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Le Soin des Possibles The Care of the Possible

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Exhibition at 1.1 in Basel
14 September–12 October 2019

With Julie Edel Hardenberg,
Cassie Augusta Jørgensen, Feminist
Collective with No Name, Tabita Rezaire
and Mina Squalli-Houssaïni

Curated by Lotte Løvholm

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interviewed by Erik Bordeloue

Practising Multiforms

by Lotte Løvholm

“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.”
(Stengers 2011: 12)

Le Soin des Possibles, which translates into *The Care of the Possible*, is an exhibition presenting artists working strategically with care in their practice. Care for bodies. Care for the possible. The artists Julie Edel Hardenberg, Cassie Augusta Jørgensen, Feminist Collective with No Name, Tabita Rezaire and Mina Squalli-Houssaïni work in the gap where ethics meets aesthetics. The selected works presents an activism that is non-explicit and perhaps therefore not activism. But despite the subtle approach of the works they disturb the status quo.

Nine years ago, in July 2010, Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers and researcher Erik Bordeleau sat down in Stengers’ office at Université Libre de Bruxelles to talk and speculate about consequences and possible practices around communities, alliances, and neo-pagan witchcraft. It became the interview ‘Le Soin des Possibles’ published by ‘Scapegoat’ and ‘Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme’ in 2011. In the interview Stengers thinks about practices of the interstices: practices and interventions within gaps. Rather than defining itself through antagonism, this type of practice produces its own sense of presence while of course being aware of its opponents.

I decided to centre the exhibition around this conversation because the interview sparked some hope

inside of me. Since the 2010 interview, many people worldwide have come together to express the sentiment that Stengers would refer to as “we are not happy at all”. Fuelled by social media, political events and movements like the Arab Spring, Occupy, IOTBW, Black Lives Matter, White Lives Matter, global surveillance disclosures, ManFriday, Gamergate, Fridays for Future, Me Too, Trans is Beautiful etc. have sprung up. I mention this to keep in mind the fast pace of political events in the 2010s. These are not the practices Stengers talks about however. In the interview she looks at the minor, rather than the major.

On Care

The exhibition concept for *Le Soin des Possibles* was drafted one and a half years ago when my friend Apolonia Sokol invited me to co-curate a group exhibition with her in Paris, focusing on artists working with anti-racism and feminism in their practices. I sent her the interview *Le Soin des Possibles*.

Since my first thoughts on the exhibition much has happened: Sokol lost her close friend and took time to focus on herself, and through detours and circumstance *Le Soin des Possibles* found its home at 1.1 in Basel. I am pleased the exhibition is being realized with 1.1 given the platform’s focus on community building and artist care.

The work ‘FCNN News’ (2018-2019) by Feminist Collective with No Name (FCNN) is dedicated to Oksana Shachko, the friend Sokol lost last year. Writing her name is emotional. Shachko was an artist and activist, and rediscovering the interconnectedness within this exhibition made me think of a podcast interview FCNN made with Shachko about her practice two years ago.¹ It have decided to include it in the show.

FCNN consists of filmmaker Anita Beikpour and artists Dina El Kaisy Friemuth and Lil B. Wachmann. Their practice is a web of interconnections with other artists, some

of whom are present in the exhibition. In the collective the members bring together their individual interests in community building. In a humorous yet serious and zero-fucks-given-tone the three members act as news presenters in their latest project ‘FCNN News’. Taking familiar gestures from news broadcasting, they present news that rarely makes it to mainstream television by focusing on minority stories. Their slogan is: “We talk with you, not about you”.

ARoS museum in Aarhus, Denmark, serves as a futuristic backdrop to the newscast. Each episode starts with a panorama of the museum with the three members standing on a massive spiral staircase and taking the glass lift up. Once in the studio, before introducing the programme content, the collective target their antagonists. FCNN make a subtle yet determined reference to current racist debates in the Danish cultural landscape in their introductions. It is their way of saying that they know what is going on in public debate but they decide to focus their energy on the invited artists and activists.

In each episode they invite activist and performer Christian Music to be a fellow anchor. She is sent “out in the field” to interview the artworks in the empty museum space. To Ron Mueck’s huge sculpture ‘Boy’ (1999), the “mascot” of ARoS, she asks: “Would you say your size is a handicap? A privilege?” FCNN also use gentle humour when framing serious topics like invisibility by using the tagline “Ghost Busting”. In the interview focusing on ghosts the invited artist Eliyah Mesayer talks about lived experience and heritage: of having walked through the desert for generations and ending up in Aarhus, Denmark. The camera gets close in this interview, creating an intimate scene, and unlike in a mainstream news broadcast there is room for reflection between interviewer and interviewee. There is an interest in listening to what the invited guests have to say. The interview is followed by an infomercial on “rejuvenating Nile water drops” by Tabita Rezaire.

