



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

ASSEMBLAGE AND NON-STANDARD AESTHETICS

STEFAN PAULUS OST - OSTSCHWEIZER FACHHOCHSCHULE

For Deleuze and Guattari the body without organs (BwO) is like an assemblage, composed by a multitude of intensities, gradients, molecules, splits. When Deleuze and Guattari ask how to make a BwO (1987, 149ff), their instruction to settle on a stratum, a layer of rock, can be understood literally. At heights, on vertical lines, between rocks, streams, mudflows, on firm fields and sedimentary layers, it is not only possible to escape the socius, the striated space (Deleuze/Guattari 1977, 183f); in these open, boundless, smooth spaces, unique experiences and sensations can be created (Deleuze/Guattari 1977, 28) ... and that's how I tried it too. This article deals with my attempts to make a BwO.

Thus, the BwO can be understood as a concept that implies a psychophysical experience of the self through a critique of societal modes of subjectification, of a de-subjectivation. Accordingly, in order to create a BwO, it is necessary to get rid of the meanings and regularities of society and to fill oneself with intensities. For Deleuze and Guattari life is more intense the more it is molecular and inorganic (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 520).

Dissolving the organism and becoming intense can also be understood in a figurative sense, not by killing the body but by developing multiplications, superimpositions of meanings and codes, and by going into the unknown, the undescribed, the unorganized, the formless.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that this aggregation of intensity to smooth, reduce and remove subjectivity takes place in experimentation, sound production and movement. For Deleuze and Guattari, making oneself a BwO is a tactile and haptic experience. The BwO emerges in ecstasy, in experimentation, in hearing, in listening to, in making sound (Paulus 2022a).

For me, the concept of BwO therefore has less of a philosophical fascination than a practical function. I seek out places where the impermanent, formless, vast and pathless can be found. Those searches in my work, as part of being aimlessly on the move, have become "vagrant pilgrimages" into the smooth space: mountain expeditions in the European Alps, in the Caucasus or north of the Arctic Circle, journeys in sandy or stony deserts, crisscrossing continents (<https://frameworkradio.net/2013/05/419-2013-05-05/>) or to the terra nullius, the no man's land, like the West Sahara (<https://dai.ly/x3xgevw>) or the Murmansk Oblast (<https://vimeo.com/70965224>). The undertaking of finding the organless has led to documenting elements and substances of the elements stormy weather, avalanches, sounds from inside crevasses, the howling of winds in the wide plains of deserts.

In this regard, this article invites readers to take a trip in place, to make their own BwO: "keep moving, even in place, never stop, moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification" (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 159), so that transversal connections of intensities, the coupling of sensations, the defunding and diffusion of perception can emerge (Paulus 2020a).

Deleuze and Guattari have not developed a consistent and systematic application of the concept of BwO outside of *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) and *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1993), but they simultaneously offer their concept of BwO as an analytical tool to produce multiplications (n articulations) (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 159), so this essay embarks on an audio-visual search for traces of the BwO. This search for traces leads with the documentations from the smooth spaces to assemblages of visual, audio and film material, i.e., to double and multiple exposures, field recordings and soundscapes, video montages and thus into areas of the perception of the imaginary, to superimpositions of experiences and to images without objects. This search for traces does not aim to develop an ontology of the BwO (cf. Paulus 2022a on this), instead this material is contextualized by means of Laruelle's (2014) non-standardized aesthetics (Section i), so that the unknown, the unconscious, the formless can be tracked down in addition to the pictorial (Section ii) also in the audible (Section iii) and in the audio-visual material (Section iv), to create speculations of the performative about the organless.

i. Non-Standard Aesthetics

Deleuze and Guattari did not develop a clear definition of the Body without Organs (BwO). They refer to it as an egg (Deleuze/Guattari 1977, 27; 1987, 164) or as the Spinozist immanent substance (Deleuze/Guattari 1977, 422). That is, just as for Spinoza nature exists as a single substance declined in an infinite number of variations, Deleuze and Guattari also describe the BwO as a variation of different intensities that have no obvious structure: The BwO is a permanent becoming, a developing, a life before the formation of established structures, opinions, meanings, interpretations. For Deleuze and Guattari, the BwO is less to be found in the visual (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 382), because the pictorial is the encoding of the real through hegemonic interpretations, aesthetics, norms, and values and this is nothing other than a codification and fixation of perception. Through such hegemonic representations of the real, the production and normalization of perception takes place.

