

The Care of the Possible: Isabelle Stengers interviewed by Erik Bordeleau

Translated from French by Kelly Ladd
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Isabelle Stengers is, without a doubt, one of the most interesting figures in the panorama of contemporary philosophy. A mobilized scientist who chose desertion, a free electron of thought, she has finally found refuge in the philosophy department at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where she initiates students into the abstract charms of Alfred North Whitehead's speculative philosophy on the one hand, and the political practices of neo-pagan witches borne from the anti-globalization movement on the other. Her prolific theoretical output is both open and original. One dimension of her thought has initiated a renewal of the relationship between the sciences and philosophy, particularly in *The New Alliance* (1979), written with Nobel Prize winning chemist Ilya Prigogine, and in *The Invention of Modern Science* (1993), winner of the Prix Quinquennal de L'essai (1996). A second key aspect of Stengers' philosophy has developed into a constructivist-inspired cosmopolitical reflection around the concept of an ecology of practices, as in *Cosmopolitics I and II* (1997/2003), *Capitalist Sorcery* (2005), and *Au temps des catastrophes* (2009). Between these two poles, there is one question that cuts across all of her work: "What has rendered us so vulnerable, so ready to justify the destruction committed in the name of progress?" This decisive problematic is animated by a vital exigency long ago articulated by William James and relayed by Gilles Deleuze: *To believe in the world*. It is with remarkable generosity that she agreed to this interview, which took place in July 2010, at her ULB office.

—Erik Bordeleau

The editors of *Scapegoat* would like to thank Erik Bordeleau for his own remarkable generosity in sharing this interview, and for allowing its English publication to precede the original French. We would also like to thank Kelly Ladd for her translation.

Practices & Academia

Erik Bordeleau: I am interested in the way you think about political intervention, which gives a unique inflection to your writing. I am thinking about, for example, *Capitalist Sorcery* or *Au temps des catastrophes*, books that are at once complex and nevertheless really accessible, which illustrate the concern you have about questions of heritage and transmission, a concern that is considerably out of place with academic modes of publishing. How do you situate yourself with respect to the academic world?

Isabelle Stengers: One way of articulating what I do is that my work is not addressed to my colleagues [laughs]. This is not about contempt, but about learning to situate oneself in relation to a future—a future in which I am uncertain as to what will have become of universities. They have already died once, in the Middle Ages, with the printing press. It seems to me that this is in the process of being reproduced—in the sense that they can only exist as diplomatic institutions, not as sites for the production of knowledge. Defending them against external attacks (rankings, objective evaluation in all domains, the economy of knowledge) is not particularly compelling because of the passivity with which academics give in. This shows that it's over. Obviously, the interesting question is: who is going to take over [prendre le relais]? At the end of the era of the mediaeval university, it was not clear who would take over. I find this notion compelling.

However, it's not about holding on to the institution. I made the choice to hold on to practices because with practices, while they may be present at the university, the university is certainly not suitable to them [laughs]. A bit better are those of scientists, because the universities as we know them are not based on Wilhelm von Humboldt's model of the university, as we are often being told. They were invented in the concluding decades of the 19th century. What seems normal to us today—finishing one's dissertation in four years—was a major innovation that stemmed from Giessen's organic chemistry laboratory in Liebig. The idea that we learn to become a researcher, and not a "scholar," comes from the laboratory sciences, but today this has redefined everything else. However, even for the experimental sciences, the cost has been steep and has created a vulnerability that is only now being brought to light. Therefore, I look to practices instead of to the university, and I am trying to write using that model.

EB: The way you hold yourself at a distance in relation to the academic world and, consequently, how you envisage the future, reminds me of Peter Sloterdijk, who has harsh words for the university.¹

IS: Let's say that Sloterdijk is more "prophetic" than I am! My idea is to try to discern in the present what perhaps will make the future. I do not feel that I think before my time. Maybe a quarter of a millimeter [laughs], but I owe that quarter millimeter to what my time is capable of. We always say that there is a rapport between philosophy and medicine, but I don't really come from medicine, at least in the way that we can say that medicine always receives its force from its own time—it all depends on the figure of the physician. In any case, I don't come from a medical tradition that benefits from a knowledge that allows it to intervene in and transcend its own time.

EB: What is striking in your work is the concern that you demonstrate for the singularity of practices. It matters to you to think of practices in terms of their divergence, which allows you to preserve their political potential. I see in this a pragmatic tenor that strongly contrasts with the obsession over an anesthetizing consensus that marks our time.

IS: Effectively, the encounter with pragmatism has been very important in the sense of, "So this is what I do!" [laughs] Here is what animates me! This pragmatism, which I take from William James, from his more speculative dimensions (meaning the concern for consequences, in terms of invention, of speculation on consequences), this is what pragmatism, in its common usage (which is an insult), passes over in silence. We don't know how these things can matter. But we can learn to examine situations from the point of view of their possibilities, from that which they communicate with and that which they poison. *Pragmatism is the care of the possible*.

Spiritual pragmatism? No thanks!

EB: Your reading of pragmatism seems to be the exact opposite of the sort that has led to the present domination of the liberal ethos and of "keeping the conversation going," in the vein of Richard Rorty. But I would like to return to the care of the possible: while speaking of the "speculative," you have made a very singular gesture; it seems to me a spiritual one, as if to open up the future.