Cyber Knowledges

'Afro Cyber Resistance' (2015) is a video essay by Tabita Rezaire taking inspiration from online lecture formats. Rezaire talks directly to the viewer as she reads from her essay 'Afro cyber resistance: South African Internet art' (2014) published by Technoetic Arts.² She starts out by sharing how the paper came about: a friend of hers commented on a film screening she hosted in Johannesburg with mainly Western artists using social media as artistic practice. Her friend called it "white art".

Often combining Internet aesthetics with healing through her knowledge of ancient African spiritual practices, Rezaire insists on a different Internet. In the lecture she presents artists and activists challenging Western online power structures: Chimurenga, WikiAfrica, Bogosi Sekhukhuni and Cuss Group. Rezaire sits in front of a green screen, which sometimes erases parts of her. There is a DIY feeling to it, which mimics her emancipatory messages on online activism.

At the beginning of the video there are typing noises, as if Rezaire is in fact connecting with the person sitting at the other end in real time. This intimacy is always present in her works whether they are healing séances or video pieces. There is a generosity at play in Rezaire's work and a desire to share. 'Afro Cyber Resistance' highlights the research-oriented and collaborative aspects of Rezaire's practice. Often producing research-heavy works, Rezaire always presents her material in a light and quirky way while introducing the audience to scholars and activists that possess knowledges that are rarely shared widely.

Inside the gaps

Stengers relates the position of the minority to a possible factor of disturbance to capitalism. To her, minority is practice: "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" (Stengers 2011: 27). These are the practices of the interstices: practices that might be more powerful than the mass movements in terms of challenging capitalism.

Julie Edel Hardenberg's work in the exhibition 'Hidden Stories' (2017) was made for the Greenland Reconciliation Commission (2013–2017). The commission was established to create awareness of Greenland's colonial history and the consequences the past has had on today's society.³ Together with the Greenlandic population, the commission aimed to start a long-term process of change in a society with many social problems. Hardenberg works with Greenlandic identity, challenging Inuit stereotypes while at the same time researching pre-colonial Greenland. She looks at social issues and tries to find answers and reasons within current power structures, which are often related to the colonial history. For six months she decided to only speak Greenlandic in Nuuk, where she lives. The project had a greater impact than intended, as people were extremely offended by her choice to avoid the Danish language.

'Hidden Stories' juxtaposes two strong symbols: the 800-year-old Danish flag 'Dannebrog' and long black straight hair, referencing Inuit hair. The textile work is a reminder of colonial rule trying to suppress indigenous culture. The hair grows out of the flag like a dandelion through concrete. Very few Danes have visited their commonwealth neighbour Greenland and news broadcasts about Greenland are rare in Denmark. Denmark is however very present in Greenland, from the language to the educational system. Hardenberg insists that colonial wounds are present both in former colonies and former empires. The piece is part of a series of works that focus on national symbols.

At 1.1 the flag touches the floor, which is forbidden by Danish law. It hangs vertically instead of horizontally,

stressing the importance of the Christian church in Danish nation-state building and in the colonial project of Greenland. Christianity has succeeded in suppressing many ancient practices worldwide; Hardenberg brings those stories to light.

Spectrums

Under the pseudonym ‘Somatic Incubator’ Cassie Augusta Jørgensen presents the video work in three acts ‘Etude’ (2018). Having trained as a dancer at The Ailey School in New York, Jørgensen often uses her own body in her work together with theatrical elements. In this piece she invited friend and fellow dancer Lydia Östberg Diakité to perform with her. Their different body shapes, though both strong and androgynous, stress the point we as the viewer are presented with in ‘Act I’: they are “a multiform”. They perform a choreography based on Fibonacci numbers and the golden spiral: a mathematical system and shape present in nature. While almost fading into the white background, they present us with their failures and attempts to dance the choreography. There is a struggle between free will and determined mathematical formula. They claim an angelic presence, one that is not he or she.