François Laruelle's concept of non-photography and non-standard aesthetics describes in detail such a hegemonic representation of the real resp. an "onto-photo-logical appropriation" (Laruelle 2014, 13, 57ff translated by S.P.) of the perception of reality: e.g., in the photorealism of passport photos, product photos (fashion, food, cars), and so on, representations of the world get created which act as copies of reality. These copies help to organize the perception of reality and make it an unchallengeable fixed idea, because these images take the place of the real. With an onto-photo-logical perception, one views the real itself through a photograph—not the object, but a representation of an identity (Laruelle 2014, 43). Accordingly, onto-photo-logical perception has a symbolic dimension: it is not based on the free choice to interpret an object; instead it is based on the pre-reflexive classification of what is seen. It is based on memories that classify what is seen and make it identical with reality. In other words, before perception occurs, the senses are already predetermined by the conceptual apparatus, and the viewer of a photograph sees the world as the substance from which the viewer makes it. This leads in turn to the problem that we become incapable of discovering the new, changing processes, the becoming in the world, because we strive to discover the known in the unknown.

Laruelle's concept of non-photography and non-standard aesthetics offers the possibility to use methods and techniques to defund hegemonic organizational schemes of perception. Here, non-standard aesthetics is to be understood as a practice that has its own theoretical operations. That means to create the vision-in-one, a radical form of radical immanence (Laruelle 1998, 165), to create one's own non-autopositional rules by defunding the hegemonic interpretive power through radical immanence (Laruelle 1998, 124) and to adopt a chaotic universe of multiple "as-if" representations. That implies the creation of philo-fictions or photo-fictions of alternate meanings (Laruelle 1998, 124, 99).

Assemblages create such theoretical operations to look out for the immanence (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 406), possess their own non-autopositional rules (437f), and set up philo-fictions through the deterritorialization of space, codes, feelings (505). Experiments, installations, connections, layers, superimpositions with and of photographs as double and multiple exposures, but also audio recordings, soundscapes or moving images, and video montages possess the characteristic of withdrawing the onto-photo-logical causality from the object forms through the mixing and merging of the objects. A non-standard aesthetic emerges as spaces of possibility of imagination and experience an epistemological, spatial and sensual in-between (Laruelle 2014, 67ff).

ii. Multiexposures

A non-standard technique of observing an image begins by "distinguishing the ideational appearance and the empirical appearance by removing the object from itself" (Laruelle 2014, 60 translated by S.P.). For this purpose, double and multiple exposures in particular form the possibility to defund the empirical appearing within the object form and create therefore non-autopositional rules, because the multiexposures detach objects from their original territory. That means, in photographic multiple exposures, individual exposures or different intensities are produced on one surface. On this one surface, the objects become translucent, or they darken and

so they can be seen as the vision-in-one, because the objects blur into each other and the interpretation of the objects produces then new meanings, which can become philo-fictions.

Methodically, double or multiexposures can be produced in different ways. In my case, first I expose an analog film once, then the film gets rewound. By using a film extractor, the film is pulled out of the film container again and will be exposed once more. This process can be repeated several times.

