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This text is a reworked version of a conversation between Isabelle Stengers and Henk Oosterling, moderated by Sjoerd van Tuinen at De Unie in Rotterdam on May 31st 2012 following a tour to the primary school Bloemhof - the home base of the Rotterdam Skillcity program Physical Integrity - and a Masterclass by Stengers at the Erasmus University Rotterdam earlier that day.

Ecosophical activism - between micropolitics and mesopolitics
A conversation on responsibility between Henk Oosterling and Isabelle Stengers

SvT: You are two contemporary philosophical activists whose work at first glance couldn't be more apart. A philosopher of art and culture, inspired by Hegelian dialectics and its fortunes in French philosophy of difference with a focus on Japanese culture and a philosopher of science inspired by the pragmatism of William James and the speculative metaphysics of Leibniz and Whitehead. Yet to us, meaning first of all Nathanja and I, the organizers of this evening, the necessity of your encounter was entirely obvious. This is primarily because you do share a very deep theoretical inspiration in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, to which you have both given very unique political or practical inflexions. And I am thinking particularly here of the political thought of Guattari whose solo work is still hardly read today. You are both trying to cope with a problem that he diagnosed already many years ago but that has lost nothing of its urgency. And by that I mean the loss of meaningful subjectivity and as a consequence of this, the constant disavowal of our capacity to take responsibility. Not just for our own words and actions but also of our modes of relating to our social and physical environments. And this problem of our subjective inability to take responsibility, I think, is what is at stake in what Guattari has called ecosophy. So this is what we are going to talk about. What is ecosophy and how does it enable us to intervene in our *oikos*, in our lived environments. For Henk, as hopefully will become clear, these questions are related by the concepts of skill or craft, for Isabelle they are related by the notion of practices.

So let me introduce the first proposition: Rotterdam, as you probably all know, has a longstanding tradition in the so called philosophy of difference which goes back mainly to the work of Henk Oosterling. One of the things that Isabelle Stengers teaches us however, is that when it comes to difference, what counts is not so much a passive openness to the other, but rather the ability to actively introduce oneself to the others and this ability to make oneself relevant to the other is precisely the precondition for any civilized encounter.

So in order to give you the opportunity to introduce yourself I will borrow my first proposition from Gilles Deleuze who in *Negotiations* writes: "Mediators are fundamental. Creation is all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people but things too, even plants or animals. If your not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you are lost. You are always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own." So how would you both situate yourself in the groups you are working in as a philosopher, but also in relation to other practices you are concerned with or indebted to?

Politics: scaled mobilisation of groups

IS There are many groups and many scales of groups. Thinking about the milieu starts from the feeling something may grow here without imposing an aim upon it, without mobilizing it. The aim is present, but not in a commanding way, not as defining its means. It is rather an orientation. That is why, when I was younger, the groups I would not be able to work with were the very active, mobilized, politically minded people. Marxists and such. I felt that their aim was crushing what Guattari would call the micropolitics of the group. Only when the surviving political groups were able to hesitate about the means, I became officially a politically minded person. By now, all the groups I am working with are what you could call "experimental" groups, experimenting and learning as you probably have, working with the Bloemhof school. I think it is something which now happen a bit everywhere – how to have people thinking and acting together without a commanding aim, knowing that *how* they do it is as important as *what* they try to achieve. Knowing at each step that this step is important by itself. Not

to rush things, but to know that each step needs taking care of, never instrumentalizing because of the next step. Never forgetting we are on the move, never rushing while on the move in the name of the end. It means looking well at the very interesting developments in any present step. That is probably what everybody learns, who is involved in such complex situations.

HO My collaboration in groups with groups goes way back to the sixties. For decades I was fueled by a certain impatience. Mobilizing groups always had an urgency for me as was the formulation of concrete results. Yet, not in order to realize ideals in the broad sense. More in the sense that I need to have a proper view on the scope and reach of the projects we were developing. I soon came to realize that three years is about the span that I can handle to manage urgency. Even the things I am doing now still have this scope of three years. So for me it has always been necessary to determine a limit, not an ideal, but a limit. And a substantial outcome. A book for instance or a symposium. So when we were reading a philosopher or philosophies, I always projected a book, or a very specific activity that had to be realized. But these were never ultimate projects, in the sense that they had to be rigidly strived for. These were a focus for a collective practice and some, or perhaps even most of them, ended up somewhere else than I planned.