Theatre is all about transition: there is a whole script on top of the manuscript with cues and instructions for the stage workers. In film you simply cut from one scene to the next. ‘Etudes’ mixes film with theatre transitions in one-take sequences and instead of being left in the dark we see the transitions. Throughout the piece there are elements of “Verfremdung” which translates to alienation. Playwright and theatre director Bertolt Brecht used this technique as a way to awaken his audience politically. These moments of staged process bring a raw sincerity to ‘Etude’. The camera follows Östberg Diakité walking out of the white studio backdrop into the “behind the scenes” to help with the transition to ‘Act III: Daddy giving Death’. Östberg Diakité

throws a snake-print dress to Jørgensen, still sitting by the white backdrop. And cut.

The multiform alien creatures in Jørgensen’s work move their lips and speak, but there is no sound to their words, only subtitles. Perhaps they speak a language we cannot hear. The focus on transitions becomes evident in ‘Act III’, where Jørgensen is left to herself with green light embodying a snake ready to shed its skin and the text “Go₃C” on the screen. “Go₃C” is a group of oestrogens. According to writer and philosopher Paul B. Preciado, we live in a “Pharmacopornographic Era”. Preciado stresses how gender is created through capitalism’s reproduction politics. The comprehensive success of the birth control pill is one of the examples he uses to explain heteronormativity.⁴ The birth control pill was tested on Puerto Rican women in the 1950s without them knowing it was a clinical trial. It was a form of population control targeted at women of colour living in economic poverty. In the video, Jørgensen draws a snake as a reference to the logo often used by the pharmaceutical industry. This is an ambiguous symbol: it could heal you and harm you. The snake represents fluidity and a spectrum. Transitions are not binary. Neither are hormonal balances in genders.

Buzzing Drone Spells

Mina Squalli-Houssaini’s work ‘our chimeras are meant to be’ (2019) references the childhood dolls made by her grandmother in Morocco. Growing up in Switzerland, the dolls were both a reminder of her heritage and served as a mirror to her predominantly white environment. Squalli-Houssaini’s version of the dolls is less humanlike and inspired by matriarchal insects. They look like superheroes as they stand tall and proud with their long traditional garments.

Often working with mirrors, Squalli-Houssaini looks at representation and self-awareness, targeting the

Narcissus myth that most humans on this planet with a social media account suffer from. By focusing on the trans-human she points at other ways of positioning the self while looking at ways of organizing in nature. The matriarchal system in nature can be as violent as the patriarchal, but in Squalli-Houssaini's playful and naïve universe these figures present something otherworldly and spiritual. They stand together in a triangular shape as if they are summoning or healing this forsaken place. They look alien and the title of the work suggests a shared experience: 'our chimeras are meant to be'. The piece links the feeling of not belonging to a higher purpose. They are not meant to fit in and that is the beauty of it.

In her practice as a sound artist, DJ and organizer Squalli-Houssaini creates spaces of belonging. In the sound piece that accompanies the sculptures, female family members and friends talk about colonial history and racism. Their French voices merge with insect buzzing, drums and the string instrument the oud. At times the buzzing is so loud and dense it becomes a drone. The drone is interrupted by gestures towards techno anthems, rap and whispers. There is echo and reverb, which create a sacral yet intimate atmosphere. It is as if these extraterrestrial spiritual insect-leaders are casting a spell. I believe they are.

Paying Attention

"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." (Stengers 2011: 12)

Philosopher Achille Mbembe calls acceleration

the main philosophical and political question today.⁵ In relation to current power structures, acceleration magnifies injustice: those that have money can control time and decide when time moves fast and when it moves slow. Hyperproductivity is the new uncool. But being lazy is also only for the privileged few and hedonism a productive force.⁶ This is the era in which work lost its magic⁷ and showing off all our fabulous leisure activities on social media became the norm. Our free time is being capitalized on and decades of struggles to unionize are being undermined with each and every single swipe. The system is broken: join and suffer or starve alone. For precisely this reason it is important to continue thinking about resistance and practices of care. Can we imagine what it would take to devalue growth?

Paying attention is a political act according to Stengers. However with development and growth we are taught not to pay attention.⁸ Paying attention and being careful requires knowledge on how to "resist the temptation to separate what must be taken into account and what may be neglected" (Stengers 2015: 62). Stengers uses examples of neo-pagan witchcraft in her research and believes science should be a common practice, which she rearticulates in the book 'In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism' (2015), which focuses on ecological crisis. To her the only way to avoid barbarism is by learning to "couple together multiple, divergent struggles and engagements" (Stengers 2015: 50). Practicing care and caution opens the enclosed hierarchy of knowledge that the institutions of science have created. Care of the possible is way of nurturing what is neglected. It is a way of practicing solidarity while entering the uncertain grounds of the now.

