

Abstract

Shuffling times is an ill-considered practice inside academia (and perhaps elsewhere too). Manipulating the past for present purposes, reading the future from days gone by, is considered lax at best and devious at worst. Agreed: shuffling times is risky business. Too often, the so-called “learning from the past” becomes synonymous with accepting both present and future. What has been shall be. What is now, was actually meant to be. Determinism and fatalism are risks that should not be handled carelessly. Yet, shuffling times is what we need to do.

Shuffling Times

VALÉRIE PIHET

Valérie Pihet co-founded and directed with Bruno Latour the Programme of Experimentation in Arts and Politics (SPEAP) at Sciences Po, Paris (2010–2014). Since 2002, Pihet has collaborated with Latour on a number of other projects: she was in charge of coordinating the exhibitions and research projects *Iconoclasb* (ZKM, 2002), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (ZKM, 2005), and created and developed the Sciences Po médialab. She has also worked with numerous artists (including Pierre Huyghe and Armin Linke) as well as with researchers. She is the President of Dingdingdong—Institute of Coproduction of Knowledge on Huntington’s Disease, co-founded with Emilie Hermant in 2012.

BENEDIKTE ZITOUNI

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Prelude: an invitation addressed to Benedikte Zitouni

My name is Valérie Pihet and I am a historian by training. When PARSE decided to organise an international conference on and about the subject of time, I suggested inviting Benedikte Zitouni, because in our respective practices we are both interested in the question of research, its footprint and spread, and more particularly its repositioning, necessary in a society in deep crisis and disorder. Benedikte Zitouni is a Lecturer at Saint-Louis University Brussels, teaching courses and seminars in sociology.

We are also interested in possible links between the different time frames enabling experimentation with different spaces of intervention. Above all we wish to make sure we take part in our situations. Using the terms and approach I developed with a colleague, Céline Bodart, switching from one place to another wherever the research is being carried out, in contact with what is both familiar or unfamiliar to us, each of us is concerned with questioning our own practice as well as learning to subscribe to the practice of the other.

1. Shuffling Times

Benedikte Zitouni

Introduction

Shuffling times means lifting the constraints of clear limits between past, present and future. It means crafting present times by mixing those pasts, presents and futures. It means handling times with eyes riveted on present purposes and possibilities. It means letting a plural and potential “now” take over and substitute itself to the linear and irreversible past-present-future thinking and story-telling we’re

used to. That, in fact, is also the premise or starting point common of the leads I’m about to present: the notion that linear and irreversible past-present-future thinking, storytelling, is to be avoided at all costs.

Linear past-present-futures are problematic for they lock up present potential in deterministic and fatalist patterning. Even the so-called “learning from the past”, which is a common practice in academia and which might look like it shuffles times and has its eyes riveted on present purposes, too often becomes synonymous with accepting both present and future. What has been shall be. What is now, was actually meant to be. In other words, shuffling times is *not* just about bringing past and future in contact with present times—which I think is even a default position in academia—but it means lifting the limits and the linearity inherent to our usual ways of thinking about time.

I’ll describe three leads. The first lead is called “brewing times” and is based on those same terms used by Bruno Latour and Michel Serres and is illustrated with a tiny and tentative example of Leopold II or Belgian colonial memory-making. The second one is called “monumental times” and is based on writings by Michel Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche, which I’ll shortly illustrate by evoking tales of revolts. The third one is called “thick present”, drawing on the work of Donna Haraway and Deborah Bird Rose, and will be the starting point of the discussion as Valérie and I relate “thick presents” to the ways in which both of us have become fascinated with archives.

Lead 1: Brewed Times

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, the re-conception of time and temporality plays an important role. Not because of some debate on the critical prefixes added to modernism (pre-, post-, anti-, non-, a-modernism) but because Bruno Latour felt he had to adopt new temporalities in order to host and make space

for the material objects, technologies and networks he cares for.

Let me rehearse the argument.¹ The Non-Moderns—such as we are, unknowingly perhaps were, and should learn to become again—are those who can simultaneously consider, on the one hand, the Modern Constitution, i.e. the set of claims that separate non-human nature and human society, pure categories and hybrid entities, religion and metaphysics, i.e. our rational and usual beliefs, while on the other hand considering the multiplication of hybrids, natural-social mixes, that are actually there but that we deny any degree of real existence and agency *because* we believe in our Constitution. If we are yet again to become Non-Moderns, we need to leave aside that constitution—incidentally, post- and anti-modernists fail to do so as they continue to address the constitution, either in disillusioned or critical ways—and we need to open up space and welcome the hybrids into our living, thinking and storytelling.

Latour calls that space the Middle Kingdom. He calls its people, following Michel Serres, quasi-objects. Neither entirely objects nor entirely subjects, quasi-objects are active agents of mediation and networking. They are the ones that Latour cares for. In the first place, he's given them a kingdom. He then gives them an ontology or way of life: hybridity is the name of the game, in which the tags "object" and "subject" are but ephemeral passing points. Last but not least, he gives them a temporality. For if you consider these quasi-objects and compose with them, you'll have to admit that they have their own histories, their own time-making, their own temporality.

Quasi-objects, if taken seriously, do not fit into the strict ordering of humanist living for whom the past is gone, the present is transient and the future's not yet there. Instead, quasi-objects gather and brew epochs. They span and multiply time-lapses.

