**Isabelle Stengers and The Dramatization of Philosophy**

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**“Dic cur hic”**

In what may seem like an uncharacteristic passage by someone who otherwise described himself as the typical example of the Victorian Englishman, Alfred North Whitehead once wrote that “[t]he notion of pure thought in abstraction from all expression is a figment of the learned world. A thought is a tremendous form of excitement.” (*Modes* 36) It is the patterned signature of its *expression* that not only gives thought its own distinct character, but also propels it out into the world, exciting its environment with a new variation of interests. Without this ability to repattern, even if just slightly, the atmosphere of feeling in which they are immersed, to make a difference by shifting the way in which a situation may matter, thoughts would all be equally uninteresting. This is why, as it is expressed, a thought is like “a stone thrown into a pond.” Shaking its environment with its ripples, “it disturbs the whole surface of our being.” (36)

I am reminded of this passage in Whitehead’s *Modes of Thought* quite often. But I am drawn back to it with distinct force as I undertake the task of introducing Isabelle Stengers’ thought, and the ripples cultivated throughout what to the best of my knowledge is the first special issue in the Anglophone world dedicated to her philosophy, into *this* learned world. I’m drawn to it because such introductions would often seem to invite something quite different from this expressive excitement. Indeed, academic custom would perhaps advise that the importance of a philosophy be introduced, to some degree at least, in abstraction from it. To the degree, that is, that the *scope* of its ripples, those that may remind us of a philosopher’s achievements, their distinguished trajectory, and the breadth of their reception, may be abstracted from the singular *patterning* of the ripples their philosophy generates.

Nothing, in this case, would prevent such an account. Ever since her collaboration with the Nobel Laureate Illya Prigogine on the implications of the research on dissipative structures and irreversibility, and throughout the course of her now extensive writings, Stengers has indeed crafted an eminent career that has not only earned her the highly prestigious grand prize for philosophy from the *Académie Française*, but has also established her as a world-renowned philosopher of science, and an original reader of Deleuze and Whitehead. Furthermore, thanks to her interventions in the so-called Science Wars, and her constructively divergent association with the sociologist of science Bruno Latour, many aspects of Stengers’ philosophy have already become well-known in the Anglophone world as an influential contribution to the post-disciplinary field known as ‘science and technology studies’, and she has been recognised as an important and demanding voice within the emerging field of environmental humanities.

Many other achievements could be added to this list. But such introductory habits are always somewhat paradoxical. Because more than just abstracting the scope of the ripples from their own patterning, this mode of recognition, however habitual, however celebratory, effectively *judges* a philosopher’s importance according to another pattern; one that may be relevant to the discipline, or to the academy, but not to the way in which the philosophy in question may have succeeded in transfiguring the atmospheres of feeling to which it has connected. Not, that is, to the fact that “philosophy never reverts to its old position after the shock of a great philosopher.” (Whitehead, *Process* 11). If there is always something of a paradox in such introductions, they feel especially inadequate when it comes to addressing the philosophy of Isabelle Stengers. And not just because of the greatness of the shock her philosophy may involve, a shock that is very much alive and kicking, progressively gaining amplitude and reverberation. They feel inadequate because nothing could be farther from Stengers’ philosophical *signature* than the celebration of something called “pure thought” in abstraction from its dramatic excitement, as if thought were *ever* a neutral operation to be carried outpurely in the sky of ideas.

Deleuze put it provocatively when he said: “Given any concept, we can always discover its drama.” (98) With Stengers this isn’t just a possibility, it is a requirement. What would her philosophy of science, concerned as it is with the possibility of cultivating an ecology of practices, each endowed with their own requirements and obligations, mean in abstraction from the attempt to dislodge the arrogant resentments that fuelled the Science Wars and its ongoing aftermath on both sides of its trenches? How should one understand her readings of Deleuze and Whitehead, so unlike those of many *Deleuzians* and *Whiteheadians* alike, in abstraction from the attempt not to be authorised by their thought, or to cipher them, but to put her own thought to the immanent testing experience of conferring upon her reading an ethopoietic character, one whose effect is no other than to transform the reader who risks thinking with them? Even worse, how would one make sense of the fact that the same philosopher who explored the implications of thinking with far-from-equilibrium systems and ventured into the history of chemistry, who meditated on the event of Galileo’s experiments and his invention of a new form of scientific veridiction, and delved into the abstract speculations of some great European philosophers; that this is the same philosopher who has also written about the efficacy of hypnosis and now calls for a reclaiming of animism, who invites us to take the risk of affirming the reality of Gaia, and, through an alliance with the contemporary neopagan witch Starhawk, endeavours to think while feeling the smoke of the burning times in her nostrils? How to understand it, that is, without paying attention to the atmosphere of feeling in which her philosophy operates and whose mutation it pursues, an atmosphere shaped by the dreams of a modern world which abstracts at everyone’s peril, and shows nothing but disdain for everything that its own abstractions have become incapable of feeling and making felt?

