

ENTWEDER NOCH.
A COLLABORATIVE EXPERIMENT ON GENDER-FLUIDITY
WITH AND THROUGH THE ESSAY FORM

The German expression *entweder oder* (“either or”) anticipates a decision regarding one or the other, while *weder noch* (“neither nor”) acknowledges that a decision can in fact not be made. Taking this into account, *ENTWEDER NOCH* is a collaborative writing experiment that curiously introduces notions of becoming fluid. This experimental set-up with and through the essay form addresses prevailing questions how gender identity can, in non-contested authorship, play out across different bodies within the spectrum of trans.



PROLOGUE:

First Scenario: Alone

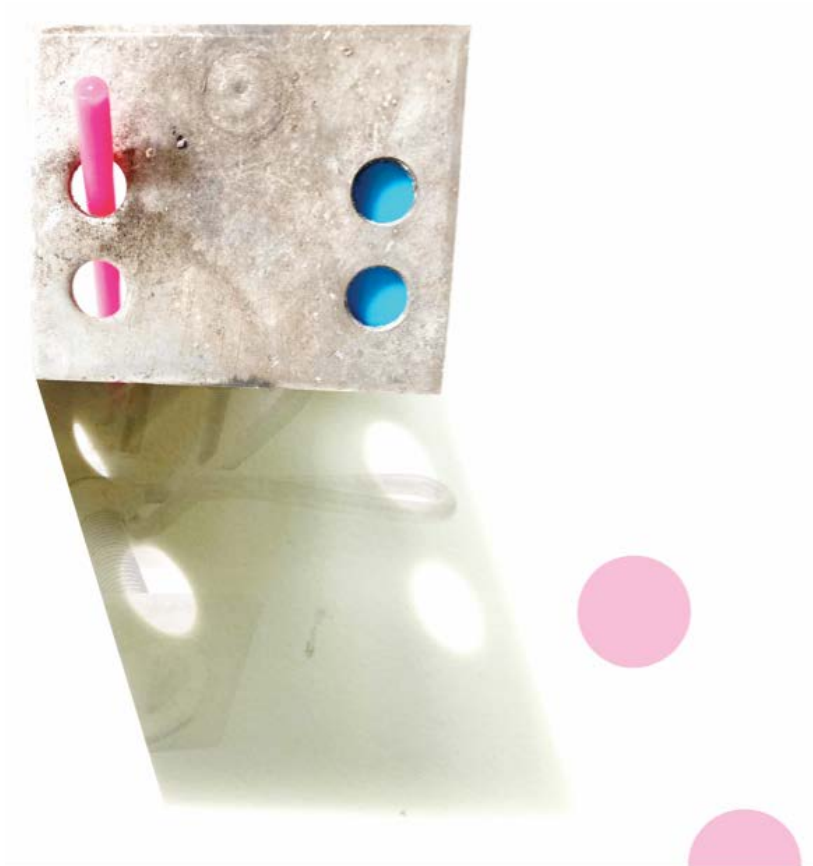
She is all by herself. Only a white sheet of paper and a computer keeping her company. She has an idea and a plot that she wants to follow. So she begins to write. Skillfully she establishes a text framework. Very systematically. Her thoughts are well-structured allowing her to write her text.

Second Scenario: Lonesome

She is all by herself. Only a white sheet of paper and a computer keeping her company. Yet, an observation sparks her interest. So she starts writing. She tries to catch the subject of interest, all the while struggling for resonating words. Her curiosity dispreads, but she does not know what kind of plot will emerge. Piece by piece, text fragments individually develop. Her writing invites thinking. The initial description evolves into an own interest that gradually solidifies. Within this writing phase, themes, figures and counterparts diffuse associatively and intuitively.

Third Scenario: Companionable

Two women live in different cities, but they want to write collaboratively in shared authorship. Together they are interested in trailing away from contested words and sentences, shifting towards ideas of liquid writing instead. Relating to Georges Didi-Huberman's concept of 'the phasmid' (1989) and notions of phasmid thinking, they are triggered by experimental set-ups that inspire moments of de-focusing. De-focusing as an act of phasmid thinking that requires a practice of un-doing or rather re-doing. The latter puts into question what they think they are seeing, which they are, in fact, only seeing because they know what they are seeing (or rather thought and believed they knew).