In the following series of double exposures, I have created a smooth layer by interlocking image layers over angles and planes. Entirely in the spirit of a non-standard aesthetic: lines, shadows, reliefs emerge to create a single interface, a vision-in-one:

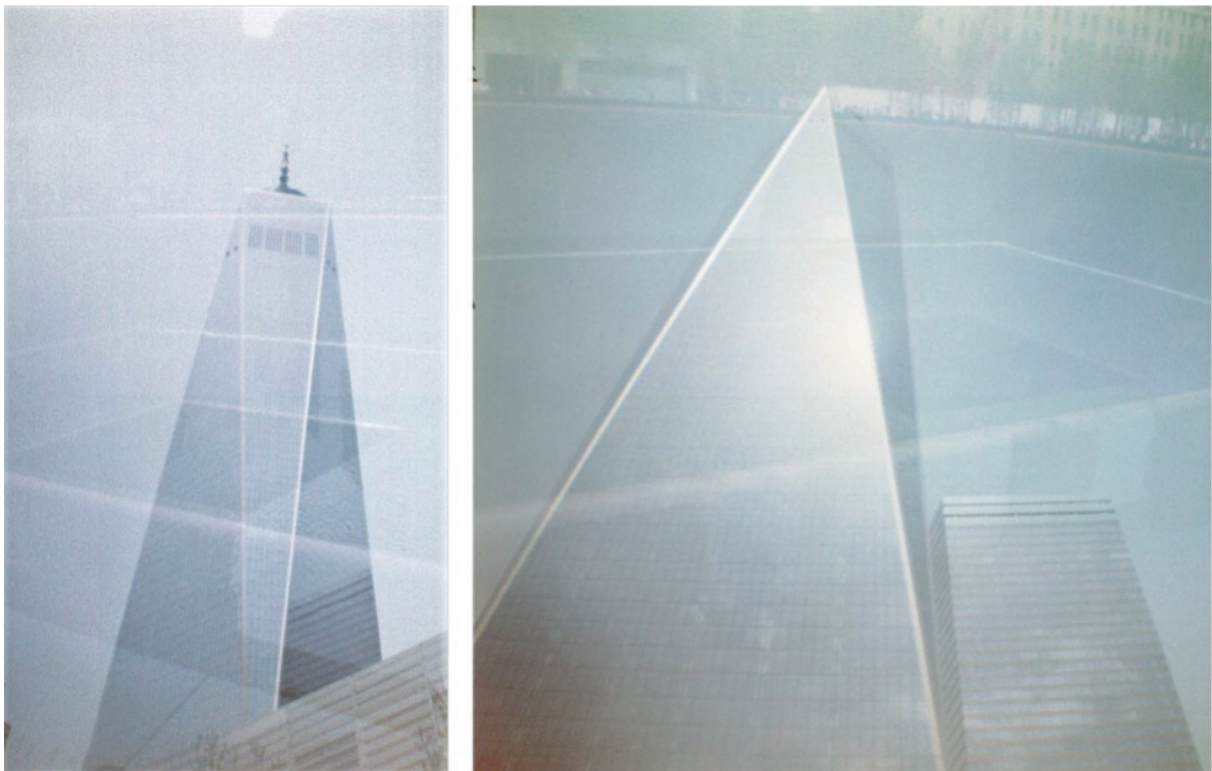


Figure 1. "uSa/nw", 35mm film for color prints, Stefan Paulus (2018)

The process of multiple exposures can also achieve a long distance between locations (any location on Earth) and a long time (months, years, decades) between exposures, as shown in the following series SFxCH (2020–2022). In this series I superimposed the striated space of the city with the smooth space of the high alpine, in order to develop a deterritorialized perception.



Figure 2. "SFxCH", 35mm black and white film, Stefan Paulus, 2020-2022

Nevertheless, references to the original locations (San Francisco and the Glarus Alps) can be established with the corresponding information on the individual image levels. This in turn can trigger a coded perception or an onto-photo-logical staging of reality ("This is a montage, because these places are many thousands of kilometers apart," etc.). Nevertheless, with the help of the practice of the vision-in-one, places beyond the original locations can be imagined.

