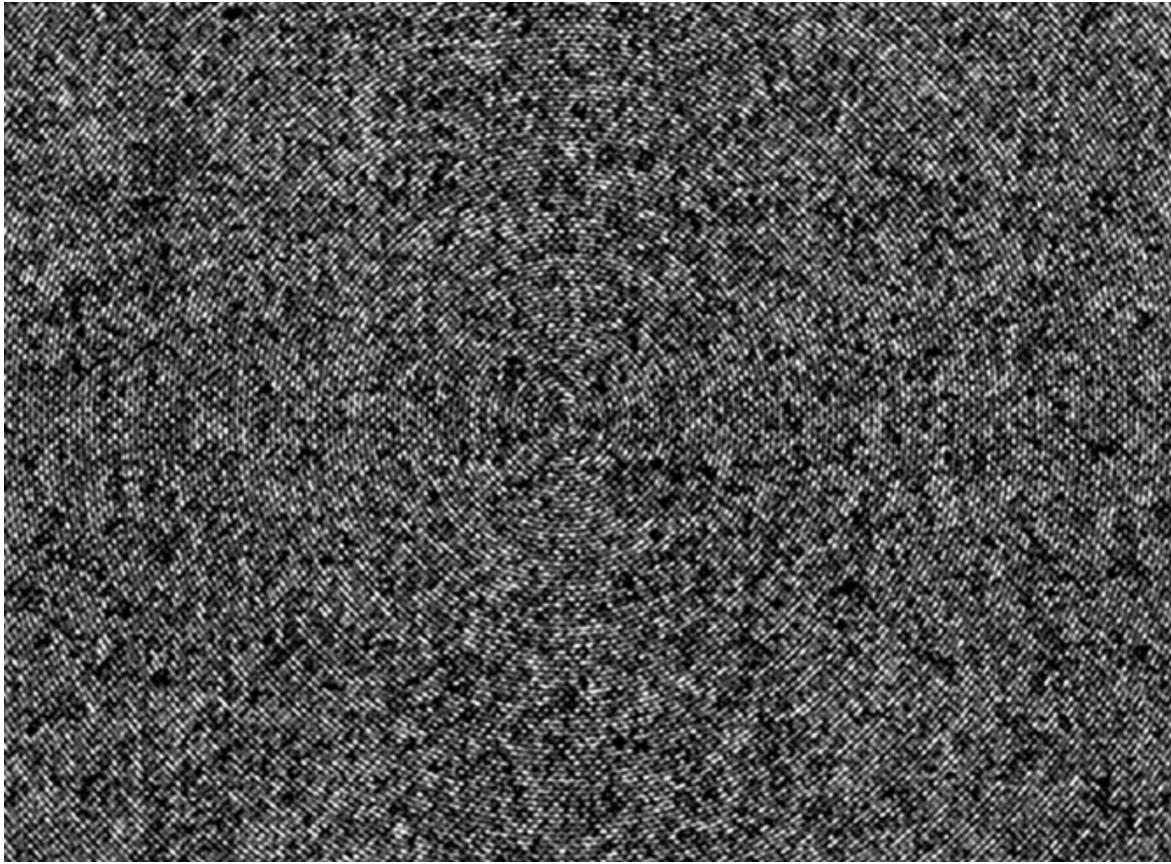


Figure 1: Alexandra Reill. 2022. *skin flats*. Digital image edit of a photographic self-portrait