¹ FCNN in conversation with Oksana Shachko: www.soundcloud.com/friktionmagasin/kunst-og-kultur-feministisk-kollektiv-uden-navn-og-oksana-shachko/

² ‘Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research’, volume 12, Issue 2, 2014.

³ The Greenland Reconciliation Commission www.saam-maatta.gl/en/

⁴ Paul B. Preciado: ‘Testo Junkie’, 2013, p. 28.

⁵ ‘Discussing African Futures with Achille Mbembe’ 2015: www.okayafrica.com/achille-mbembe-african-futures-interview/

⁶ Sven Lütticken: ‘Lazy Labor: Sleepification’ in ‘Arts of the Working Class’, no. 6, 2019.

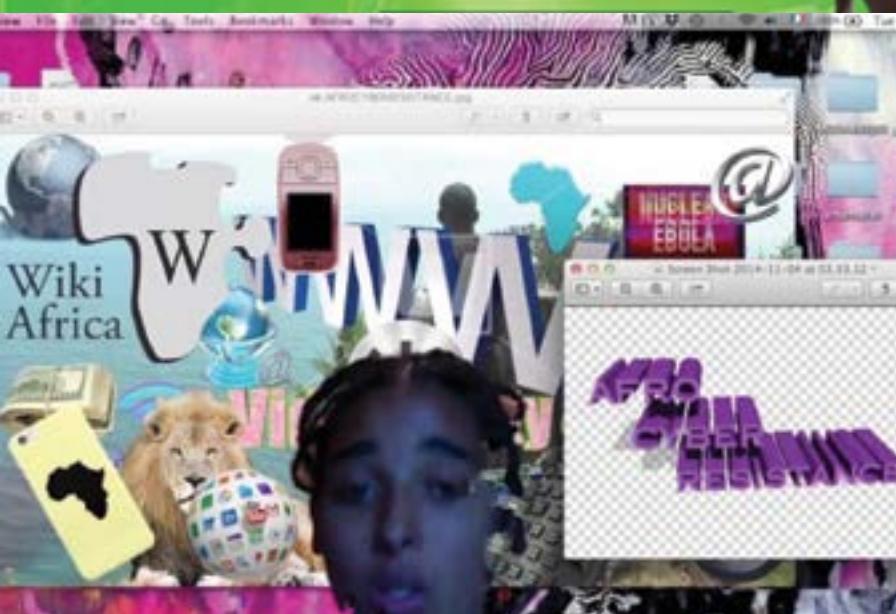
⁷ André Gorz: ‘Reclaiming Work’, 1999, Cambridge, Polity, p. 56-57.

⁸ Isabelle Stengers: ‘In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism’, 2015, p. 61. Available for free online: [www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/download/Stengers_2015_In-Catastrophic-Times.pdf/](http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/download/Stengers_2015_In-Catastrophic-Times.pdf)



Feminist Collective with No Name, 'FCNN News', 2018-2019,
videos, episode 1-3, 14 min. Stills from episode 2.

We need to quickly snap out of the web 2.0 fantasy of the Internet as a promised land for those seeking a greater freedom of expression or livelihood. Whatever visions that ideologically shaped this technology at the beginning of the development of computers, has now successfully been structurally organized to serve the primary interests of North American governmental bodies and the commercial interests of some of the world's biggest and wealthiest companies, Google and Facebook. The rapid accumulation of power that these companies have garnered over the past decade is testament to this reality. According to Bruce Sterling, there is no reason to think that this will always be the case and the real interest for me is imagining what tone life on the Internet will take in coming years. Social media dominates Internet usage and so its cultural manifestation is something worthwhile to speculate on. Consumer culture and advertising have been the avenues that have been the source of income on the Internet, along with it, is the spawning of a distinct online visual culture and aesthetic that is thriving and complex.



Tabita Rezaire, 'Afro Cyber Resistance', 2015, video, 18.25 min.
Still from video. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, RSA..



Julie Edel Hardenberg, 'Hidden Stories', 2017, textile work.
Photo: Julie Edel Hardenberg.



Cassie Augusta Jørgensen, 'Etude', 2019, video, 18.36 min.
Stills from video.



Mina Squalli-Houssaini, 'our chimeras are meant to be', 2019.
Installation shot from HEAD Genève. Photo: Alicia Dubuis .

1.1

by Deborah Joyce Holman

1.1 is a non-commercial platform for emerging art and music, which I co-founded in 2015 with Roberto Ronzani. 1.1's output spans solo exhibitions by early-career artists in its exhibition space in Basel and music events across Switzerland and abroad. We also commission and publish DJ mixes on our SoundCloud and text-based works on our website.