IS: I will never take up the label of "spiritualism" because that would oppose the spirit, the spiritual, to other things. Conversely, absolute silence (we can't even say contempt) on what might represent a concern for the spiritual seems to me to come from a badly directed Marxism and scientism. In any case, I situate myself primarily as a postcolonial European. I consider this to be present in my analysis of modern scientific practices, that we must first learn to civilize these practices—to separate them from words that are guaranteed to insult those that seek to cultivate, each in their own way, something that is a matter of concern. The philosopher can learn from the responsibility carried by the words she has forged, which are almost systematically insulting, and try some new ones. And so, I try to use words in a manner that takes into account and incorporates this fact as an active constraint: *We think of ourselves*, and almost no one can escape this—not even Marx—as *the thinking heads of humanity*, in relation to whom others are, in one way or another, still children. It is something that is in all of our words (Kant expressed this

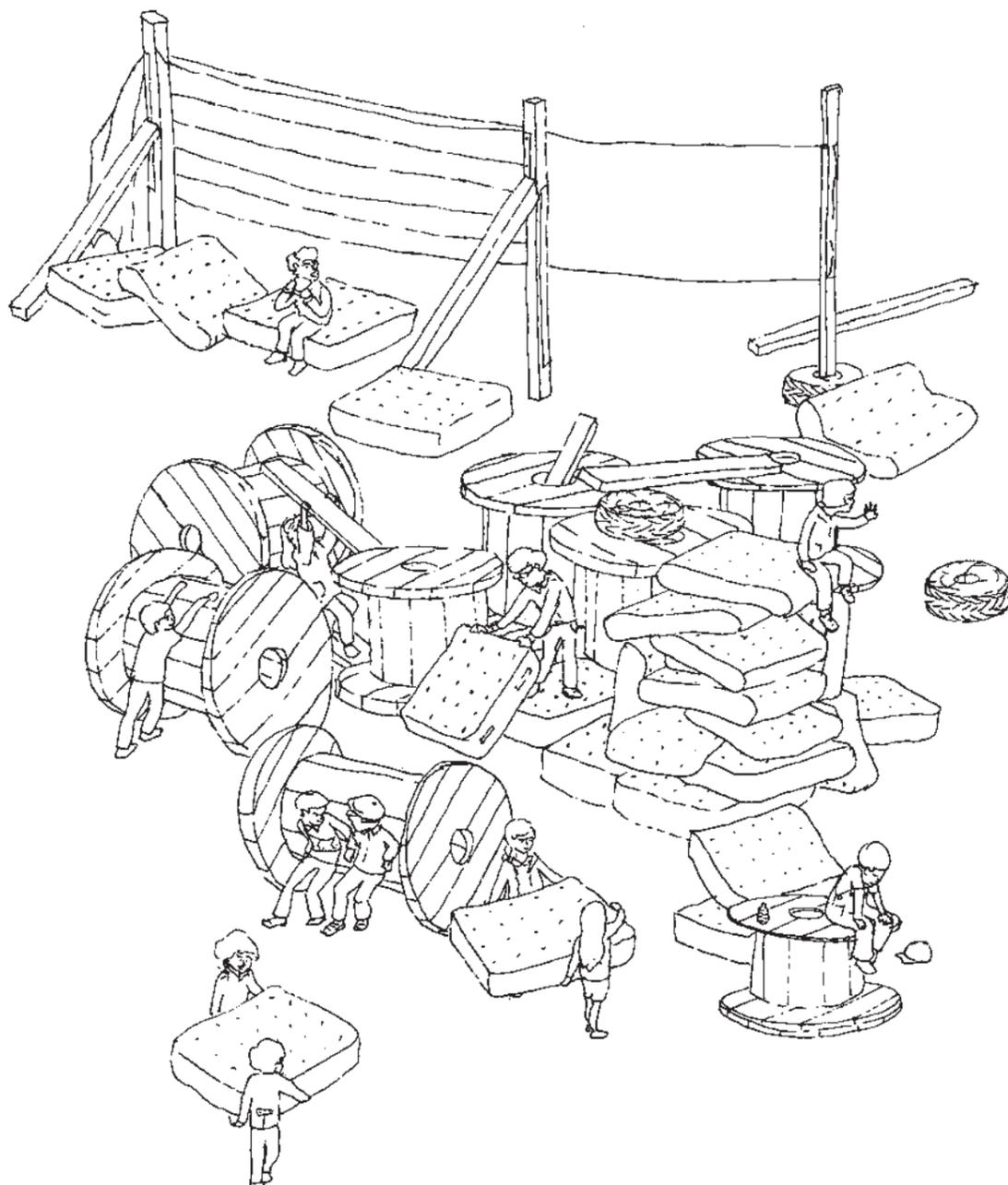
very well in *What is Enlightenment?*), and it is a lot of work to rework words, to acquire words that break with this state of affairs. What I like about the concept of practice, in the way that I am trying to think it, is that it creates an angle from which to approach our most "serious" holdings, including the sciences as "bizarre," as bizarre practices that we have the tendency to classify as superstitious, etc.

EB: All of your work on hypnosis, therapy, ethnopsychiatry...

IS: Yes, ethnopsychiatry has been extremely important for me, notably because it has taught me up to which point, precisely, in the eyes of others, we can be "bizarre." Bizarre is important because I am refusing another one of our specialties—denouncing ourselves. We are masters at having goodwill as much as we are at feeling guilty [laughs]—from the moment that, as Westerners, we consider that we are exceptional. To think practices is an attempt to situate ourselves, starting from the way in which practices were destroyed, poisoned, enslaved in our own history. As a result, I refuse all positions that would have others act as the conveyors of our "greeting," or as "our" victims, somewhat like Third Worldism did, with "us" always at the centre. This is again and always thinking in the place of others. I try not to think in the place of others because I look to a future where they will take *their* place.

EB: This is where I like *Capitalist Sorcery* a lot, in the great efficiency with which things are formulated in terms of capture and vulnerability, and conversely the question: How to get a reliable new hold so that divergent practices emerge within the smooth and neutralized spaces of capitalism?

IS: How to get a hold [comment faire prise]? This question proclaims that I resist what I call, pejoratively, the theatre of concepts. Whether it's [Alain] Badiou, [Slavoj] Žižek, and so on, we have the impression that the one who discovers the right concept of capitalism or communism will have discovered something extremely important. So, I "reclaim," as the neo-pagan witches say, a pragmatist Marx. That is, a Marx about whom we can say when reading him, "Yes, at the time, effectively, his analysis was an excellent hold." But also a Marx whose nightmare would have been thinking that more than a century later, we would continue to rely on this hold and to make of it concepts that are more and more disconnected from his question. His was a pragmatic question: understanding in a "consequent" mode, that is, in contact with the possibility of transformation. So, "reclaim" Marx, recuperate him, but also (and this is a move that I learned from the witches)



rehabilitate him, *reproduce* him.² And not for any concern for justice on his part, but from the perspective of asking his question once again. If we want to understand him in the sense of transformation, we have to re-ask ourselves to what capitalism could give hold today [*il faut se re-demander à quoi le capitalisme pourrait donner prise aujourd'hui*].