It seems to me that if there is a signature to the unique patterning of the ripples that characterise Stengers’ philosophy, it may well be this: *the permanent dramatization of thought*. Which is to say, the risky exercise of crafting philosophy in the hold of the events that connect the creation of concepts to the historical, political and ethical dramas that call for them. As she wrote with characteristic humor at the beginning of her *Thinking with Whitehead: ‘*The surest way to “kill” philosophy is to transmit it in the manner of a science: one does not need to enter into contact with Newton’s problem to learn rational dynamics– the equations of Lagrange and Hamilton define what must be retained of it– but to deal with Plato without first sharing his problem is somewhat analogous to studying butterflies on the basis of a collection of pinned butterflies, without ever having seen one fly.’ (10)

Indeed, it is no surprise that Stengers is fond of recalling Leibniz’s motto, “Dic cur hic:” say why here. For the “why,” here, has no recourse to transcendental reasons, or to universal principles capable of providing a rational justification for the choice of how or what to think, feel, or do, on any given occasion. To the contrary, *dic cur hic* functions as a pragmatic test– it is precisely the demand not to “shield yourself behind general justifications that block pragmatic imagination, the envisagement of the kind of difference this choice is liable to make here and now.” (Stengers, “Thinking”, 29). What demands to be expressed is not therefore the truth behind the general reasons that would authorise your thinking, endowing it with the seemingly neutral character of a logical deduction, but the problematic situation whose gripping drama takes hold of you, forcing you to think:

*Dic cur hic–* suspend your action, let yourself be affected by this “here”, that is, by this world; don’t give to your reasons a power they don’t have, always general, valid for an innumerable host of different worlds, but mute as to the way in which that which they justify will contribute to each of these worlds. […] In a world where everything conspires, learning not to confer on a judgement the power of a reason does not guarantee a better choice, but it implies an act of consent, a “feeling-with” this world, against that which Nietzsche would only very late call *ressentiment* – the sentiment of impotence that nourishes contempt for oneself, for this world, for the reasons that make this world, rather than another, exist. (Stengers, “L’insistance”, 10. my translation)

Refusing the reasons that give rise to resentment and consenting instead to feeling-with those worlds that make one think, with Stengers the task of philosophy is staged in an entirely different way. Like alchemy, it becomes an *impure* art– transformed by a speculative gesture that no longer confers on ‘pure thought’ the power to dictate the reasons from which judgements ought to be passed, or from which actions ought to be derived. Shrugging its shoulders at the authority of general theories with their immaculate ideals of essence, logic, or transcendence, their “either/ors” and their “if…thens,” to dramatise philosophy is to turn it into an earthly, experimental, and gripping sort of affair: an immanent and situated act of creation concerned with whens and wheres and hows, with abstractions and their consequences, with practices and their dreams, with events and the possibles they create.

**What Has Happened to Us? The Gesture of Dramatization**

This is a radical gesture indeed. For it is not a mere appeal to historicism, always susceptible of being turned into a quasi-transcendental gesture of disqualification of its own. Stengers’ dramatisation is radical because it strips philosophy from its rights. No longer protected by the power of anonymous reasons, every thought is a wager. It is an attempt to explore, and in so doing craft a creative and risky response to, the dramatic question “what has happened to us?” (Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead*, 14-16). Moreover, Stengers’ exploration of this question is not performed with the purpose of devising an explanation with the status of a verdict, an account capable of settling the question once and for all, of providing a final diagnosis whose incisiveness may endow us, the people of critical ideas, with a feeling of historical satisfaction at our own impending demise. One asks the question “what has happened to us?” not from a position of lucidity but from a state of perplexity, when an adventure has gone astray– and a strayed adventurer will find little solace in an account whose effect is simply that of providing rational justification for her sad fate. If thought is a wager it is because it involves the pragmatic risk of trusting that, despite the success with which modernity may have turned its dramas into tragedies, another staging is possible– in its still ongoing multifariousness, the world provides vital resources for resistance, cultivation, and careful experimentation. Rather than a nostalgic lament, the question “what has happened to us?” is a lure for giving the possible a chance, for regenerating our imaginations, for experimenting with other ways of inhabiting our present, “for telling our stories in another way, in a way that situates us otherwise– not as defined by the past, but as able, perhaps, to inherit from it in another way.” (14).

