



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

FIGURATIONS OF IMMANENCE: THE EVENT OF WRITING¹

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Prologue

This is a totally unfinished encounter with the concept of immanence. It is not that I can say that I can clarify anything. Also my encounter starts and starts again with the question: how to clear, how to flatten, how to clean our pages.

Immanence sometimes, in rare moments, perhaps popped up in the process of writing—I am not sure. I could not grasp it. I would be a liar, if I said I trapped it. It could not be trapped. It vanished all too often. Sometimes I thought immanence has to do with mathematics, then it appeared to be mystical. Next time it appeared as very fundamental, but not in the Kantian sense as an unconditioned condition.

This text is certainly and explicitly not of a glamorous virtuosity. It is slowly written. More meditated. In the sense, that I tried—really tried—to write it in the middle of approaching the concept of immanence. Sitting in the middle of other texts, of thoughts of others, in the middle of Deleuze, Derrida, Cixous, Spinoza, Lispector, Braidotti. They are not all quoted directly. But they are witnessing this approach.

So let's start.

The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with pre-existing, pre-established clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 204)

So, here I am. Sitting at my writing desk. Sitting and waiting for a breath of air. Sitting in front of a blank page, which is massively covered.

How to clean it?! How to shred, how to flatten?!

It is a very early morning. It seems as if the world is sleeping. Even the dog is sleeping. Breathing. Dreaming, I guess, since it barks from time to time, whilst sleeping. It is a very early morning. It seems as if the world is sleeping.

Yet, I am not sure, if the *world* ever sleeps. Or is something constantly sleeping. Perhaps it dreams. And that's what we are. Figures of a fiction—able to continue fictionalizing what we are about to become *within, upon* and *of* this fiction: what we are about to become *within the sway of this fiction, upon* its stream as well as inside *of* this very fiction ...

So, flattening that page. Some say, that **writing** is an act of cruelty. You have to go on word by word. Inching your words into the skin of the page, the skin of bodies. Biting precisely. You choose your words. You exclude others. You are selecting. You are naming. You are identifying. You are defining, even if you do not want to. That is an act of a certain cruelty. Yes, and there is no escape.

But, what about the blank page?!

Fighting against this massively covered blank page?!

Before writing a single word, you have to erase tons of words, of meanings, of invocations. Before writing a single word, you have to *handsew* all this.

And this is not only true for the painter and the writer as author of literature, as we learn from Deleuze and Guattari.

What about those of us being philosophers? At present, philosophy finds itself in a huge machine of production: write, get peer reviewed, publish, if you luckily passed the peer review. Write again, fail, publish, fail again. Fail better. Yes, it is true, philosophy's stage is not only the page, the writing page. Even if Derrida—perhaps—longed for this. Philosophy is not “only” taking place in writing. But at present, isn't it a lot of writing we are confronted with?

But: I am asking you:

Do *we* confront ourselves with *writing*?!

Really?!

Are we really fighting with the blank pages—with the massiveness of their coverage?!

Or is it on a very practical level that our writing starts with copy and paste?! So, adding more coverage. Loading the page even thicker. Isn't that strange?!

And yes, I am convinced, it is a problem that we most of the time write on a computer. Not, because some of them are called personal computers and they are not that personal ... The problem is, that computers are bureaus, they are offices. We do everything on our computer: We work, we communicate in terms of Email and Skype and so on, we write our papers, our proposals. We store our photos, we post, watch films. We organize our money transfers, and we dispense our depts. And so on and so forth. So, could this seriously be called freedom? A place to do nearly everything—a device of almost unlimited possibilities.

No. This is not freedom in a positive sense. It is the torture of self-discipline. *You* have to force *yourself* to con-centrate, to work *now* on your lecture, your poem, your book, your manuscript, your proposal, your film, your composition et cetera. Only you yourself can define which app is the app for now. Every app is a self-application at first place. It's your job. Your responsibility. And it is *one* device.

So, how to flatten that page which is the screen?! It seems to be endlessly crowded. Uncleanable. No flatscreen flat enough.

Flattening.

What is that act of flattening?! Of cleaning?! Of shredding the page, once one sits down dedicated to the event of writing, painting, etc.

Is it an act of spacing? Spacing the crowded space. Making it porous. Open. Invent holes and gaps.

So, flatten your page as long as it looks like a horizon. I say to myself. And I would love to fly AND touch the surface in writing at the same time. Is that possible?!

Here we have it again, we had it yesterday already: *voler*.

It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down. (Cixous 1976, 887).

This is what we can learn from Hélène Cixous in her wonderful essay the *Laugh of the Medusa*.

Apropos: changing around the furniture: The given text has been presented first in the course of a Conference, entitled with "The Concept of Immanence", organized by the FWF PEEK-project "Artist-Philosophers. Philosophy AS Arts-based Research" [AR 275-G21]. Before the start of this conference, Arno Böhler, Susanne Valerie Granzer, I and Hans Hoffer—who developed the idea for this space with the arrangement of furniture, the writings on the wall, together with us—literally moved the furniture to open this place, to make it hopefully here and there a bit porous for the "breath of air from chaos", Deleuze is talking about. The plane of immanence he says, constitutes "the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth or deterritorialization, the foundation on which it creates its concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 41). So we tried to deterritorialize this territory—in a quite hands-on-sense—in order to open it: For our shared encounter with immanence.