EB: In *Out of this World*, Peter Hallward, a philosopher close to Badiou, develops an acrimonious critique of Deleuze, which seems to me to correspond to what you reject in Badiou or Žižek. In his little theatre of political concepts (to take up your expression), Deleuze is defined as a "spiritual thinker" and, as a result, largely ineffectual in the political scheme of things. He goes as far to treat him as a "radical creationist."

IS: And, Guattari spoke about axiological creationism... There is bread on the cutting board of the censors! [*mocking laughter*] But if there is anyone who is a quasi-spiritualist, it's Badiou! The event as a matter of fidelity, the four truths, etc. It is spiritualism in the sense that there is a genuine transcendence in relation to the state of things.

EB: Exactly. He does not ask the question about the modes of existence, and this transcendence justifies his "pure" politics...

IS: And, as soon as we in "the pure," in "the pure and the true"...The convergence between the true and the pure, that is the sin of spiritualism!

On Messianic Politics

EB: You have situated yourself in relation to Badiou. At the extreme of the philo-political spectrum that interests us, we find a certain kind of messianism. In particular, I am thinking of Giorgio Agamben, Tiqqun, the Invisible Committee, etc. I can't help myself from seeing several points of contact with your work, in particular at the level of a reflection on the hold and the capture, an attempt to position our vulnerability to being captured by apparatuses [*dispositifs*], with the difference that this thinking is dramatized in a messianic or apocalyptic manner.

IS: Yes, but this difference is crucial, it is everywhere...For me, Agamben is the inheritor of a tradition from which I want to escape, from which one must escape. This tradition says: We are in a disaster that conjures up a truth. And, those that possess this truth find themselves in a neo-colonialist situation. They have nothing to learn from others. Their knowledge has value for Man (or *Dasein*, or the Subject, or Bare Life...). And so, once again, this means we don't think from where we are, but instead for everyone in a delocalized manner.

This is the movement to *reclaim*, taking into account what has happened to us, that we are further away from being in a position to touch the Real. We are very sick. It is not an illness of truth and it is not an illness of Deleuzian philosophy or of Nietzsche, who must pass through the grand illness. No, we are impurely sick [*salement malades*]. And so, simply recuperating a few points of joy, of resistance, of thought, etc. and understanding where this occurs from—the vulnerability to stupidity [*bêtise*], the feeling of being responsible for humanity, the communication between our histories and the vocation of Humanity—it would not be bad if our concepts could contribute to that. Deleuze said that if philosophy has a function, it is to resist stupidity. Not stupidity as an anthropological trait, like I have read in the work of certain Deleuzians, but as *our* stupidity. I am not far from this position, except that one must always be suspicious. Deleuze himself dates the question of stupidity.

As such, this problem emerges in the 19th century, at the moment when science, the State, and capitalism forge an alliance. Africans do not suffer from stupidity—maybe that is what waits for them; they are not unharmed by this definition. But in any case, stupidity is nothing inherently anthropological.

So, confusing what happens to us with something that not only would necessarily happen to the rest of humanity but, additionally, would somehow contain a truth that would allow the philosopher to be the one who truly sees—no way! That's what a hold is for me: it involves a body-to-body relation to the world, which has a relative truth. And, it's also linked to a thinking of the relay [*relais*]. The consequences of this hold do not belong to the one who produces the hold, but to the way in which this hold can be taken up, to work as a relay [*la manière dont cette prise peut être reprise, et faire relais*].

And so, when considering Tiqqun, I have often conversed with inheritors or those close to Tiqqun in France and it seems to me that, for the moment, a discussion topic among them is the role of Agamben. There are tensions, there are those who have discovered that it is really not the kind of thinking that they need. Because I enjoy stirring the pot, I told them that, when reading certain Agamben texts, I felt what Deleuze calls "shame"—at the reformulation of what happened at Auschwitz, the "musulmann" taken as an anthropological truth of our time: this is instrumentalization. A philosopher does not have the right to do that; he has to create his own concepts. He cannot take possession of Auschwitz to formulate a philosophical anthropology.³

EB: I have to say, I find myself in a very particular position, hopefully that of an intercessor, between a certain 'Tiqqunian' milieu and those that adhere to what I call, echoing your work, an idea of 'speculative presence.' In fact, the people that I am going to see in Brussels after our interview belong to this Tiqqunian constellation.