But, as Deleuze and Guattari described, how to make oneself a BwO is more a tactile and haptic experience. The BwO emerges in ecstasy, in experimentation. When Deleuze and Guattari ask, "How could lines of deterritorialization be assignable outside of circuits of territoriality?" (1987, 34), however, such double exposures are only one answer. Another answer is to create a new sound, a *ritornello* (311ff), which involves a molar extension and a human hyperconcentration (34).

iii. Soundscapes

To seek out and record the inorganic, to create the organless from this material, all that is needed is a medium, but in order to hear the intense droning sound of the cosmic chant, the "song of the Earth" (Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 339), someone must also be willing to enter the smooth space and go where the crashing and cracking of ice surfaces, the indistinguishable in a snowstorm happens, the howling of the winds in deserts of ice and stone take place. The organless, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is found in smooth space, in the crashing and cracking of ice surfaces, in the indistinguishable in a snowstorm, in the howling of the winds of ice and stone deserts (1987, 387).

The first sound sample is called "Subterranean Contemplation In A Pyrih Labyrinth" (20:42 min)



🎧 Sound example 1: "Subterranean Contemplation In A Pyrih Labyrinth" (20:42 min). Part of: Stefan Paulus – *Halo From Inside The Mountains* // Label: Buddhist On Fire – BOF-074 // Format: 2 x File, FLAC, Album // Released: Jul 25, 2015. <https://on.soundcloud.com/RachW>

This sound example contains field recordings of wanderings through the Swiss Alps: stormy weather, high alpine winds, avalanches, and sounds emanating from glaciers and from the insides of crevices and caves, but also the overtone improvisations of the Appenzell alpine herdsman, the natural yodel, can be heard resp. modulations of it. The resulting audio mixes, compounding a multiplicity of spatio-temporal excursions, were then further encased in drones: The sound

samples, such as the natural yodel, were morphed in time and space. Pitch and length changed to produce a drone, a standing tone. I.e., the drone is to be understood as a permanent becoming. These superpositions of inorganic sounds, the molar extension of the natural yodel to a human hyperconcentration, the reference to the territory, to the individual subject, becomes imperceptible by making those forces perceptible that dissolve the relationship of the space and the organized body of the yodel groups. Technically and epistemological, this example is a soundscape. A landscape of sound, consisting of hundreds of layers of sound samples, in the duration of a few seconds to a maximum of a few minutes, digitally layered on top of each other: an analog to the geological strata of their geographic sources to create – again – a vision-in-one resp. the sound-of-the-one with non-autopositional rules that can become philo-fictions in the perception of the listener.

The second example, "A Journey Into A Spatial Fold" (14:11 min), also allows open, boundless spaces of imagination to emerge.



🎧 Sound example 2: "A Journey Into A Spatial Fold" (14:11 min); Part of: Stefan Paulus – *Salt Sea Island* // Label: Treetrunk Records [treetrunk 263] // Format: 5 x File, FLAC, Album // Released: March 14, 2013. <https://soundcloud.com/stefan-paulus/3-a-journey-into-a-spatial>

This Soundscape is a sound cartography collected through field recordings across the world. For these records I dislocated myself, followed animal trails deep into German woods, crossed the alpine valley of Ötztal or the continent America, recorded on Atlantic and Pacific islands and seaports. I connected with unknown persons. I jumped into the next subway, the nearest bus and got somewhere out. These records are done during what Guy Debord describes as 'dérive' or 'psychogeography drifts': the experimental exploration of the environment, the mindful or transient passage through urban or country areas (Debord 1955). This method can also be used to map the inner space—to create different thematic maps of reality. Epistemologically, this method produces a chaotic universe of multiple "as-if" encounters because the meaning and purpose of the journey is left to coincidence and thus random experiences and unknown intensities can be produced. In such smooth and deterritorialized spaces of assemblages of sound and intensities, the distances between the acoustic landmarks can enable the imagination and experience of unknown regions. The sound molecules, the superpositions of sounds, and the dissolving of reference points on territories allow listeners to create philo-fictions.

iv. Video Assemblage

The last aspect of a non-standard aesthetic taken up here is the experimentation with soundscapes, motion images and time images (Deleuze 1996), but not with the intention of creating memory images, as in home videos, commercials, documentaries, but in the creation of cross-fades to detect the unknown, to experience the formless.

In the first video assemblage "Stratum" (2020), the concept of territorialization and deterritorialization was taken up again.