We founded 1.1 with a desire to engage and learn with peers nationally and internationally, in order to facilitate a wider exchange between local and foreign artists. Throughout the four years of its existence, we've worked closely with artists with a far-reaching array of backgrounds and practices—from fine arts and fashion to music and research.

Embarking as an extremely grassroots endeavour with an ambition to engage with such vastly varying positions, collective processes, space for fluidity and experimentation are very much at the heart of 1.1. With little to no prior experience of any professional engagement in the arts before founding the platform, my two collaborators (Roberto Ronzani and Tuula Rasmussen) and I have tried to constantly position ourselves in relation to our values and ethics. Exhibition making has thus been a political act from an early stage.

The notion of care naturally plays a key role within this. What Isabelle Stengers refers to as “the Care of the Possible” transpires not just within our interaction with artists and their work, but also within the values that 1.1 is built on and the partners it aligns with.

This, as the term suggests, contains work on a small and large scale in relation to running a platform within the Swiss

—and thus European, Western—context of contemporary art. It would be untrue and unrealistic to state that conflict has never been part of this process, but, as a very immediate reading of Erik Bordeleau’s interview with Stengers may suggest implicitly, the possibilities that can be unearthed through disagreements are as valuable and productive as processes that produce less friction. Regardless, our ongoing commitment to dialogue incorporates careful examination of our position, behaviour and output. As such, I.I has always been a starting point for reflection that hopes to thread throughout the internal processes, output and reach of its programme.

The group exhibition, *Le Soin des Possibles*, with Julie Edel Hardenberg, Cassie Augusta Jørgensen, Feminist Collective with No Name, Tabita Rezaire and Mina Squalli-Houssaïni has been conceived and curated by Copenhagen-based, independent curator Lotte Løvholm in response to an open call for curatorial projects published at the end of 2018. Her practice aligns with intentions I have set out for I.I, together with Roberto Ronzani and Tuula Rasmussen—a rewarding echo, which has forged space for an exhibition that expands these reflections in bringing together artists who in turn explore potentials of care in their practices.

Lotte Løvholm situates the exhibition in explicit curatorial and philosophical contexts via the introduction of Stengers into the conversation. An enriching expansion, *Le Soin des Possibles* furthers a web of artistic and curatorial practices that intend to shift and exploit the potentials and multiplicities of art and exhibition making, whilst resisting Western notions of universality.

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

Published in ‘Scapegoat’ Issue 01 (2011). Translated from French by Kelly Ladd. The original version of this interview—‘Le soin des possibles’—was published in ‘Nouveaux Cahiers de socialisme’ no. 6 (Autumn, 2011).

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 cosmopolitan reflection around the concept of an ecology of practices, as in ‘Cosmopolitics I and II’ (1997 and 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 Liebig's organic chemistry laboratory in Giessen. 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 millimetre [*laughs*], but I owe that quarter millimetre 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 lead 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-demande 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 [*dispositif*], 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’, halfway 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...

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 [*viriloïdes*]. 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’.⁵ 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-traitors, 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? Conversely, the destruction of GMO fields, for me, is a success because those who have placed themselves outside of the law have understood how to act so that police power, even though it would like to very much, cannot treat them like terrorists.

But if messianism doubles as pedagogy in the hopes that “people will understand” not only that GMOs are a story of lies and malfeasance, but rather, in the messianic sense, that a veritable conversion-rupture is the only road, the risk is that only the police will profit from what they do. Nonetheless, a lot of people, in France in particular, are getting together to cultivate plots of land; people are learning manual trades to be able to go from alternative space to alternative space. And, all of this requires skills that interest me: there are concrete situations in these spaces, which become political precisely because of the way in which they are lived in and from the type of force that they require. Cultivating a plot of land without pesticides and fertilizers, but also learning how to trust yourself, asking questions together, making other relations—all of this is complicated and demanding because vegetables cannot be taken hostage...

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 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 anesthetizes, 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...

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 dialled". 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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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,' 'Inflexions No. 3'; available online: www.senselab.ca/inflexions/volume_3/node_i3/stengers_en_inflexions_volo3.html

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1.1 Basel
14 September–12 October 2019

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Julie Edel Hardenberg, Cassie Augusta Jørgensen, Feminist Collective with No Name, Tabita Rezaire and Mina Squalli-Houssaïni

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Exhibition assistant: Noëlle Maltet

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