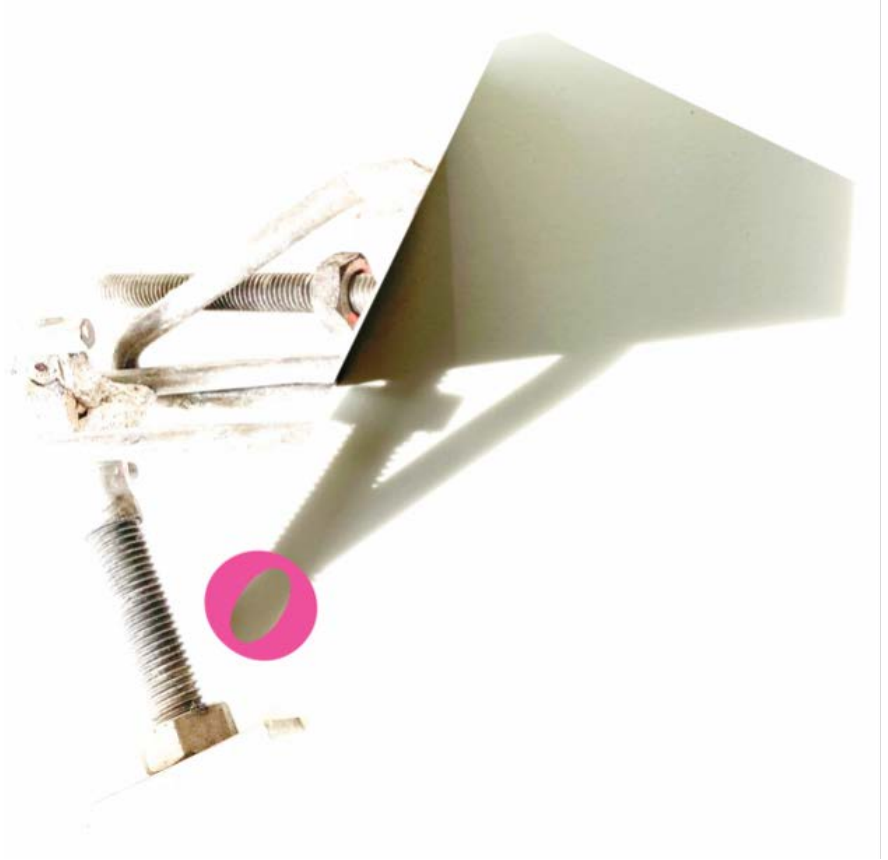
I. Silver

I have sexual characteristics that fall into the female category. I have sexual contact with people I would define as being male. Up to now, there has never really been an occasion for me to question my gender identity and a possible changeover. Until today.

Today they decided upon a rule: Don't think. Just write. So one woman begins writing. Something fascinates her. First silver, then silverfish. She does some research and comes to know the Latin name. *Lepsima saccharina*. Stop. Don't think, just write. She crosses out everything and writes *sugar guest*. The word *I* follows and a first sentence emerges. *I invite the sugar guest in*. What kind of sugar guest? And who is *I*? She stops asking questions and continues. *I offer him chocolate and cake*. A tiny plot evolves. The silver fish is the sugar guest who, in a very odd and peculiar manner, chunters and fascinates her. She sends the short text to her partner. She reads it, is irritated, laughs and is annoyed. She relentlessly crosses everything out that refuses access and focuses on one single detail that catches her interest. She continues writing, feeling the erotic tension. She sends the text back.

The woman reads Georges Didi-Huberman's essay *The Paradox of the Phasmid* (1989). Within, Didi-Huberman describes his own experience at the vivarium, the vivier, at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. While visiting the vivier, he - more or less by chance or maybe also as a movement mirroring fear - steps back. This act of literally stepping back places himself before the evidence that 'the vivarium's little forest was itself the animal it was supposed to be hiding'¹. An animal that visually engenders anxiety as it 'makes its own body into the scenery which hides it'.² This catches her interest. In light, the silverfish scurries away. In hurrying after, the beast grows. What is it hiding? They don't know. They just write.

The text goes back and forth. There is no rush. Slowly its plot becomes self-sufficient and inter-mediate. Writing emerges as a meeting zone where both women experience the act of becoming other. Despite living in different cities, they increasingly engage within each others thoughts. They essay collaboratively through space and time: A practical attempt of constant hide-and-seek and continuous sounding, sampling, and disrupting habituality. All of a sudden they find themselves amidst a topic that they, in the beginning, did not know was bubbling under. A topic engendering the spectrum of trans.



¹ Didi-Huberman, *The Paradox of the Phasmid*, 3.

² *Ibid*

II. Slicker

Today, you find this device in front of your doorstep. Why? You have no idea. You didn't order anything. You didn't even know that there was such a thing - that such a device actually existed. Who sent it? Is it a request, a demand, an invitation? Or is it maybe just a misunderstanding? You never really had an actual opinion. But now?

You open the package and then close it again. Open. Close. Just like that. The package is shipped through 'Flexse limited liability corporation'. Strangely, its prominently-placed logo is a multiple-sinuuous infinitude loop. The loop starts to blink the moment you are within immediate proximity. It shifts on the color range between light blue and light pink.

All of a sudden there is a theme. The plot develops further. A tug-of-war between a cowboy-cool slicker and an adventurous woman feeling her way towards her own sexual identity. The slicker: Is he *entweder noch*? Neither male nor female, refusing a decision? An essay evolves within which both women negotiate the possibilities of using a device with which one's one sexual identity can be interchanged. An *I* evolves, but who are you, I?