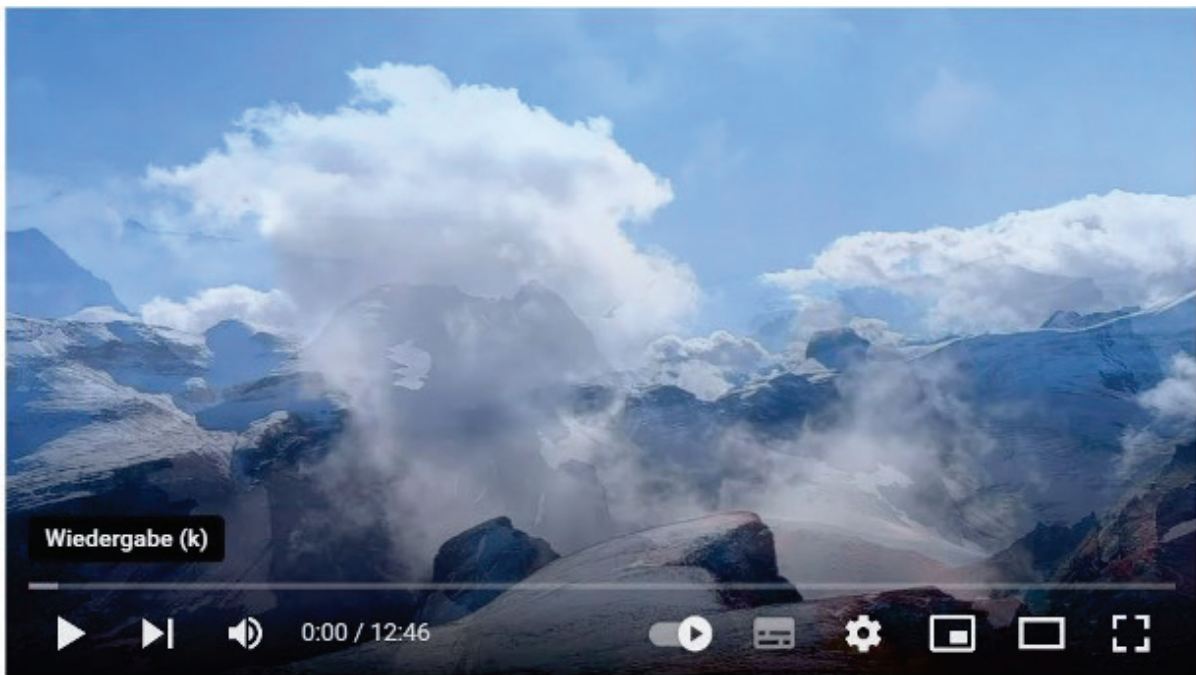
Video 1: "Stratum" (14.14 min); taken from the Mille Plateaux book/compilation „Ultrablack of Music“. Achim Szepanski (Ed.); Frankfurt/Main (2020b). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnsuXJ8CYVY>

In the Video example you can hear and see elements of the striated space: traffic, streets, electricity, pedestrians, civilization noise, machines in factories and much more. The break of the striated space begins with the musical drop (2:17 min) and the representation of sparks and fire, as a symbol for transforming, changing, dissolving molecules of the striated space, in order to let the imaginations of the smooth flow. But this assemblage does not represent cities, deserts, or mountain landscapes, nor multiplying their idea-like being, but creates, as in the multiexposures or soundscapes, a flatness and smoothness of space, levels of contingency, or a flat ontology (Deleuze/Guattari 1992, 700; Laruelle 2014, 67, 70; De Landa 2006). Within a flat ontology matter is no longer a passive substance brought into existence only by the intentionality of the observer, but by co-construction or intra-action between matter and observer. With this assumption, a reality model can be constructed in which elements and substances do not stand in hierarchical relationships to one another, but rather interconnect in assemblages of organic and inorganic

matter. Specifically, superpositions of territorialized and deterritorialized spaces were generated here. Like the alloying of Damascus steel, layers of moving images and soundscapes were digitally overlaid and interconnected by reducing the density of color and sound, so that technically a flat ontology came into existence.