Pressing on in the modern ruins of our present, it is the insistence of the possible which philosophy is called upon to dramatize, to which it must invent a manner of responding. As such, the gesture of dramatization demands a speculative leap, one that forces thought to put Reason out of its depth and turns it into a creative and experimental art. With Stengers, however, to suggest that dramatization turns thought into an art of creation is never to say that, finally freed from the shackles of its own justifications, philosophy turns mystical, enjoying a sort of poetic license unencumbered by the rationalistic demands of consistency and coherence that, in spite of all, may have so far prevented philosophy from taking its last breath. As Stengers argues, philosophy’s “survival would then depend on the continuing creation of what produces philosophers, of what is able to transform what we call thinking into an adventure, because it acts as an imperative, with a necessity of its own.” (“Speculative”, 188)

Dramatization is borne of a necessity that is neither rational nor reasonable, but immanent to the problematic events and encounters that force one to think. Indeed, as soon as Whitehead evoked the image of the stone thrown into a pond, he felt the urge to correct it, for “we should conceive the ripples,” he added, “as effective in the creation of the plunge of the stone into the water. The ripples release the thought, and the thought augments and distorts the ripples. In order to understand the essence of thought we must study it in relation to the ripples amid which it emerges.” (*Modes,* 36). The first task of dramatization is therefore to honor the problematic that turns one into a philosopher, and to make this problematic matter. Which is to say that Stengers’ philosophy is indissociable from our epoch, when thinking can no longer be a matter of an innocent dream of the attainment of universal truth, ecumenical peace, or eternal salvation. To dramatize philosophy is to refuse to partake in the perennial question of “what is the true?”, for as Deleuze suggested, this is never enough, and one must ask “who wants the true, when and where, how and how much?” (98). Indeed, in a present fraught with the deleterious histories of modern “progress” and techno-scientific innovation, of capitalist accumulation, western colonialism, and ecological depletion, thinking becomes indeed an imperative to ask such questions so as to struggle against the betrayal of the possibility of a more livable future for the many inhabitants of this endangered Earth. It becomes a necessity to risk inventing new collective arts and practices of attention, of struggle, of study, of imagination and experimentation “capable once again of inhabiting the devastated zones of experience” (Pignarre and Stengers, 137) in an earth whose ongoing collective existence is precisely what is at risk of extinction.

Thus, the creative gesture of dramatizing philosophy consists, in the first instance, in ‘the act of giving to an imperative question the power to claim the concepts it needs in order to obtain its most dramatic, forceful necessity, in order to force thinking in such a way that the philosopher can no longer say “I think,” can no longer be a thinking subject.’ (Stengers, “Speculative”, 189) But to the extent that its success may be understood in terms of its efficacy in distorting the ripples, in generating a shock that prevents philosophy from reverting to its old position, not being able to claim a victorious “I think” in abstraction form this imperative does not, for all that, make the philosopher *submit* to her milieu. It does not make her indistinguishablefrom her epoch, as if understanding her signature would be equivalent to explaining it away by waving the magic wand of a Zeitgeist. It is here that the task of telling our stories “in a way situates us otherwise” becomes a truly pragmatic art, concerned not with the reduction of truth to politics, but with the political creation of concepts whose truth “is instead related to the interest of the problem that requires them.”(190)