The topic of scale was always involved. I come from a generation that wanted to revolutionize the world as quickly as possible. But, though inspired by all encompassing critical analyses, I was very wary or even recalcitrant towards these big issues. Although I agreed upon these as a persepctive, I couldn't really believe that it was possible, given the tools that I had, to realize those high ideals but on the small scale I was involved.So it was not modesty, but a kind of realistic political instinct. As for me one has to formulate a very concrete material perspective, within the process, not giving in to the seduction of getting rigid in order to reach the end term. I think there is a difference about the plane on which you, Isabelle, are operating – scientific practices - and the one on which I am operating – societal practices - like the Bloemhof school you visited this morning. Part of the deal of that practice is that one works with people in an open societal laboratory.

Consistency and focus: creating interstices

HO Already in the seventies I started in this neighborhood Bloemhof with various projects. I formed a group of teachers that worked with foreign labourers, teaching them Dutch language,developing language method that in the following decades were used in the whole of The Netherlands. I also practiced and taught martial arts in this very neighborhood, while being at the same time active in the environmental movement, developing project on sustainable economy on primary schools. We're talking the early eighties now. That I am still working on these fields, now more than thirty years later, at least is an indication that these were longlasting inspirations. So was something at that time that insisted over the years. Something that kept me focused. All those projects were didactical, pedagogical and focused on education.

IS I am always impressed by the thecapacity of Dutch people to be able to say that words are acts. If a French speaking intellectual said that "words are acts" it would probably mean something quite different, something a bit frightening. Using this word rather than an other is in itself an act, determining your positioning with or against. The idea that acting is a pragmatic matter, that it will mean "realism", having something exist, would clash right away against the suspicion that it is mere "reformism". Words are mainly acting for demonstrating that nothing is really possible, that either something you try will be "recuperated" or it will be destroyed, showing by its very destruction that the attempt was indeed impeccably subversive. Words are not to "foster" what may be possible but to test and judge. This is why your very idea of a project is so very dutch to me – you want something to exist, you do not want to "demonstrate" something. I would say that what I am doing must be understood as a struggle against this French addiction for "either" and "or" – creating breathing spaces, or lines of flight, or tales about "interstitial achievements", against the idea that nothing is possible. But coming here, I meet a very different tradition, where words have other meanings. For instance, when I hear about the Bloemhof project the word 'citizen' has got a meaning I can accept, while in France and Belgium to me citizen is some joke. In the Latin part of Europe we are much more republican. It is not so much important that things are done, but that we keep the right direction – that we do not betray our universal vocation. So, just succeeding to have breathing space in this kind of environment is a job, I think.

Normative citizenship

HO: Yet, in Holland, citizenship has become a vocabulary for policy makers nowadays too. 'Burgerschap', as we call it in Holland, is jargon. A jargon, to rephrase Adorno, that is not completely devoid of inauthentic overtones: citizenship has become a normative category nowadays, very disciplining in the Foucauldian sense.

IS: Yes. But I am also here to learn what happened here, because in the beginning of the nineties Holland was the only place where one could give some meaning to citizenship. To me junkiebonden, at a time when in French drug users were either criminals or sick persons needing help, was very inspiring – a state that admits that citizens complicate its judgements, that knows it needs citizens' expertise.... I tried to import this event to France with words which would shock the French into thinking, because they were only prepared to say "They are betrayers, they accept what cannot ne accepted. They are just pragmatic". Yet to me there was something very interesting: not to theorize on the back of the users, but to produce meaningful experimentation. I saw a bit of what I was doing as producing a French version with words which would work with the French. So I am here to learn, and I think that you are a product of this epoche with your idea of three years in which to realize something – there is a trust in the possible which crushed in the so critical French tradition.

HO: But these three years are mainly proclaime to discipline myself of course.