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the plane of immanence as "a section of chaos that acts like a sieve" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 42). A porous ground.

For them the plane of immanence consists of a multitude of layers, that are sometimes separate and sometimes knit together. It is for this reason that they call philosophical time "stratigraphic" and describe it as a fractal surface.

So, here I am writing as if I am flying. And how could I dare to touch the fractal surface at the same time. Is that possible?!

Flying is woman's gesture-flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. (Cixous 1976, 887)

So, let's fly. Let's practice a writing that flies, that allows it to steal away, to move, to spread, to transfer itself, to become other than writing—or a writing which touches thinking. A writing with the potential to show its openness.

Deleuze and Guattari propose that “[p]erhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think of THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane ...” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 59–60).

It is there—unthought in every plane. Does that mean it will remain unthought, even if we all try to *think* it?! Or does that mean that the act of thinking has the potential to provide access to immanence—OR the other way round (perhaps by the same time): Does this layer of immanence, which is there in every plane, provide access to thinking?

Deleuze and Guattari ask us for a very modest thing to do: “Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think of THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there ...” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 59–60).

Showing that it is there. How?! What does *this* showing mean?!

To show something is an interesting act. Actually very difficult. If not even impossible to a certain extend. So often one wants to show something, but all we can see is the subject, who is trying to show. And not *what* one wants to show. And it even seems that both are fundamentally intermingled. What I am showing here today is inseparably intermingled with me. It is *my* Deleuze, *my* Derrida, *my* Cixous, *my* writing ... and will remain to a certain extend. What a tragedy. What a prison. What a limit. What a condition.

To be clear: It is my writing in the sense that it is in a way singular and always connected to a perspective. Not in the sense of any privacy or authentic individuality or identity. It is the perspective of the process of embodiment at this place, I learned to call my place—I.

Let’s extend this place.

Let’s push the envelope as much as we can. And, as Deleuze and Guattari go on “to think it in this way as the outside and inside of thought, as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 59–60).

The not-external outside and the not-internal inside: the milieu.

This means we have to face the question in which milieu, in which surroundings, on which surfaces and stages, on which canvases and pages, in which sculptures or around them, etc. immanence could appear—at least for the event?! So, as artistic researchers, philosophers working on immanence we are also challenged to move the furniture, to clean the screen, to get hands-on and to create surroundings in order to provide at least a space for the layer of immanence to occur. If anything, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, makes all living beings, including the human subjects, very much "part of nature". Calling for an embodied philosophy of radical immanence marks the start of a bodily philosophy of relations. The body in this perspective is a relation to what is not itself. To what remains always already open. It is basically a movement or an activity. Within movements or activities. Like a *single* and simultaneously *same* voice of multiple voices, the sound of the sea assembles the sound of each single drop, which we do not hear as single. But in the sound of the sea we hear the sound of each drop, both in difference and univocally.

Writing onto this multitude seems to be writing onto a porous sieve. The only structure which seems to be strong enough to function as reason in our times—the English word reason by the way is wonderful: it is ratio as well as "Grund" as we in German say.

Writing that moves into and onto this sieve. Or through. It is a question of intensity and movement. Speed or slowness. An approach. In his final essay entitled *Immanence: A Life*, Deleuze writes: "It is only when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can speak of a plane of immanence" (Deleuze 2001, 27).

Epilogue

This text was written in the early mornings only. Directly after awakening and getting up. It was written in the bathroom of my apartment with my back leaning on the bathtub, a technique of writing I learned from my dear wife. And it was partly written at my writing desk with our sleeping dog accompanying me. I drank hot water while writing as well as coffee. Note to myself: Too much coffee. This text was written in English by myself. I tried to stay with the English I am capable of. Thus the threshold of language has become an experience—one of disappointment and joy at the same time. My limited foreign language. My limited English. A handful shiny pebble stones in this text.

Notes

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Biography

Elisabeth Schäfer held a Postdoc position from 2014–2017 in the research project “Artist Philosophers. Philosophy AS Arts-Based research” [AR 275-G21; sponsored by the Austrian Science Funds FWF] at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. She is also affiliated to the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna, where she teaches since 2010. Her main teaching and research areas include: Deconstruction, Queer-Feminist Philosophy, Écriture feminine, Philosophy of the body.

In 2013 Schäfer edited together with Esther Hutfless and Gertrude Postl the first German translation of Hélène Cixous’ famous essay “Le Rire de la Méduse”, which has been published at Passagen Press Vienna. In 2017 she edited—again together with Esther Hutfless—“Conversation avec l’âne. Écrire aveugle” by Hélène Cixous, published at Zaglossus Vienna. Schäfer is currently working on a research project on “Trans*Writing. Immanence and Transformation. Towards a Political, Ethical and Aesthetical Theory of Writing as Arts-based Research”, for which she applied for a research-grant.

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