IS: Ah! Here we call them "les Chavannais" because, two years ago, they

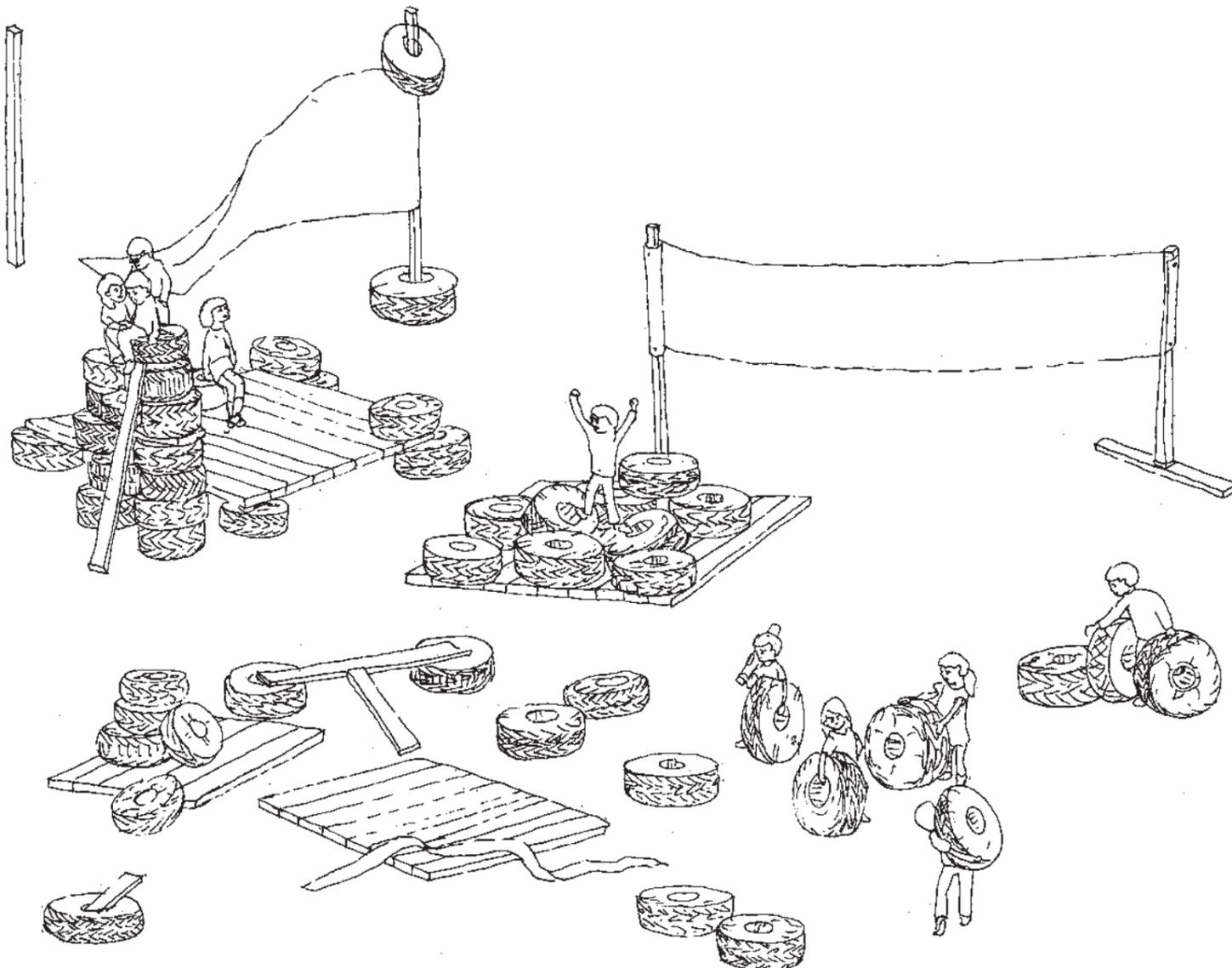
famously participated in the occupation of the Chavanne auditorium at ULB. Four years ago, they took me to be their number one enemy.

EB: Yes, they were repeating a logic that is reminiscent of the Situationist purifications...

IS: For two days we had a "frank" conversation, and since then it has not been love, but it seems to me that they have accepted that I can exist without being their enemy. In the same way, I recognize that faced with the world as it is, the urgency that they are taken with cannot be more justified.

EB: I feel like I am taking up the posture that you did when you wrote *Beyond Conversation*, half-way between the theology of Process and the French Deleuzians.⁴ I feel that I occupy the same relation to the people in the Tiqqunian constellation, or to the Barcelona collective *Espai en blanc*, by way of my own trajectory. Canada appears to me as a place of very low political intensity, where the energies of belief in the world are made manifest mostly through a therapeutic bias. Moreover, this culture of the therapeutic is the site of a disastrous privatization of existence. It is in Europe that I found the collective presences necessary for understanding that the problem of affective misery and of general anesthesia under the regime of the Spectacle is not a psychological or even psychosocial problem, but a political one. From there, I started to conceive of a strong idea of the political, guided by a certain intuition about anonymity. In effect, everything seems to me so excessively personalized in our time...

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IS: How capitalism is making us into little entrepreneurs of Self ...

EB: Yes, and it is in Europe that I met people that have reacted politically toward this civilizing phenomenon. And, it seems to me that thinking of getting reliable holds is right on, and permits a problematization of the conditions for effective action. And, to articulate it one way, it is also there that I see a site of possible encounter between “messianic” and “speculative” milieus.

IS: Ah well, let's say that messianism is what I would call a strong “pharmakon” that is able to incite force but which can also very easily become a poison. Poison as it allows for heroic vocation and a conception of truth all the more true that it is inaudible. All are traits that seem to me to be very masculinist [viriloides]. Where messianism incites the desire for separation, I try and think practices of the interstice. This is an idea developed in *Capitalist Sorcery*, which goes back to Whitehead. The interstice is not defined against the block; it produces its own presence, its own mode of production. It knows that the block is certainly not a friend, but it does not define itself through antagonism, or else it would become the mere reflection of the block. This does not mean non-conflict. It means conflict when necessary, in the way that is necessary. This is thinking in the interstices! So, what I like about these milieus is that they are looking to make their own lives.

EB: Which changes from the sort of resistance by proxy, which unfolds in the wake of Žižek's thought, for instance...

IS: Exactly. It is like Tiqqun's concept of “forms-of-life.”¹⁵ But no form of life

is exemplary. The interstice is not associated with any exemplarity, and has nothing messianic about it. Rather, its mode of existence is problematic. Each interstice is an interstice in relation to a block, without any legitimacy other than the hold that it accomplishes. This requires humour, lucidity and pragmatism. It also consists of pharmacological thinking, because the milieu, the block, is never, ever a friend. Therefore, we must never trust it. Recuperation is always a danger, but it is necessary that we are not taken aback by this danger or else suspicion poisons everything, and then it is no longer a form of life. Dangers are what one must be pragmatic in relation to—foreshadowing them and constructing the means of doing that might allow us, at a given moment, to not have to tear ourselves between the good-pure-radicals and the bad-interested-traitsors, knowing that this kind of situation is nothing more than a foreseeable failure in relation to which we must think. With messianism there is a difference of temperament because messianism is always close to the selection of the chosen, of those who know how to maintain loyalty. This kind of selection signifies that situations where we can recognize traitors are more on the side of truth than of failure.

What I call this difference in temperament can easily be described otherwise—my pragmatism is what is most comfortable for me. Except that I know that to do otherwise would injure me. I have always fled situations that hold one hostage—and there, where it is important to be loyal, the suspicion of treachery is present and holding hostage never far away.