IS: Yes. But you could say that in three years you may have done something while I think that if you take people surrounding Deleuze or Foucault or other typically French thinkers, they would never believe that they will have done something in three years. It is now or indefinite. So I appreciate this patience for producing reality.

HO: This sense of urgency produces a selfdisciplining practice – not in the normative sense that Foucault criticized in his books, but as a focused grouppractise. It creates agency, if you like. The group decides upon the form how the discipline is installed and whether it is followed or not. It gives us a possibility to check actuality with all its virtual connections. Nowadays we have to discern virtuality from actuality, that is more than potentiality and reality Actualization demands tactics tocreate coherence. But it

has nothing to do with wanting something done or having to reach it within three years. It simply gives you a clear focus and a matrix in which you can cooperate.

Openness as immanent strategy: articulating insistent possibilities

IS: The question is really a matter of opportunity. It always start empirically, with something which I did not create. Since it exists I am committed. Maybe something may start here, maybe not. How can I try? What can I do to feed it? I will never command it, but it interests me. How can I contribute to this movement? Now, one has to realize that it is just a possibility and if it dissolves, one shouldn't cry about it. I am committed to what may be possible, but I am against probability.

HO: Is there a strategic intention in your practice? To you, is there a possibility to think in a strategic way, or aren't you an activist in that sense? Or is strategy just too rigid a concept in your activism?

IS: I think that in the kind of causes I was taken by, to have a strategy would have been too ambitious. It would have meant playing a strategic game which entails some commensurability between what happens and what we can obtain or not obtain. To me it was rather breaking the spell of impotence, learning with others the way of presenting a situation, which makes possibilities insisting. For instance, we achieved a result when I was working on the issue of 'illegal' drugs. We did not succeed in having the law changed, but the kind of action and meeting and text we produced contributed to a kind of turning point. Suddenly the perspective of therapists changed.

SvT: Was it a discursive strategy?

IS: No. It was rather inventing words that may resist the way an interesting situation is liable to be dismembered by other words. You know when I have an idea – and it is not a model, it is just my idea – about something, it is because this idea belongs to the epochI am not a prophet. I am just a sensitive part of my time and I try to articulate the words which give voice to insistent possibilities which I do not create, words that do not

define but empower the situation to compell thinking. But these are not my words, they do not belong to a strategy, they come from what I have learned from the situation.

HO: In the projects that we are doing now, one of the leading ideas is, that we have to change the discourse too in order to open up new perspectives for collective interventions. Not solely polemically or by deconstruction, but while working, explicating what is already part of our mindset without having found yet the proper notions. While working we create another discourse in order for people to be able to reformulate and to reconfigure their ideas and their scopes. We try to develop an other discourse that does not contain new things but reveal new relations and a new coherence. One of the ideas behind Skillcity is: don't invent the new, because everything it is already there. Instead reshuffle things, articulate virtualities that are already there but are not yet actualized. Perhaps this is a pedagogical or educational issue too. You learn people to talk and see relational patterns in a different way, but yet it concerns the same issues. Then suddenly the issues change and the problem is analyzed in a different way.

IS: Yes, what I learned this morning at the Bloemhofschool and what was very interesting to me is that the project Physical Integrity is not some kind of very ambitious model for global education – the kind of projects that we can find everywhere. Instead it adds itself to a normally functioning school, demanding some things and obtaining some attitude to create another space to what can be education. But doing so while adding, not destroying or deconstructing in order to take the place of what was there before. Modifying the whole thing by adding and adapting.

SvT: Is it always affirmative?

IS: Well, to be sure, I think that any affirmation may be taken as an attack by some people. But the point is indeed to make some possibility come alive. This must be an affirmative gesture in the sense of affirming a feeling that it is possible. And if it is then taken as an attack by those who cannot bear the thought that something else is possible, then we must be ready for the conflict. But it is not about selecting a situation because then we have a good conflict.

What I love about the Bloemhof proposition I saw this morning is that indeed, it is not a model school. It is added to the school and it opens new space, new rhythm, new temporality, new possibilities without having to destroy everything to build something ideal and new.