Here, too, this method to create assemblages creates epistemologically—in accordance with the non-standard aesthetics—transitions and mergers of objects through superimpositions in order to make their relations immanent. Each layer becomes a part of another layer. If the shining through of different layers in the result cannot be grasped in a conceptual identification or as a synthesis, it cannot be reduced to any original matter or to an empirical reality, it is a matter of a unilateral duality in relation to the immanent (Szepanski 2015, 78) and then it is the vision-in-one. Compared to the photo- or video-clone of the real, in superpositions many realities shine through in a single surface: What appears is not transparent or transcended by the Other, to be perceived only as a copy again, but a generic model of the immanent emerges that cannot be tied back to the familiar, to memory (Laruelle 2014, 153). This One-in-All is a never-ending becoming, event and intensity, singular and incomparable, that takes the infinite path of flight lines.

The second example "Säntis", in collaboration with the Canadian sound artist Automatisme, works on the level of listening also with the concept of territorialization/deterritorialization.



Video 2: "Säntis" (12:45 min); taken from the album: *Automatisme/Stefan Paulus "Gap/Void"* / Label Constellation [CST164] // Format 180gLP / CD / DL // (2022b). https://youtu.be/wovF-zsi_tE

Here, too, this assemblage focusses visually on the technique of crossfading and the work with translucidity to create the vision-in-one. Through translucidity, the crossfading detaches perception from its self-referential territorialization or from autopositional rules. The image surface as a projection layer of the real with its undisturbed view to the object is hindered by the

reality of translucidity. I.e., an indifference of forms arises. In these pairings of sensations, the in-between emerges, as morphing, phenographic layers, which fills the zones of indistinguishability. Such porosities blur the view of the real, dissolve copies of images and codes. What remains, or rather the materializations of the superpositions, give rise to ambiguous perceptions. The absence of object completions forces the memory to complete an imagined, dreamed world through phantasies. Translucency allows the clear object to be overlooked in favor of things that call attention to themselves through increasing densities in the viewer's imagination. This, in turn, generates the non-copiable, and the non-copiable brings contingency to light. Crossfades allow a non-standard perception to be introduced, which is porous enough to let in multiple imaginings, narratives, and reveries of assemblages. The sound resp. beat/rhythm is supposed to provide associations of pulse and walking (esp. from min. 2:50), until the soundscape changes in favor of pure field recordings of the inorganic (from min. 8:08). In this way, the infinite possibilities in video assemblages also give rise to infinite spaces of possibility. In these spaces of possibilities, intersecting parts of all forms become a unity. In assemblages with multi articulations everything multiple becomes one as an infinity of modifications.

In summary, viewing and listening to assemblages with and through a non-standard aesthetic is itself an experiment to arrive in an ontological indeterminacy, to create images and concepts that capture the appearance of the world in its deterministic relation, but do not overdetermine the objective appearance; instead they under- or indeterminate it (Laruelle 2014, 140ff).

By the standards of non-standard aesthetics, assemblages are therefore not images of objects, not copies or doubles, but signals which make an event and unilateral appearances possible (Laruelle 2014, 60). By pushing the coincidental to the surface, perception and the production of meaning itself become limited, and the moment of "crossing reality or passing through a certain tunnel to the other side" (Laruelle 2014, 179; translated by S.P.), to the body without organs, becomes possible.

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Biography

Stefan Paulus (1978), Dr. rer. pol., is a professor at the University of Applied Sciences of Eastern Switzerland in St. Gallen. Since the 2000s, Paulus has published essays and books on the theory of society and agency of subjects. He has also produced sonic and visual works, including videos, photo essays, field recordings and notes based on the theory of Deleuze and Guattari. His multimedia works can be viewed on his blog <https://nowhere-nowhere.org/> and actually at the "Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Cosmic Art: A Virtual Exhibition".
Contact: Stefan Paulus, stefan.paulus@ost.ch

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