So, I don't have any desire to convince or to convert. Instead, I think that there is a force in not letting oneself be divided. All the “or this...or this...” is deadly. For groups that are looking for forms of radical or messianic life, one of the ways of resisting

being held hostage could very well be to cultivate a bit of Jewish humour—especially apt because we are talking about messianism—of the kind like, “Shit, we are the chosen people, we would be better off without it!” In any case, what I find interesting in the interstices is the knowledge that there is some messianic component, which is precious in the sense that it stops an interstice from closing in on itself. This maintains a sense of the urgency that must remain present and which should not become the basis for a mobilizing command.

EB: Demonstrating this urgency in the North American academy already puts us in a slightly contentious position, in the sense that after one's master's degree or doctorate, everything happens as if we needed to have succeeded in finding a way to be satisfied with the world as it is. We must soften our indignation. And, this tacit requirement certainly does not spare Deleuzian milieus.

IS: In France, we say that the Americans waited for Deleuze to die before taking possession of him! For me, there is a line that separates people with whom I can work and those with whom I can only be friends: is this world imperfect, certainly, but is it normal at first approach? Whenever I feel that a position implies something like “we can do better for sure, but still, we have democracy, tolerance, etc.”, there is not much for me there. Instead, I align myself with those who think viscerally about how this world is not working, that it is not at all acceptable, those who say “we are not happy at all.” We can argue, for sure, but for me it's first and foremost because the situation has surpassed us all.

Here is a short reminiscence that left a mark. I was at a protest in front of an internment center for

illegal immigrants, what we call here the “sans-papiers.” On a butte, there was a group with really smashed faces carrying a socialist syndicate flag that read “homeless section.” And they were screaming, their voices hoarse, “We are not happy at all, we are not happy at all!” And it was...it was exactly what needed to be said! This is the cry, the cry of irreconciliation. This is the reason, obviously, why I am closer to the Chavannais than to the majority of my colleagues. This must be.

EB: But can't we consider the messianic like an accelerating artifice, a creator of beneficial emergencies?

IS: I am not sure if an emergency as such is beneficial. Evidently, faced with the heavy temporalities associated with climate disorder and all kinds of other similar things, there is the feeling that there is an emergency. Sadly, it is not in the name of an emergency that we will become able to respond. In the name of urgency, those who govern us will rather require some “necessary sacrifices.” The emergency felt by radicals—I can't do anything but understand it. Still, how does one not give more power to the police if they explode a bomb?

Thinking with Whitehead

EB: I like your book *Thinking with Whitehead* a lot, and, more specifically, the way you dramatize his thought. And one of the culminating movements of that dramatization is the discussion of the idea of peace as it is presented in *The Adventure of Ideas*. You cite an extraordinary passage on how peace can easily be reversed to become Anesthesia. Whitehead says that we cannot “want” peace too much, and how the experience of peace renders us more sensitive to tragedy. Your book brings us to understand how important these ideas are to Whitehead. All of this echoes the introduction of the book, where you present Whitehead's philosophy in the context of a world where “it is normal to make war in the name of truth,” a world that you contrast to a more pacifist culture, Buddhist for example. In that world, you argue that

Scapegoat

The Care of the Possible

Isabelle Stengers and Erik Bordeleau



More innovative approaches offer new landscape design principles for ecologically motivated construction and management with an emphasis on education about ecosystem services in urban areas; however, both of these approaches still reveal mid-20th century ties to economics, particularly faith in management, with design playing the role of expert and informed implementer for an uninformed public.¹⁴

On April 1, 2011, a street performance called *Grid Scenes* marked the bicentennial of New York's Commissioners Plan of 1811. Forty performers, walking very slowly in two big groups, making simple sounds with simple instruments and carrying hand-made lanterns, aimed to slow down the grid, to run counter clockwise to the flow.¹⁵ Moving along 14th Street, from 5th toward 6th Avenue, and from 7th toward 6th Avenue, two collective forms moved at the pace of the sunset. From seven until eight in the evening, passers-by walked through the middle of the groups, stopping, pausing, and taking photos. Others waited, watching quietly and some joined in. The goal was to create an environment where possibilities could emerge in the hustle and bustle of a Friday evening rush hour at one of New York's busiest inter-sections.

Later, the lanterns were placed in a ninth floor rooftop garden on 5th Avenue, between 12th and 13th Street. The Lantern Roof Garden directs visitors' movement by asking them to align their bodies in relation to other roof gardens in the neighborhood.¹⁶ At night, the lanterns create a field of blue lights, reversing the outward orientation of the garden by offering it as an attraction for viewing from adjacent taller buildings. The garden is enclosed by landmarks such as the Washington Square Memorial, a canyon of 5th Avenue red-brick and stone apartment buildings, a wall of 14th Street white-brick apartment buildings, a big, deep, muddy hole in the ground where a new building is under construction, and a ‘valley’ of private, eclectic, lower roof gardens bursting into summer life after the spring rain. Vegetation, planted to create natural dyes, will be harvested in the fall, contributing later to the fashions of the street. Strange plant life brought in by the wind and birds, unexpected insect visitors, stairwells and clouds all add

as geographic information systems (GIS), precision application of inputs made possible with geographic positioning systems (GPS), and biotech's genetically stacked seeds to develop an EcoCommerce market that values his farm's ecosystem benefits—such as soil conservation, cleaner water, cleaner air, wildlife habitat and protected green space.⁷ The Office of Environmental Markets (OEM) is a new office created within the U.S. Department of Agriculture to catalyze the development of markets for ecosystem services. By creating uniform standards and market infrastructure that will facilitate market-based approaches to agriculture, forest, and rangeland conservation, the OEM is exploring national opportunities to make stewardship profitable.⁸ The chemical company Dow is working with the environmental NGO The Nature Conservancy to develop tools to value the natural world in business. They aim to identify risks and opportunities at Dow's facilities, and in its products and supply chain, and to value them correctly.⁹ The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity reports have prompted that payment for ecosystem services will likely find its way on the agenda for the next United Nations conference on sustainability, Rio+20, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in May 2012.¹⁰

How did ecosystems come to be understood in economic terms? In 1977, the environmental historian Donald Worster argued that “the metaphors used here are more than casual or incidental...ecologists have transformed nature into a reflection of the modern corporate, industrial system.”¹¹ Worster notes that economics took nothing from ecological biology that might have made it more aware of the environmental limits to industrial growth. Rather, it was ecology that applied economic thinking to the study of nature.¹² For Worster, every generation writes its own description of the natural order, which generally reveals as much about human society and its concerns as it does about nature. These descriptions linger on in bits and pieces, often creating incongruous or incomplete juxtapositions.