Micropolitics and mesopolitics

SvT: The topic of this conversation is 'Ecosophical activism - between micropolitics and mesopolitics'. Mesopolitics has to do with what is already given, the connections we already have. Something has to happen there, because you can never start from a tabula rasa. Why mesopolitics and not micropolitics?

IS: Physicists learn that there is microphysics (atoms, molecules) and then macrophysics (temperature, things you can measure). But the scale of materials is always meso.

SvT: What is the scale of materials?

IS: Materials are not abstract "matter" like a perfect crystal or a pure gas, which are characterized by well-defined scales. When you have a perfect cristal it can be understood in micro or macro terms. But as soon as you have something which can bend, or any other properties of materials stickiness, fatigue, plasticity, elasticity, limits of elasticity, you cannot understand it in macro or micro terms. Such properties need the introduction of the meso scale, a scale that is not fixed because it is the one which allows you to characterize interstices, defects, faults... and their consequences. The properties of matter may be derived from generalities. At the meso scale you have to follow and narrate.

Micropolitics in a social sense is everywhere. I would imagine that in each moment at the school of the contact between the team and the mothers who are assisting, you have very entangled worlds of micropolitic events on which a lot depends.

HO: And lots of different interests.

IS: Yes, indeed. But it is a fact that a lot depends on what situates you and your team in a distinct way. You cannot command micropolitical tensions but you may know that their consequences will partly depend on the way you deal with them. They may be destructive or they may result in adding to the situation something which is never given, for instance that the mothers become interested in the project as such. Not only as mothers, but as persons relating in their own way to the project. This may open to new kinds of possibilities a bit like a change in the properties of the material. It is not a matter of telling them what is good for them, rather of adding a new ingredient in their preoccupations and their relations with each others.

This is what I would call mesopolitics. This entire population of micropolitics - events, processes - are paid attention to with a pragmatic concern, not a moral one but one for what Deleuze and Guattari call "assemblage" or *agencement*, a practice that produces agency Not with a great political scheme of universal liberation in mind, not with the hope that mothers will become disinterested, sharing the project – this would be an ideal cristal. But with the hope that it may be possible that they are interested in the way you answer the questions they raise, that they feel the project depends on this understanding. This interest creates a meso level making possible new relations between them , producing new degrees of freedom. Meso is about making new possibilities thinkable because the mothers have become interested in the project, or even because they feel that the way they are addressed means that their possible interest is not demanded but taken seriously. Meso is always a creation while the micro is already happening all the time.

HO: Does the microlevel, for instance, involve the desire of the mothers to earn some money? Or the need of the kids to be entertained?

IS: Well, while acting on a mesolevel, the micro is everywhere. The point is not to transcend the micro, but to add new dimensions to it. For instance, say you discover that money will help the involvement of mothers. Then you pay attention to this discovery, but it does not mean that money is the only thing that counts for the mother. It may be just a means that makes things easier. So, the way the money aspect will be thought of is

a matter of care, because it would be a very different thing to say: "Well, if it's important for them, then we'll pay the mothers," Instead, no, you do not *pay* the mother. There is some money involved, but the way it is involved makes it feel that what the mothers are doing is not for money – makes they themselves experience it as important.

HO: So the money thing is on the meso level?

IS: It is a meso level care for micro events, the way they fold together, with which consequences. Let me explain. The neo pagan book by Starhawk[1] is all about the care and the way to try to produce consistence and robustness in the activist process circle and ritual. It gives a whole set of recipes, because it always starts with micropolitical events producing a conflictual divide. Mesopolitics lies in this experience of treating this divide not in terms of micropolitics but as a learning process of the collective itself. As if the dividing options were not to be attributed to individual people but were questions which the situation itself impose on a virtual 'we'. The point will never be individual - or micro - subjectivities as such, but the manner people address each other, never in terms of intentions, rather in terms of questions liable to have everyone hesitating together. Such a "as if " is neither a lie no a truth, it is transformative. It does not oppose the interest of the group to individual subjectivities, it creates an active and open correlation between them.