In this way, whenever Stengers is concerned, thought is not an originary well of conceptual invention but a *singular vector of transformation* of a problematic field*.* Indeed, what is truly disruptive and exciting is not the stone itself, but the stone-thrown-into-a-pond, that is, a singularity which introduces an interstice, a shift in perspective, a variation, a break in the equilibrium of the pond’s surface and situates it otherwise, disturbing the whole surface of its being. It is perhaps no coincidence that Whitehead, in the same piece, would propose that the “concrete truth is the variation of interests.” (*Modes,* 11) What’s more, this dramatization of philosophy as an impure, pragmatic art, as an non-originary yet singular vector of transformation of problematic fields, may perhaps also enable us to understand Stengers’ insistence on the need to invent a manner of inhabiting the interstices of the problematics she is moved by, on creating concepts not only by consenting to feel-with other philosophers but also with a plethora of situated practices, within and beyond the sciences, whose singularity she seeks to vectorize– situated practices “which exhibit the possibility of an approach by the very fact that they have already undertaken it.” (Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II,* 313)

One can discern this pragmatic art at work in her attempt to dislodge the resentful trenches on both sides of the Science Wars, where indeed for Stengers it is neither a matter of siding with the critics in cultural studies and the social sciences, who by habit would reduce the sciences to another game of competing interests, nor of simply extending a perfected, more rational and consensual version of Popper’s criterion of demarcation, a justification capable of abstracting an image of a purely disinterested science from the problematic distribution of interests and passions that configure the contours of the situations in which scientific practitioners dream, operate, and invent. What is at stake in her intervention instead is the creation of a “new mode of astonishment,” a novel situation of perplexity, capable of asking anew the question “what has happened to us?”. Capable, that is, of dramatizing the problematic field which makes ‘the science question’ matter while identifying ‘a “motif” (in the double sense, both musical and desiring) that would singularize “science” and make it capable of becoming, certainly not an object of definition, but a subject of history.’ (Stengers, *The Invention,* 71).

If *The Invention of Modern Science* was primarily concerned with the singularization of this thing called “science,” this situated gesture of dramatization soon reveals a proliferation of interstices, a demand to follow its vectorial thread, every time anew, with manifold relationships across divergent practices, engendering each time a new adventure: “How can we make it possible for a modern practitioner to present herself, justify her practice, draw attention to what interests her, without that interest coinciding with a disqualification?” (Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I,* 49). It is this practical transformation of the philosophical problematic itself, then, that enables Stengers to trust the possibility of envisaging an always unstable “ecology of practices,” a task most monumentally articulated in her *Cosmopolitics.* For indeed, as she presents it, the thinking of such an ecology is borne again of necessity, of “the demand that no practice be defined as 'like any other', just as no living species is like any other.” And it is this dramatic imperative that may in turn allow Stengers to approach practices in their divergence, that is, by feeling-with each of their singular borders, “experimenting with questions which practitioners may accept as relevant, even if they are not their own questions, rather than posing insulting questions that would lead them to mobilise and transform the border into a defence against their outside.” (Stengers, “Introductory”, 184)

As it happens with good dramas, as soon as a few characters enter the scene, the plot thickens, and as one follows its unfolding, the field begins to refold onto new dimensions, infused with other relevant threads, and a multitude of other problematics begin to resonate in tandem. If the ecology of practices operates as a vector of equalization, of *mise en égalité,* speculatively enacting the trust in a possible togetherness of divergent interests and dreams, it rapidly becomes perceptible that the entire ecology itself, like the Earth we still precariously inhabit –or whatever is left of either or both– are also part of another drama. For they subsist in an ongoing process of capture and destruction by the dramatic capitalist operation of a generalized *mise en equivalence*, whose relentless effort of turning everything into a productive force, and subjecting everything to the laws of the market, propagates “a veritable cemetery for destroyed practices and collective knowledges” (Stengers, *In Catastrophic,* 98). It is by dramatizing this dimension of multiple ecological devastation, by giving to this drama the power to claim the concepts it may need, that the problematic field acquires new dimensions and demands: more than ever before, crafting the possibility of a habitable interstice becomes imperative. And it is here too that Stengers can be seen exploring new situations, and vectorizing unlikely, speculative alliances.

Deeply moved by what she refers to as the “GMO event,” which relates to the European movement of resistance to the proliferation of genetically modified organisms, she is prompted to tell a story to situate us, and the problematic, otherwise: no longer one simply concerned with the authority of modern science in relation to a host of other knowledge-practices, but one attendant to the often subtle but crucial discrepancies between those activists and scientific practitioners “who were in the process of producing more and more concrete, more and more significant knowledges,” and “the knowledge of those responsible for public order,” including the indeed *capitalized* figures of the Entrepreneur, the State, and yes, Science (Stengers, *In Catastrophic,* 36).