Today, urban ecology texts often begin with an introduction to the phenomenon of global urbanization and conclude with a statement of management recommendations which privilege spatial planning indifferent to context.¹³

Self-Centered Ecological Services by Victoria Marshall

Eugene P. Odum's (1971) unified theory of the ecosystem, with its emphasis on homeostasis, cooperation, social organization, and “environmentalism,” has been replaced in the last two decades with an image of nature characterized by individualistic associations, constant disturbance, and incessant change. Within this dynamic context of changing ecological ideas, lies a stable understanding of human self-interest. In a world where our relationships to food, animals, and things are all up for discussion, why does the idea of the “self” remain so stable while other ideas change? This trend can be seen in ecosystem services where narrow categories have been broadened to include multiple types of services that support human life. Two recent projects marking the bicentennial and future of the New York's Commissioners Plan of 1811 offer examples of a self-interest that challenge these stable categories to allow radical ideas of self to inform policy and planning. This agenda aims to shift the spectacle of urban design from the passive consumption of green urban simulations constructed by specialists toward one in which a broad array of actors advocate and participate in the making of both the city and its images.¹

According to the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the concept of ecosystem services was first used in the 1960s, with its use dramatically increasing after 1995.² In 2005, the concept was broadened, popularized and formalized, referencing two definitions:

Ecosystem services are the conditions and processes through which natural ecosystems, and the species that make them up, sustain and fulfill human life. They maintain biodiversity and the production of ecosystem goods, such as seafood, forage timber, biomass fuels, natural fiber, and many pharmaceuticals, industrial products, and their precursors.³ Ecosystem goods (such as food) and services (such as waste assimilation) represent the benefits human populations derive, directly or indirectly, from ecosystem functions.⁴

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment assembled ecosystem services into four broad functional categories which sometimes overlap, acknowledging our entangled socio-natural processes: 1) provisioning services are the products obtained from ecosystems; 2) regulating services are benefits obtained from regulation of ecosystem processes; 3) cultural services, which are nonmaterial benefits obtained from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, and aesthetic experiences; and 4) supporting services are those that are necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services—their impacts on people are either indirect or occur over a very long time.⁵ These categories are then operationalized in a process that includes assessment, assignment of value, and management, which is defined as maintaining stability in relation to dynamics such as variability, resilience, and thresholds.

Regardless of these broad functional categories laid out by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, there is a trend toward privileging economic value over other values such as the socio-ecological (resilience), psychological (well-being), cultural (inspiration), and philosophical or ethical.⁶ This valuing trend is discussed as an innovation in relation to current agricultural and forestry practices, business strategies, and global governance. For example, a farmer in Wisconsin proposes to use new tools such

concepts would take on an entirely different meaning.

IS: Today, Whitehead's philosophy is having some success in China, Korea, and Japan. But I think that its meaning is changing, or, more accurately, it has something familiar to it—"now here is a thinking that we can connect to our own traditions," like a reunion. But the Whitehead that interests me, being a European, is wholly from here. He has wholly taken into account the rapport that characterizes us, between truth and polemic, of what our concepts are made of that allows them to be delivered up to war. And he did not respond with a pacification that anaesthetizes, in the vein of Rorty for example, but rather through creation. It is not a question of renouncing, but of going even further with ideas and separating them from what is of the order of power. Ideas are vectors of assertion that do not have the power to deny. Maybe this is because I am a woman, but the concepts I am trying to make—and in every case the effectiveness that I hope for them—will function to dissolve these huge amalgamations that hold together liberty, rationality, universality...

EB: If we let these blocks fall, we have the impression of losing all consistency.

IS: Exactly. It is precisely these pseudo-consistencies, which are in fact amalgamations that we have to undo!

EB: It is against this background that the idea of speculative presence emerges, which I find so beautiful, and implies precisely the taking hold of a plane of consistency. Is there perhaps here a parallel with the work of François Jullien, with his way of thinking the implicit, or with other forms of coherence?

IS: Yes, of course. It is true that if you are Chinese in the manner of Jullien, the only question that you'll ask yourself is "why was it so complicated to arrive at that...!" [*big laugh*]. But there is a limit to Jullien: his representation of "our" coherence leaves no room for marginal thinkers, Whitehead, maybe Leibniz, and many others. For me—the question that needs to be asked if we're talking about the "West" would be why these thoughts have been systematically misconstrued, transformed into a vision of the world or simply despised. Since Voltaire, we have misunderstood Leibniz's idea of the best of all possible worlds, which for me functions as a "thinking-hammer" in the Nietzschean sense.

Therefore, what I find interesting about Whitehead and also the American neo-pagan activist witches is, notably, that which allows us to inherit our history otherwise, against all ideas of a kind of anthropological truth that would forgive us—the "West"—for "thinking man." For me,

presenting ourselves, thinking ourselves, as if we belonged to a real history, not to a destiny, is a condition for holding language in a way that is alright with others who don't have the same history, to get out of a position that is still and always the one that benefits colonialism. That Whitehead was ignored by academics for such a long time is not chance. I give myself the task and the pleasure of discussing witches with philosophy students. I don't do this to play at being an exotic creature who does her all to shock, but rather because it is a vital test for thought. I have become aware that even those in touch with what is happening, like Donna Haraway, don't do this, maybe because all this is happening right under her nose. Or, maybe because American universities form such a dense network amongst themselves that there is no room for what happens on the outside. My highest ambition on this front, now that *Capitalist Sorcery* is being translated into English, is that American academics will begin to realize that there are things happening in their backyards that they consistently ignore. They love French Theory, so I am serving them Whitehead from Harvard and Californian witches!