Territorium and conflicts

HO: If I understand you correctly, only on the meso level subjectivity or angency becomes effective, i.e.on the level on which people act together. All works out on the mesolevel. Efficacy as the outcome of what works, shows itself on the meso level, not on the micro level? To make it more concrete. We have a problem now with this money issue. We give the mothers a volunteering bonus. We don't pay them as such, but when they are there all day we give them a little money. And in a socio-economically deprived neighbourhood - 30% of the Bloemhofpopulation lives below the poverty level - I think it would be perverse not to pay them and just say "No, you are a mother, you have to do it voluntarily." So, for the mothers the money is an issue. However, by now the practice

that we developed is getting institutionalized. . As a result, the money becomes an institutionalized issue as well and there is a group of mothers that is more or less institute their position as the ones that assist in the kitchen. Something interesting is happening. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari: the new opened space is reterritorialized, becoming exclusive again – we not them - and no longer inclusive. How to deal with that? Can you explain that for me in your terms?

IS: I have no answer but that it is not a matter of disappointment but of learning. The art of the meso is about knowing that this may happen, of creating the possibility for it to happen. Eventually, learning about meso is always also learning from points of conflicts or even failures. Those points are where a transmission is possible and we need transmission, we need sharing experiences – as Starhawk does when writing her books. Even in the case of failure experience should be transmitted, telling how you trusted this, tried to do that and this is why, you believe, this has failed. So the meso is where the craft or the art of the assemblage may develop. This craft will never be a theory or science, but an experience, that can be destroyed by idealistic anticipation followed by sad disappointment. We need memory, story telling, stories the telling of which may be part of new assemblages.

A craft of reflexivity: skill reflexivity

IS: One of the things we learned from the practice of witch Starhawk is the importance of taking a situation where decisions are to be made, or micopolitical tensions are active, as a matter of post hoc evaluation. We felt that these two aspects had to be dissociated because the evaluation was about how we had been able to collectively inhabit the situation. So everybody would try, some would complain, tensions would be negotiated along with the process, but we would proceed. But after that would come an other moment, when we would celebrate eventual success in the way we proceeded and discuss failure, trying to learn from both – never accusing others, always thinking the situation as what allowed failures and successes. The aim was not exactly to produce reflexivity. We just created a space where what did happen was examined from a pragmatic, impersonal point of view, knowing that what each of us would learn then

would become part of the micropolitics level, and transform, maybe, the succession of such situations into a learning trajectory.

HO: Why did you say 'not exactly to produce reflexivity'? Perhaps we have to redefine reflexivity.

IS: Exactly.

HO: We are no longer talking about reflexivity in individual terms: "Did *I* learn something about it and how can *I* think about it?" That is not the reflexivity we are talking about, is it? This is about a reflexivity that is materialized in the processes.

IS: Yes, I would say it was a craft of reflexivity. This is mesopolitics, working with the success of the event and not about the people. To do this I needed something which I learned from the US activists. Because 'not working about the people' means that it is never a question of guilt or responsibilty. If somebody did something, it was the whole situation which allowed it or induced it. The fact that some people should change their attitude was never spelled out as such, as if they were responsible. I am very keen on this formula which to me did determine the emergence of my understanding of the mesopolitic level. It is indeed reflexivity, but it is a very impersonal reflexivity.

SvT: Reflexivity as a skill?

IS: Indeed it is a skill. You have to stay at the level where the situation has the power to have you thinking together.

HO: So there is always a device or a skill needed to focus all these different relations and interests?

IS: Yes, you can get in the habit of it, but that always means paying attention. Because the way it will be destroyed will always be the same: by accusations, by asking "Who is responsible?" and all kind of things related to what is felt as "truth" Truth, assignation of guilt and responsibility go together very often. But when you are thinking - with those

who can and wish to do it – to 'what is now going on' - the real question is: what kind of proposition can be created which has a chance to produce and avoid the danger? This is a mesopolitical concern.

HO: Concern? I was thinking about trust.

IS: Concern. To produce trust is a mesopolitical achievement. But the mesopolitic level appears when there is a concern, an always fragile concern relating people. This concern in itself requires some trust, but not in each other, in the situation that connects us, is "between" us – inter-esse, we are interested in and by the situation.