But there is more. For what this added dimension brings to the problematic field, with the dramatic force of an imperative, is the need to heed the intrusion of the Earth itself into the scene, one that is here to stay, making perceptible that we can no longer “think of ourselves as being the only true actors, capable of making and unmaking.” (Pignarre & Stengers, 117). A ticklish being enters the problematic anew, resituating everyone and everything: from those responsible for the public order, who publicly dream about geo-engineering this intrusion, to the insatiable critics in the humanities and the social sciences that have not resisted the temptation of engaging the idea of an epoch –the Anthropocene– that would finally bear their name. Through the gesture of naming this character not in order to be correct, or to speak the truth, but in order “*to confer on what is named the power to make us feel and think in the mode that the name calls for*,” Stengers risks renaming it “Gaia.” A singularity indeed: not a synonym for a concrete, felt Earth, but a name for *the-one-who-intrudes*, one which demands a response “as much to what provoked her intrusion as to its consequences.” (*In Catastrophic,* 43)

The dramatization of the fact that we are not the only actors, that we are not alone in the world, also requires the reclaiming of practices that would seem to have been already buried in the capitalist cemetery and that we, bewitched by the power to measure everything according to its contribution to the general interest, have failed to honor. Practices that require a humble apprenticeship, for they are the ones “that spoke of prudence in a fearsome world, of the possibility of creation despite the permanent probability of war.” (Pignarre & Stengers, 117) Here again Stengers’ seeks to craft stories that situate us otherwise, vectorising not just the practices of scientists and environmental activists, each in their singularity and possible alliances, but now also entering into an apprenticeship with the practices of neopagan witches, whose singular craft, what they crucially –because the naming is already part of their practice– call *magic*, requires the reactivation of the art of paying attention, of protecting oneself, “that is to say in the first place and above all, not to think of oneself as sufficient onto oneself. They have learned the necessity of casting the circle, of creating the closed space where forces they have a vital need for can be convoked:”

Unlike scientists, it [the witches’ circle] is not defined against a world that it would later con­quer and convert. Unlike that of feminists and of non-violent protesters, it doesn't include human protagonists only. What is invoked there, she who, the witches say, ‘returns’ is she to whom thanks will be given for the event that makes each and all together capable of opening up and of learning. She who makes them capable, when opening the circle and parting, of encountering differently what it was first necessary to keep outside. To honour the goddess is to learn at one and the same time to close and to make exist, inside, the ‘cry’ of a world that demands that one learn how to join it again. (Pignarre & Stengers, 138-39)

Once again, the drama of thought keeps metamorphosing, transforming the problematic in such a way that resisting the capitalist destruction of practices and habitats connects, intimately, the question of the vulnerability of the ecology of practices to the test of honoring and relaying the heritage of knowledges and techniques that modernity has already dishonored. Situated anew, dramatizing the question “what has happened to us?” forces Stengers to experiment with a different staging: “What have we done, what do we carry on doing when we use words that make us the heirs of those who eradicated witches?” (Stengers, “Cosmopolitical”, 1002)

Thankfully, Stengers’ dramatization of philosophy is still ongoing. It involves many other threads, transforming with its ripples a host of problematic worlds that our modern habits of thought would rather keep separate. But what breathes life into it is not so much, I insist, the development of the accomplished trajectory of an individual philosopher, as the rippled cultivation of a mode of *expression,* a free and wild creation of concepts that respond to a question rather than a vision. What is at stake is the piecemeal development of a singular signature that simultaneously requires, and is addressed to, others, ‘in so far as they are “in their element,” insofar as their habits constitute a world for them, into which they admit no free trespassing.’ A risky signature it is indeed, for rather than be in the search for anonymous truths or lucid critiques of our epoch, it proffers its divergence trusting that “these habits may be inflected,” that “laughter may resound testifying to the entertainment of a proposition that transforms what was accepted as an unavoidable alternative into a badly posed problem.” (Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead,* 517)

**Compassionate Thought: A Collective Effort in Creative Appreciation**

The expressive sign, Whitehead wrote, “is more than interpretable. It is creative. It elicits the intuition which interprets it. It cannot elicit what is not there. A note on a running fork can elicit a response from a piano. But the piano has already in it the string tuned to the same note.” (*Religion,*  118). If this is true of Stengers’ philosophy, as I have proposed above, it is also true of the many articles one will find in this special issue. The articles collected here constitute interpretative explorations of this unique signature that I have associated with Stengers’ philosophy. But they are, each in their own way, co-*creative* of the notes that Stengers’ running forks elicit, making them resonate in a variety of different keys, and in relation to their own dramas and imperatives. What is more, when one listens closely, it might be possible to hear how their different keys begin to resonate with each other in often surprising and fertile ways.