Thinking Together

EB: You evoke the challenges posed by talking about witches at the university, but when we look at it a little more closely, we can nevertheless see that it is very solidly supported, philosophically speaking. For example, I am thinking about your preface for the new edition of Étienne Souriau's *Les différents modes d'existence*. I was struck by his insistence on the question of the accomplishment of what he calls the "mystique of realization." This reminded me of your usage of James's formula: 'Nothing but experience, but all of experience.' In effect, in the "all" we understand the necessity of the accomplishment, something that seems to be essential in the thinking about becoming for Deleuze, for example, or something like a contraction on the order of the cosmological, or, invoking Michaux, "vital ideas." This "dramatic" idea of the accomplishment is

very present in your work. But I wanted to ask you: how do you cohabit with a philosophy that is as comfortable with the establishment as Souriau's?

IS: It was a friend, Marco Mateos Diaz, who one day introduced me to *L'Instauration philosophique*, and it was a surprise. My first reaction was: "But, but...Deleuze read all of this!" There is a whole dimension of Deleuze, notably that of imperative ideas and of the virtual as "work to do," which is there...I will never think with Deleuze because I believe he never asks for it [*laughs*], and I can't think with Souriau either, but for other reasons. I think with Whitehead or with Leibniz because there is "trust" with them, to use James's sense of the word. I know that I can go all the way to the end of their concepts, even if, when doing this, I am recreating them—and I know that this would not bother them. Deleuze is difficult; his concepts are not made in the same way. One has to be very careful with them; if not, we expose ourselves to a kind of binarism, which was Bergson's problem.

EB: This is exactly what Hallward criticizes in him, a kind of tendency toward redemption.

IS: If we read these texts technically, they are the two dimensions to the event: counter-effectuation makes no sense without effectuations, as multiple and proliferating as possible. To effectuate in one's own body, that is not nothing! But there is something in Deleuze's style that, if we watch for it, can easily lead us into a binary attitude, derisive towards those miserable people who simply effectuate. This is maybe why he has so much success in academia today. As soon as they can deride, academics are comfortable. But Deleuze created

the most beautiful eulogy for Anglo-American philosophy and for his own wild empiricism...

But our problem today, it seems to me, is not minor creations but collective ones, in relation to which we are not taken aback, who demand that we learn how to inherit (that is why witches interest me). Our bourgeois capitalist world has satisfied itself by honouring creators as "exceptional beings," humanity's patrimony, etc., but this is what has always been systematically destroyed, what we call today "collective intelligence." This is a concept that I don't connect to new technologies, however, but to what Felix Guattari called an ethico-political "paradigm." My formula for asserting a creation of that genre, from that of scientists when their science is alive to that required for collective gardens, is "conferring to a situation the power to make us think together." In a way that is perhaps fabulatory, I would say that that's what the commons were about, before they were destroyed by generalized privatization. The "commoners" needed to think the collective usage of the land together.

EB: The critical ethos that you describe so well in *Au temps des catastrophes* effectively prevents conceiving of how a situation could make us think together.

IS: Yes. Because when there is thinking together, it is always of the order of the event. But the care of the event, meaning that from which the situation can receive this power—which is not usual, which is not given—this requires a whole culture of artifice...

EB: To accompany it in collective processes...

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Scapegoat

The Care of the Possible



actions might be considered alongside what Keller Easterling calls an extended repertoire of troublemaking.²² The goal was to begin to encounter ourselves as an array of bodies that are not exclusively human and to develop a type of self-interest that is as porous and open as contemporary ecological theory and urban design practices. This can be done through the use of a busy and congested urban street and an under-utilized roof as sites to practice the radical ecological idea of not believing in an external environment.

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Notes

1. Brian McGrath, *Digital Modeling for Urban Design* (UK: Wiley, 2006), 20.
2. "Ecosystems and Human Well-being: A Framework for Assessment, Ecosystems and Their Services," www.maweb.org/documents/document.300.aspx.pdf
3. G.C. Daily, "Introduction: What are Ecosystem Services?" in *Natures Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems*, ed. G.C. Daily (Washington: Island Press, 1997), 1-10.
4. R. Costanza et al., "The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital," *Nature* 387 (1997): 253-260.
5. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, "Ecosystems and Human Well-being," 56-60.
6. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, "Ecosystem Services in Urban Areas Seminar 2011," www.sendzimir.org.pl/en/node/281
7. Jon H. Harsch, "EcoCommerce to pay farmers for their environmental good works," www.agri-pulse.com/Gieseke-EcoCommerce_20110202H.asp
8. The Office of Environmental Markets (OBM), "USDA: Ecosystem Services," www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices
9. "Natural Capitalism," www.natcap.org/. Andrew Winston, "Dow Asks, What's the Business Case for Protecting Nature?" www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-winston/dow-asks-what-the-busines-b_819916.html
10. Victor Anderson, "Using land wisely is

to the designed non-grid-like orientations of the garden.

The *Grid Scenes* performance and the *Lantern Roof Garden* are the first events of an urban design project that aims to serve both as a celebration of the historical moment when New York transformed from a compact port city into a metropolis, but also to start a discussion on cultivating new ecological subjectivities for Manhattan, and the Hudson Raritan Estuary beyond, over the next two centuries. Next, a network of wireless environmental quality sensors will be installed from river to river, street level to rooftop. The door-to-door process of finding partners and appropriate sites to house the sensors is also an outreach project designed to find participants for a series of workshops aiming to lower summer surface temperature, create urban micro-climates, store rain water and investigate new visions for mobility, energy and aesthetic perception.

Today a non-equilibrium paradigm in ecology acknowledges that natural systems do not have internal equilibrium-seeking or equilibrium-maintaining behaviors. Ecologists now acknowledge the following: ecological systems exchange materials with other systems; external factors can regulate system behavior; there may not be a single stable state equilibrium point of a system's composition or behavior; disturbance is part of a system's dynamics; succession or response to disturbance can be highly unpredictable; and finally, humans, their institutions, and behaviors are part of ecological systems.¹⁷ Some activists and scholars argue that this open model has meant the loss of authority for their critiques or an emasculating of critical environmentalism. However, within the context of this discussion, non-equilibrium ecology is seen as a more engaged and radical mode of inquiry, where the emphasis shifts from problematizing stability to working with instability.¹⁸

The idea of ecosystem services presumes a stable understanding of self-interest in the context of changing ideas of ecological frameworks. Inspired by Felix Guattari's *Three Ecologies*, the *Grid Scenes* performance and the *Lantern Roof Garden* aim to create spaces for experiments into expanded notions of what Jane Bennett calls *self-interest*, or what Guattari calls *subjectivity*.¹⁹ For Guattari, emancipatory ecological praxes intervene in the means by which subjectivity itself is produced. His three ecologies—the environment at the macro scale, social relations at the intermediary scale, and mental ecology at the micro, or molecular, scale—are all ecological registers that need to be engaged fully and simultaneously. For Guattari, "earthly spheres, social tissues, and the world of ideas are not compartmentalized."²⁰ This is an image of change through action, through new aesthetic ethical-political articulations that are not based solely on profit, property, scarcity, or restricted distribution.