SVT: To be interested?

IS: Yes. And this is why it is the level where you can really learn something. That might be interesting for other experimentation at the mesopolitic level, like asking how have we just escaped this trap, why did we not anticipate this other?

HO: So, mesopolitics is always primarily relational?

IS: Connective yes. And this is what I appreciate in the idea of skill. To me skill is indeed at the microlevel, but it is not really individual. There is no skill if people do not have some trust in their own capacity to participate and bring something to the situation. And producing and maintaining this trust is obtained at the meso-level. Micropolitics as such usually works to create distrust, in oneself or in the others.

Savoir faire: reversion in skilling

IS: A friend of mine writes about what we in French call 'savoir faire', which may be called skill. For her, savoir faire is a transforming experience, both with regard to oneself and to the other. Because what is important is not only that you feel that you can do something, but also that others can recognize your savoir faire and say: "Yes, now you got it." This is already a "meso" moment because this is not addressed to "you" as an individual but to something that matters for those who now will address you in a different way.

To me as a teacher, exams in philosophy can be one of those moments. Because in philosophy also, there is a matter of connecting with ideas, not only of "having ideas". If I feel that a student is making such a connection, irrespective of what I think of the student's idea, part of my job is to say this to her. "This here, you should keep memory of it, feel it is important, because what you feel is the taste of doing philosophy" – meaning that what the student has produced is something else than a mere rhetorical knowing how to produce sentences. And for her, the fact that I tell her this, is part of the event. She maybe already knew it, but she could doubt it too. To tell her: "Here it is beginning. You are beginning to feel what is to be taken by a philosophical question", , if I may tell her that, for me, it is doing my job. I am not judging the quality, I am celebrating the event of some kind of in-between grasp between student and philosophy. And there is some efficacy there. There is a transformation of something the student has probably experienced at an individual level into something which is something no longer individual. Which means a relation of trust – at this moment, with the regards to this event, we are equals.

The most political version of this was lived for some decades in France of the beginning of the 19th century. It was the école mutuelle, a school for the poor. There would be 90 children, all ages and classes mixed for one teacher. The functioning of the "mutual teaching" transformed heterogeneity into a force. The principle that if somebody understood something, she would teach it to somebody who did not understand it yet. Thus Whatever was learned, was learned in two senses: to have learned and to have somebody else learning it from you. And in this duality – in French we would say 'apprendre de quelqu'un' and 'apprendre à quelqu'un' you have the full circle. After you have taught something to somebody else, nobody will be able to deny your savoir faire.

SVT: What happened to this experiment?

IS: Now for two reasons this machine functioned in such a way that the school was closed. First, it was too efficacious. In three years the pupils learned the skills it took six years and a lot of failures to learn in normal schools. It was really about skills, because what you learn is skilling – not rhetorical subjects, no theory. But this was a problem

because schools also exist to keep children from of the street. What to do with children of poor families after three years ? You would not teach them trigonometry or algebra because this was ony for upper class children. But the main thing was that they learned to trust in themselves and the others. This was a problem of a kind, since they were learning skills by learning from each other, but they were not learning to respect the skill in authorative way, as they would have in a master – pupil situation.

I think that a process which not only takes its heterogeneity for granted, but understands this heterogeneity as an active and important aspect of the situation, is politically very robust. Because if you start from an ideal of homogeneity and identity, it will be vulnerable to any difference. Difference will always be percieved as a defect.

HO: Does that mean that on a ontological level, difference is the main issue? It all starts with differences and identity results from their interactions?

IS: Yes. It is really the working condition. It is working through difference.

SvT: Could you respond to the risks that Isabelle identified in this situation? It can be too efficacious, where the school becomes super fluid. You might learn skills not how to respect these skills. How does Skillcity operate?