Some of them address directly, and expand on, this nagging, dramatic dimension that sets Stengers’ philosophy in motion, that turns her thought into an experimental wager and transforms her craft into a truly pragmatic operation– that is, they deal with the question and status of “the problematic” itself. Thus, in his article Didier Debaise explores the singularity of Stengers’ philosophy by elaborating a creative interpretation of the *function* that she attributes to it. One that, he wagers, dramatizes philosophy as a political craft devoted to nothing less than *resisting stupidity,* that is, resisting a characteristically modern mode of operation which consists in the incapacity to evaluate what is of importance, an acquired incapacity that Debaise correlates with “the celebration of false problems.”

Martin Savransky, for his part, relays this concern with the transformation of badly posed problems in a different key. Exploring the challenge of what it may mean to *think with* Stengers today, his article pays attention to the *manner* in which Stengers carries out this transformative task. In so doing, he emphasizes the importance that the resounding “laughter” has in Stengers’ thought, and proposes that Stengers’ philosophy cultivates what he refers to as a “humor of the problematic”– distinguished both from the solemnity of serious epistemologists and the arrogance of ironic sociologists, Stengers’ humor is an art of immanence that endows the problematic with an existence and a force of its own. As such, “the laughter of humor consists in allowing the problematic to be inhabited such that one may be able to attend to the construction of differences that diverging practices articulate in developing a sense of the problems that animate them.” Subsequently, Andrew Goffey’s article throws into sharp relief a dimension that resonates throughout the first two articles and indeed throughout Stengers’ philosophy: the problematic of power. And he chooses to stage this question in a very particular way– while exploring several stages of her oeuvre, Goffey focuses centrally on the approach to power that Stengers cultivates in her earlier and recurrent writings on hypnosis and psychoanalysis. In this way, he argues that her gesture of *singularization* is intimately connected to a *multiplication* of powers, enabling an analysis of powers in terms of their *instability*: “successfully infecting an environment but dependent, in one way or another, on the patience of that environment so as to continue generating effects.”

Taking stock of these creative interpretations, the resonances that the collection generates are augmented and reactivated in new ways by the weaving together of other generative patterns and relays. As if in an *interlude,* Donna Haraway’s short meditation energizes the echoes between Stengers and her own thinking along and around the figure of SF: “string figures, soin des ficelles, speculative feminism, science fiction, science fact, speculative fabulation, so far.” Cat-cradling with Stengers, echoing Virginia Woolf and her unfaithful daughters and sons, hers is a veritable call for speculative arms: “Whether we asked for it or not, the pattern is in our hands. The answer to the trust of the held out hand: think we must.”

Think we must indeed! The rippling patterns continue augmenting and evolving in the hands of Vinciane Despret, whose article relays and makes resonate again the fight against stupid questions, the humor of the problematic, and the multiplicity of powers, through a challenging and generative dramatization of her own: her research with “people who continue to maintain active and living relationships with their dead.” Taking inspiration from a number of crucial passages of Stengers’ *La Vierge et le Neutrino,* among other works, Despret extends the ripples of Stengers’ philosophy precisely as it is addressed to those who are “in their element”: sociologists, anthropologists and folklorists who refrain from passing quick judgements on those they study, who refrain from reducing the presence of the dead as mere matters of belief or superstition, and instead learn to hesitate with them, to be instructed, “by agreeing to be the connection point, or the crossing of two different orders of reality.”