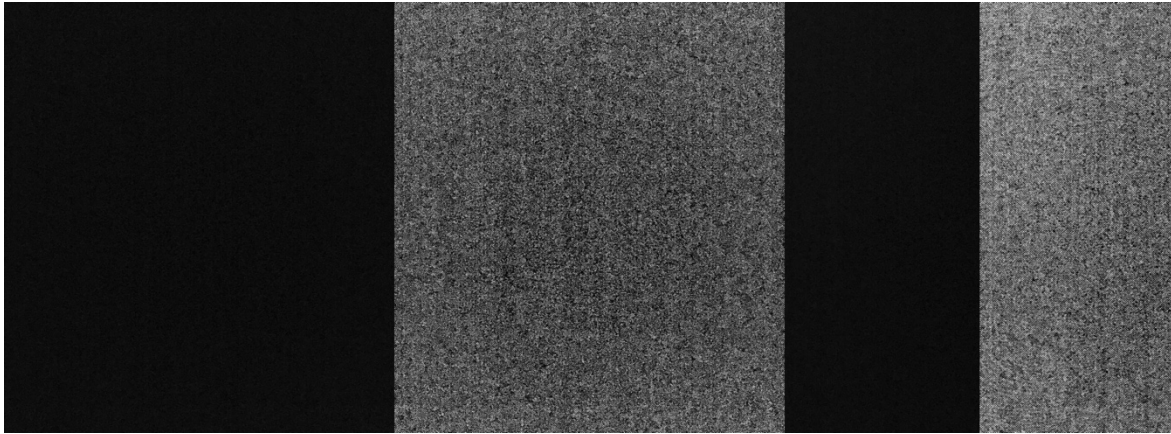


Figure 2: Alexandra Reill. 2022. *skin flats. triple 007168*. Digital image montage

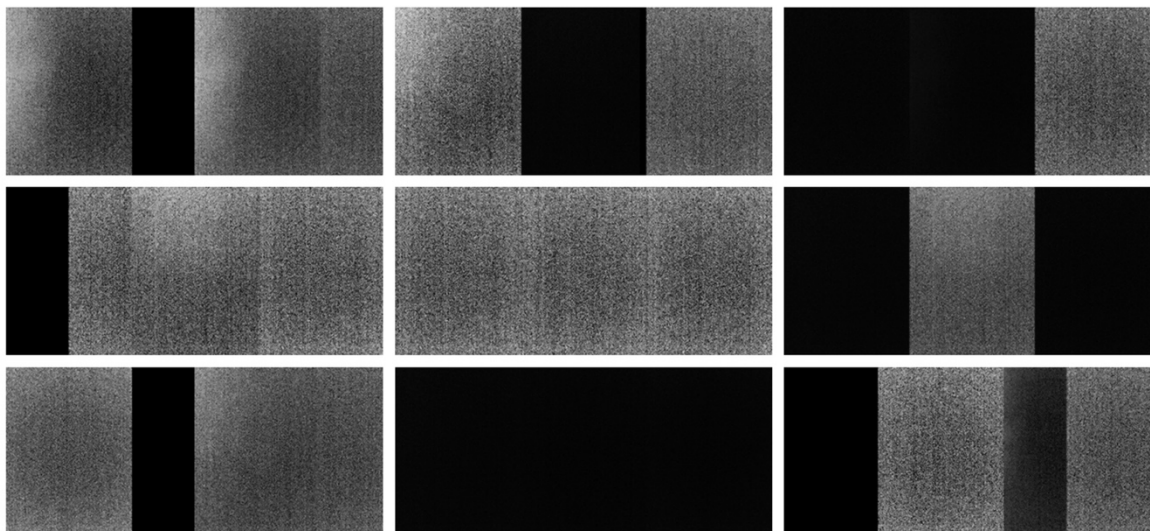


Figure 3: Alexandra Reill. 2022. *skin flats*. Wall installation of 60 digital image montages (triples). Selection

For Nazareth Karoyan, emptiness [...] *is not a result but rather a consequence. A result is something to strive for, to create, and achieve, whereas a consequence is something to face or to end up with. Consequently, as a state or consequence, emptiness can be reached; it can be discovered. Its forms are revealed, unearthed, or, to use a stronger term, invented as fissures, cavities, openings* [...] [3].

Creating the specific does have an impact. Or, in other words: When a butterfly flaps its wings, a breeze goes round the world.

The research results from observing and analyzing the production process of *skin flats* led to the conclusion that the void and its abundance can be realized; by simultaneously experiencing emptiness and fullness—through connectedness. They can be one and the same and do not have to form a paradox.

The artistic piece *skin flats* understands itself as an approach to immersive experience in the context of “shifting temporalities,” trying to evoke a sense of deep time in recipients by taking them on a journey into their individual everywhen.

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

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