HO: The skills are always learned in a relational situation. Authority is not an issue, expertise is decisive. Yet expertise implies an asymmetrical situation: a pedagogical and educational situation. So trust – or as Isabelle said: concern - must be its foundation. For me one of the most interesting aspects of the Bloemhofproject is that we aim for the situation where this assymetrical relation can be reversed. The master and the bachelor, the teacher and the pupil, each have certain skills that have to be respected in a relation, which in an institutional sense is hierarchical.
But there are other relations and other skills that can entail a different power structure. For example, nowadays parents and teachers learn from seven year old kids how to use a computer. So can you reverse the situation on another scale. I worked with freerunners, youngsters that jump and climb every object to move through the city as swift and efficient as possible. Their skills are immens. For me the criterion of a non-

hierarchical master-pupil situation is that you open up the situation in order for this hierarchy to be surpassed. That is risky, because when one lacks the trust the situation will be untrustworthy. When one succeeds, the pupil – or student – will gain a completely different experience, like in your example of the philosophy student. The challenge is to give them skills that enables them to become better than you. Competition is an affirmative force in this effort. So at Bloemhof school, the main idea is opening up a diversity of skills in which kids, parents and teachers can connect according to their specific interests and opening up to possibilities to surpass the hierarchical relations.

SVT: So the skills we are talking about are gardening, cooking, sports like judo and philosophy.

HO: But also computer skills, and artistic skills in other trajectories of the curriculum. As for philosophy, for us doing philosophy is, first of all, a device, a tool, a skill. Not a higher plane of interiority, not at all self-reflexive contemplation. Philosophy consists of skills: listening, argumenting, summarizing, making statements in a very precise way. In order to respect the skill, kids are not interrogated upon their interiority and their ideas – what happens inside your head? - but they are asked to step outside of themselves, respect the skill and play the game. Thus philosophy is not about interiority, the inner life. It is not even about exteriority . It is relational.

This goes for the sports as well. We distinguish between different sports. There are group sports like football. But also individual sports like running against the clock, helped by your adversaries. Judo is a relational sport. You can′t do it on your own. That′s why judo is so interesting. It gives you a tactile experience of the other, incredibly direct. The moment you move your body, this is directly communicated with the other′s body. You learn to think with your body. Using or learning this skill gives you an experience of proportion. And of limits. You experience your body through the body of someone else, but at the very same time in this relation you experience where your body meet its limits. The whole trick is to disclose a situation and experience that Francois Julien qualified as ʹthe propensityʹ of bodies. This is neither an interior nor an exterior event. It is a relational event. Some kids are very good at judo. Others hate it, but are very good at

philosophy. Or cooking, gardening, whatever. The moment they master a skill on some level, they learn to respect the fact that the other has skills too. They respect expertise. Skills for us are an in-between, but at the very same time they are something in itself that one can use in a pedagogical and educational way.

Interesse as interstice: the evidence of mesopolitics

SvT: Are skills devices for creating inter-esse?

HO: We distinguish 'drills' from 'skills'. Drills are uncreative repetition. Skilling is creative repetition: it connects in new ways as a result of which a new assemblage is created that was not there before. It stimulates our ability to act in different directions. For us, inter-esse in this specific way designates a concept that summarizes this: the relational as being of the inter. Basically we are dealing here with a relational philosophy. The relational and relating condition should not be metaphisized, in the sense that there exists some in-between (inter-esse) beyond all those material processes. It is a material process. It immanency is interesse. One does not choose to be interested, though one can force oneself not to be interested, to be indifferent. Inter-esse is an affirmative practice in which material devices accumulate connections that are material and therefore cannot be abstracted from the specific practice in which these are produced.

Four years ago, when we started the Bloemhof project Physical Integrity, I was asked by the city council of Rotterdam to explain the ins and outs to them. Municipalities in Holland are a very important layer of government. Once you're in, you're somewhere. The secretary of the Association of Dutch Municipalities, who was present at the meeting, came up to me and asked me to present Skillcity to its members (and these are all influential people in politics). I refused. Why? Because this is not a model that can be extrapolated to another situation without adapting. Their way of thinking is top down: you do it here, take it as a model or blueprint and you can do it everywhere. But we could not take it beyond Bloemhof then. After the experimental phase we now can use its parameters, take them to another situation and refill the parameters with the content of that specific situation. Revaluing the different proportions. Perhaps, certain

parameter are more important in another neighbourhood than in Bloemhof; others have been fulfilled already so you don't have to work on it. In that sense interesse is always material.