The social sciences are also the milieu of dramatization in Michael Halewood’s article, where he seeks to “eavesdrop on the ongoing conversation between Stengers and Whitehead” in order to explore and think with some of the aspects of “the problematic status of causation, as something which we may deny in some aspects of our lives and yet require in others.” Tracing the legacy of a scientific rejection of the metaphysics of causation, he argues that scientific versions of causation arise from scientists’ faith in the remorseless regularity of nature. But what good does that do for social scientists, who have equally rejected metaphysical accounts of causation but are interested in the changing character of human groups, societies, and institutions? Drawing on Stengers’ work, Halewood wonders whether much of social science, in its search for change, may have not inadvertently placed their faith in the unchanging nature of its own concepts, thereby encountering difficulties in addressing the situated question of *how* things change. Reaching out to Whitehead’s held out hand, he reclaims the concept of “conformation,” that is, the *ways* in which each present is formed-with its pasts, and wagers that, with it, it might be possible for the social sciences “to develop a sense of faith in the future, balanced by a recognition of the role of causation in the present.”

It is the threatening future that our epoch makes felt that is the focus of Adam Nocek’s article where, by way of an exploration of Stengers’ writings on Gaia and her alliance with a host of non-modern practices, he explores the challenges of staging “the conditions for thinking *par le milieu* today.” Nocek argues that Gaia, as Stengers singularizes her, is a proposition that resituates us in our thinking, and in our relations, towards the Earth: “it is a problem we must learn from and not solve; anything short of this destines us for barbarism.” In so doing, he proposes that this problem of learning raises another generative question: the question of what a non-barbaric response might constitute, which is to say, the question of learning “what civilization could mean today.”

Taking the pattern into her own hands to inhabit new interstices, Melanie Sehgal’s article explores Haraway’s “SF with Stengers” in relation to an unexpected drama– the pasts, presents, and possible futures of what we call ‘aesthetics’. Noting that ‘aesthetics’ does not prominently figure among Stengers’ concerns, Sehgal argues that the history of aesthetics as a discipline formed in the eighteenth century can be understood, speculatively, as the obverse thread that follows from the bifurcation of nature and the invention of modern science. Dramatizing this other dimension of the question of what has happened to us, Sehgal attends to the importance of Félix Guattari’s “new aesthetic paradigm,” where the aesthetic designates neither a theory of sensuous perception nor of the beautiful, but a production of existence that is concerned with one’s capacity to *feel,* to affect and be affected by the world. Relaying Stengers’ “feeling-with the world” anew, Sehgal proposes a coupled gesture: to singularize aesthetic practices while generalizing aesthetic concerns. In so doing, she argues that to generalize aesthetic concerns is to attend to the ways in which “practices make their environment feel and allow themselves to be affected and constituted by it.” She argues that this is simultaneously key to understanding the singularity of Stengers’ philosophical practice, in the SF mode: one “aimed not at representing a world of matters-of-facts, but at writing in view of what this world, a situation, might become capable of.”

This special issue is therefore the result of a collective effort in creative *appreciation.* To play on Whitehead’s metaphor, like a note struck on a running fork in a hall full of differently tuned pianos, each one of the contributions develops intuitions elicited by Stengers’ notes in radically different directions. And perhaps their reciprocal resonances across the hall compose, if not necessarily a harmony, then at least a collective motif, a different atmosphere of feeling, adding new variations to the initial notes. That we can only hope. But just like the ripples are effective of the stone thrown into the pond, the resonances may elicit, in relay and return, a response from the struck note. This is why the collection ends, in two movements, with a conversation between Isabelle Stengers and Martin Savransky on (re)learning the art of paying attention, which explores many aspects of her philosophy, as well as with a postlude by Stengers herself.

What one will not find in this collection, however, are quick, gratuitous judgements– neither disparaging critiques nor happy celebrations. This collection –it may as well be expressed out loud: *dic cur hic*– is made in creative appreciation of a collective *affinity*, an affinity for honoring what makes us think, an affinity for philosophy as a dramatization of thought, an affinity for what that expressive signature that is Stengers’ thought makes matter, an affinity for what thinking together makes possible. But it is not petty sympathy that prevents judgement. Affinity, etymologically, evokes an exchange through borders. Alas, it evokes *com-passion,* which is to say, feeling-with, making kin, feeling and thinking with those who nevertheless remain others in order to discover and invent relevant and novel contrasts and dimensions that are brought to our thinking and understanding by creatively exploring our differences and divergences. How else may one appreciate a philosophy that is never just “pure thought,” but always the dramatic expression of an impure and pragmatic art of creation?

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