I am the person who ponders upon fluidity as an expression of non-duality. I am inspired by Karen Chiaroni's concept of 'Fluid Philosophy' (2016) which affirms that humans are 'creatures born into movement and subject to constant flux'.³ I feel encouraged to 'change the element with which we think'.⁴ I feel encouraged to change the elements with which we write. Relentlessly I share words, phrases and sentences. I complement, abbreviate and cross out. I allow for my narratives to follow yours, dwell upon and either stay, or gradually shift away again. I loose myself in-between you and I and am triggered by an extensive search that allows for the supposedly non-imaginable to be conceivably precise and diffuse spaciouly. I discover the essay form as a methodical possibility of constant flux. A possibility to go back and forth between multiple narratives and their heterogenous dimensions of reality. A possibility to dissolve space and time, focusing on my central question: What if?

What if I was to do it today?

What if ...

Inside: lots of packaging material, little content. Layer by layer I put the packaging aside. Inside: a chest. Metallic bright purple. About the size of a box of chocolates. Classy. But what the

³ Chiaroni, Fluid Philosophy, 108.

⁴ Ibid.

hell? The logo flashes on illuminating

'Flexproductive systems'. My eyes latch on to the loop of the logo. A lying eight. Moving back and forth from top to bottom and left to right and back again. I am hypnotized.

What if ...

I drag myself away. I rummage around in the bottom kitchen drawer for the kitchen scales. I need numbers. Precise calculation tells me that the package consists of a total of 67% packaging material. The actual content merely weighing 33%. I don't stop and find out that within the 2021 international gender census poll, 44,500 gender diverse persons chose non-conforming as their identity word. 33. What if I also belonged to these 33%?

You start scribbling. On the inside of my underarm. In the middle you sketch Easter 1991 at your parents' friends house Anne and Chad. Directly underneath you scribble the white albino bunny that you found dead in his box just one day after. The bunny and Anne's coming out directly connected. On the inside of my palm you scrawl the formula: male + female = x. Was that the reason the bunny died? You continue to draw and pull up my skirt. You draw the Argentinean man with whom you tangoed. He was considerably smaller than you, that's why you rested your left temple on his bald head. You felt like a sex goddess. But within which part of your body?

I put a big X directly on the bunny drawing and my thoughts wander to Chris. Earlier his name had been Christine. His last surgery was imminent. He had been through years of hormonal treatment. While we tangoed I felt as if I was simultaneously dancing with a man and a woman. My body, electrified.

While writing they ponder upon the notion of the refracted state of becoming, as conceived by Gilles Deleuze (cf. Bankston 2017). They increasingly correlate their individual body and body relationship with the supposedly unthinkable. What have they been seeing in themselves, which they, in fact, were only seeing because they thought they knew what they were seeing?

I tear the lid of the box open. Inside: a little silver jewel case. Next to it a recharger and a tiny leaflet that tells me that this device will make it possible to interchange my gender identity. I am told that it is possible to do this multiple times at any rate and any frequency. But who will guarantee that I can rollback my decision? Having feminine parts pulled out of me and masculine parts pushed inside of me. Now.

First I press the one button, then the other one and then both at the same time. The device's control unit adjusts the categories masculine and feminine variably. In the meantime the slicker has made himself feel comfortable in the living room, but this is confusing as the woman does not know if the slicker, the device, or her own gender identity interest her most. She is not even sure if maybe the slicker itself is the device that will guarantee her flex-sexuality. Her own gender



identity has totally come apart at the seams, transforming the slicker into an element for the creation of liquid imaginary, working itself into the ground of the woman's inner and outer boundaries. Her own gender identity expands into an unforeseeable exploration of the un-defined, bringing her to step into a state of *entweder noch*.

III. Light-Pink

The women have reached a writing phase that is no longer characterized through processes of intuitive writing. Instead, this phase of their shared authorship includes processes of profound thinking, re-thinking, re-writing, moving on and finally de-tangling the subject of interest from properly muddled up clichés and set phrases. The women are on the lookout and deeply engaged in dialogue. Shared doubt evokes continuous review and re-evaluation, puzzling around, turning upside down, repeatedly questioning, and trying a-new.

Quickly I pull the curtains shut. I turn on my nightstand lamp and open the jewel case anew. Behind a black subfont is a longish, glossy thing. A lepsima saccharina. One of those little fish moths that hide in the cracks of my bathroom. However, a bit bigger. About as big as a string bean. Slicker, I whisper. All of a sudden the device activates itself. On the one side it glows a light pink, transforms into pastel purple and then light blue. Pastel purple. 50% light pink. 50% light blue. 'Please name your gender identity', a voice asks me. I carefully lift the slicker out of its case and carry it to the living room. I lay it on my couch table right next to the last candy herring. It lasciviously nestles up against this sugary fish. I feel something within. From top to bottom. From outside to inside. I relocate the control unit. It's easy. Flex.

Again, the lying eight appears. The color alternating logo illuminates. I take off my clothes. I fumble around and all of a sudden there this light-pink voice, really close to my ear. That thing must have crept up on me. "Exactly", it whispers lasciviously.

SOURCES

- Samantha Bankston, *Deleuze and Becoming* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
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- Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Paradox of the Phasmid*, [1989] trans. Alisa Hartz, http://underconstruction.wdfiles.com/local--files/imprint-reading/huberman_paradox.pdf, accessed September 9, 2022.

PHOTO CREDITS

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