The project is not a laboratory. It is an open life space. Nevertheless you need to produce evidence based research. At least to raise money. Having monitored the project has worked out fine in that sense, because now we got the money. But from totally unexpected financers. You also have to redefine the idea of evidence based practice. Evidence is always connected in a material sense to those practices. You can't objectify it, let alone universalize the so-called factsAnd take its conclusions to another neighbourhood. As long as we are aware of this - and this is what you talked about when you dealt with the laboratory in a scientific sense – we understand what a device is: an accumulator of specific relational tensions within a specific situation. . It is all about practice beased evidence. Once you take it out of the situation or you forget how it came about, how it was developed, it falsely becomes a general law and as such objective evidence that you can extrapolate.

IS: This question of evaluation is an important stake for me. A mesopolitical stake, to use the term. Many radical groups I know in Belgium would refuse evaluation because it would mean recuperation, incorporation. I can understand this and from time to time you have to refuse. But to refuse out of principle is very dangerous. It has very strong effects. Your environment becomes the enemy. The micropolitcs of paranoia takes over. I learned that certain kinds of tensions mobilize groups in defining the environment as its enemy. This is why I proposed the term 'interstice' - it comes from Whitehead - an interstice in a block. That is where mesopolitics comes from. The property of the material depends upon the interstices which inhabits it.

HO: So it's a physical term for you, interstices?

IS: It means that what the block is able of depends on something which is itself not a block. Yet it is neither alien nor an enemy of the block. What is at stake is the relation. Here I leave physics because it is a good point of departure. You leave it when you move

over from the question of the property to the question of pragmatic concern. The pragmatic concern would be the relation between the block and the interstices. That is where you go out of physics. You take interstice as a political stake. The concern is the relation between the block and the interstices: what I would call a 'culture of the interstices'.

This is what to me the Dutch drug policy was good at. Meaning that the administration was ready to allow something that was against the rules. Okay, drugs are prohibited at international level. So you cannot sell it, but you can buy it.

HO: Coffeeshops as interstice?

IS: Yes. But for French people this meant: the State is telling something incoherent! Citizens will go crazy! But it were the interstices where new possibilities of pragmatics culture arose. Here the problem of evaluation is central, because within this pragmatics things have to be negotiated.

HO: As for the drugs policy, a lot has changed in Holland since those days. For the worse I think, while at the same time by now globally the idea that 'the war on drugs' has been lost, has been aknowledged by almost all parties except the warleader: the USA. But let us transfer this thought to science. Collecting evidence then is a form of negotiating too. We believe that monitoring the project is far more important for raising the level of reflectivity of the participants than to prove we are right. The reason why we monitor is that in the process of monitoring, reflectivity and concepts are ploughed back into the process. Monitoring is feedback that makes the process reflexive and cyclical. You have to think things over. You have to talk about it. You have to communicate and in communicating reflectively you participate. The result is not the issue, yet you can raise money with it. The idea is that monitoring is part of a conceptuality that is inherent to the practice. A cyclical form of reflective management which is *in* the process, not the result of the process.

IS: Yes, but I think this is very important to people who are working everywhere. New management nowadays rules at the universities. The way it is excerted now, kills

everything. So the point of 'cultural interstices' would be that evaluation is indeed a way of monitoring and as such an object of pragmatic negotiation. What is to be evaluated lies between the interstices where things are done and the block that is responsible for the monitoring. Some kinds of evaluation are destroying interstices, some others may be more relevant. If there is a plurality – not one so-called objective way but a pragmatic plurality of possibilities to evaluate – then the way we wish to be evaluated is the first step of reflexivity. It is not an easy matter, it is much easier to denounce evaluation. But evaluation creates a situation which is more interesting because we have to pruce a new kind of consistent togetherness which transfoms us.

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[1] Starhawk is a US activist neo-pagan witch. Her last book is *Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Colloraborative Groups*, New Society Publishers, 2012.

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