The Guattarian subject is "an entangled assemblage of many components, a collective (heterogeneous, multiple) articulation of such components before and beyond the individual; the individual is like a transit station for changes, crossings, and switches."²¹ The *Grid Scenes* performance created a type of clearing in the city, and it also offered the performers an experience of slowing down according to the pace of the setting sun. The *Lantern Roof Garden* offers a diagonal and relational experience of the grid as a space of exchange between insects, rain, clothes, flowers, and clouds. These are experiences of environmental activism that are not normally considered in symmetrical face-offs or in the culture of frugality that emerges whenever the word sustainability is mentioned. These

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1. Brett Bloom, "Alluvial Deposits," in *With Love from Haha*, ed. Wendy Jacob et al. (Chicago: WhiteWalls, 2008), 27.

drawings, pgs. 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 28

Olia Mishchenko was born in Kiev, Ukraine, 1980, and moved to Canada in 1997. She primarily works in drawing, ranging from miniature bookworks to large-scale wallworks. She actively works with several artist collectives on installations, sculpture, performance and food based projects. She currently lives and works in Toronto, teaching at OCAD University (formerly Ontario College of Art and Design) in the Environmental Design Programme, as well as design and run innovative collaborative architecture and new media projects for children at several contemporary art and design institutions, Oakville Galleries and OCAD. She exhibits in Canada and internationally and is represented by Paul Petro in Toronto.

Continued from pg. 17, "The Care of the Possible"

IS: Exactly, although I am not sure that it requires that we accompany it, that is to say, also address it—"there is no one at the number you have dialed." It is, moreover, a matter of pragmatic concern. That is what interests me about witches who have inherited strategies of decision-making through the consensus of non-violent activists. When an everyday group makes a decision, what beautiful tempests we would hear in their minds if we had amplifiers to hear them. But the question is not about listening, but rather about elaborating and experimenting with artifices, which, in this situation, make up the meso.⁶ Notably, the artifice complicates the process, slows it down, welcomes all doubts and objections, and even actively incites them, while also transforming them and listening in a different mode. This is a transformational operation of "depersonalization," which has been experimented with in feminist groups working (without men!) with the idea that "the personal is political." But it is also, using other procedures, that which reunites modes of African palaver, where turns of phrase circulate around the facets of the order of the world. And this, it seems to me, is what the neo-pagan witches look for when they close the circle and summon the goddess. The art of the event, which transforms those who participate, which brings forth a consistency that does not deny the molecular, but which gives it a problematic status. Above all, no "hidden truth!"

The politics of the interstices belongs at the level of the meso. But this is not a "new discovery." It is, moreover, what the State and capitalism have systematically destroyed in the name of individual rationality and large macroscopic laws. As John Dewey emphasized, the problem is that, in our supposedly democratic societies, problematic emergences and recalcitrant productions of new inquiries are rarefied in the extreme, to the profit of what we call "the public," whose pulse we take as we do a sick person's. What Deleuze called minorities, who do not dream of a majority (and a group of three can be a majority from this point of view), belong to the problematic of the meso. Deleuze and Guatarri saw their minorities as subversive. I prefer to see them as "practices"—all practices are in the minority. But it requires the undoing of majority amalgamations. It does not require one to "politicize" minorities but instead affirm that their very existence is a political concern because in our world, for minorities, living is resistance, owing to the fact that in this world 'the minor'

can only just survive, in a more or less shameful way.

The figure of the rhizome is a political figure and is that which opens up communication, transversals—always transversals—which are only responsive to minorities. And it is these communications, which could, perhaps better than the "mass," disturb capitalism, because like it, the rhizome can invent its own terrain and make its own delocalizations. As Deleuze said, "The left needs people to think," and this definition of the left creates a difference in nature from the right. A determining difference.

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Kelly Ladd is a first year Ph.D. student in the Science and Technology Studies program at York University. Her current research is on sensual forms of knowing and the apparatus of vision in the context of human-machine interactions and the anthropology of science.

Notes

- 1. Eds. note: while much of Peter Sloterdijk's work has been translated into French, only recently have more contemporary texts become available in English translation; see, for example, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); *Terror from the Air* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009); and *Neither Sun nor Death* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).
- 2. Trans. note: "reclaim" appears in English in the original.
- 3. Eds. note: see, for example, Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010).
- 4. Eds. note: for a useful introduction to the distinction between process theology and poststructuralism in the context of philosophies of postmodernism, see *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, edited by Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell (New York: SUNY Press, 2002).
- 5. Eds. note: for an elaboration of the concept of 'forms-of-life,' see Tiqqun, *This is Not a Program*, translated by Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).
- 6. Eds. note: for a more complete discussion of Stengers' preference for the 'meso' as a concept that can avoid the binaries inherited from *A Thousand Plateaus*, see her interview with Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, "History Through the Middle: Between Macro and Mesopolitics," *Inflections* No. 3; available online: www.senselab.ca/inflections/volume_3/node_i3/stengers_en_inflections_vol103.html

from pg. 15

A project by CATHERINE LORD. Professor of Studio Art at the University of California, Irvine, she is an artist and writer who lives in Los Angeles. She is the author of *The Summer of Her Baldness: A Cancer Improvisation* (University of Texas Press, 2004) and, in collaboration with Richard Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture: 1885-2010* (forthcoming from Phaidon Press). She is currently at work on the text/image project, "The Effect of Tropical Light on White Men," 2011.

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1. Unconstitutional and criminal abortion bans.

than protective, and offers no real security from anti-abortion harassment. He argues for a more

2. Schneck v. Pro Choice Network of Westcott New York, 519 U.S. 357 (1997), footnote 9.