To put it differently, any facet of our existence, if looked at through the lens of the quasi-objects, necessarily mixes several pasts, presents and futures and cannot be categorised into the "gone", "transient" or "not yet there". I quote Latour:

I may use an electric drill, but I also use a hammer. The former is thirty-five years old, the latter hundreds of thousands. Will you see me as a DIY expert "of contrasts" because I mix up gestures from different times? Would I be an ethnographic curiosity? On the contrary: show me an activity that is homogeneous from the point of view of the modern time. Some of my genes are 500 million years old, others 3 million, others 100,000 years, and my habits range in age from a few days to several thousands of years. As Péguy's Clio said, and as Michel Serres repeats, we are exchangers and brewers of time (Serres and Latour 1992). It is this exchange that defines us, not the calendar of the flow that the moderns had constructed for us.²

From the point of view of *modern* times, any situation is unorthodox. The quasi-objects exceed the fixed boundaries of past-present-future. Not only do they differ in age, they are gestures from different times, i.e. they also involve their own particular time spans of usage and rhythms. They are better accounted

1. The argument is based on the following parts of Bruno Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern*. La Découverte / Poche, new edition in 1997: end of Chapter 2, p. 70; Chapter 3, particularly p. 95 and pp. 101-108.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

3. Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1998. p. 295.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

5. See the following link: <http://www.7sur7.be/7s7/fr/1502/Belgique/article/detail/410285/2008/09/09/La-statue-de-Leopold-II-voit-rouge.dhtml> (Accessed November 2015.)

6. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

7. Foucault, Michel. *Dits et écrits*. Paris: Gallimard. 1979. No. 269 "Vivre autrement le temps", No. 270 "Inutile de se soulever".

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 793-794.

for, not by a linear time frame but by a spiralling one. Each new cycle expands experiences. It takes up and leaves aside some ingredients of the other cycles. Lost ingredients can at any time be taken up again. Selected ones can at any time fall into oblivion. In other words, as Latour stated very clearly, we must stop thinking that time makes the triage. Rather, the triage makes time. Or, we make the triage and thereby define our times.

The question remains: why should we want to change our times? For one, because spiralling time allows us to involve ourselves, with our own material temporalities (such as genes and ideas and others) into and with the quasi-objects' own temporalities, heading for potentially more interesting hybrid assemblages. But also, more simply perhaps, call it my conviction or my commitment, because the past is with us. It is present. It is not gone. It is there, but perhaps in another key or in another mode of existence.



By way of illustration, I want to present a short and tentative take on Belgian postcolonial memory-making. This picture was taken in a park that looks over Brussels, triumphantly, in an alley that points to the Palace of Justice and the Royal Palace. The man hidden by roses—I think anyone in Brussels, in Belgium, would recognise him—is Leopold II, the King who has “given us” Congo and who is known for the terror of his reign. Yet there is denial. For some, for many, Leopold II is an exemplary King. And I wonder: what if we brewed times? What if unveiling the deeds is simply not enough? What if we lifted the clear limits between past, present and future and resuscitated Leopold II? Bringing him here, which in fact, he is. The lives of the dead are reaching into the very fabric of our city. It is something I’ve become convinced of. The lives of the dead are reaching. They are there, in the material fabric. So then, if we’d write a brewing or spiralling tale, what could we, would we, write? I gave it a try:

*The shadows of the Empire and its blood
rubber King still haunt us today.*

*“Now sometimes in my sleep I think I am the
poor devil and half a hundred black fiends are
dancing about me. I wake up with a great
start and I find myself covered in a cold sweat.”
(letter from a manager of a rubber-collecting
post in the Kasai region, 1896-1901)³*

*“Often they find, in the folds of his pocket/
With gold rings and crumpled satin/ Two
children’s feet cruelly cut off.” (poem written
during World War I, about Germans
mutilating Belgian babies as if to revenge
what had happened in Congo some years
before)⁴*

*“We’re pouring red and blood paint on the King’s statue today in the name of the millions of victims of the colonial policy run by this imperialist, racist and stupid despot. The nice business-as-usual perpetuation of his memory is no longer.” (activists 2008)*⁵

Beard ringed with roses. Beard spattered with paint. A manager’s cold sweat. A rumour about cut off feet, echoing a fact about cut off hands... It is my impression that remembrance and memory-making could use some past-future-present spiralling rather than linear and single-arrowed time-tracing. It is a way to make the haunting present, physically, materially, discursively, affectively. As Latour writes:

*Real as Nature, narrated as Discourse, collective as Society, existential as being: such are the quasi-objects that the moderns have caused to proliferate. As such it behoves us to pursue them, while we simply become once more what we never have ceased to be: amoderns [non modernes].*⁶

Lead 2: Monumental times

According to Michel Foucault, any account he writes must be eventful. Singular and out-of-the-ordinary deeds should not be turned into mere components of the passage of time. Singular and out-of-the-ordinary deeds should not become mere episodes in the evolution of mankind. Singular and out-of-the-ordinary deeds should not be turned into a proof of futility as they are set against the walls of society’s structural forces. Foucault states this clearly in two articles written for the main press, in May 1979. One on the subject of time; the other on the subject of uprisings [*soulèvement*].⁷

Foucault states that one of the most powerful actions for a philosopher, for anyone actually, is to break the thread and course of time; to make one available for the events of time; to vibrate for and at each one of these events, be they close by or far off, huge or small. The radical deed is to pay attention to all that

which escapes the weight of structural history: the breaking, the ripping, the interrupting of times by events that, in religious terms, would be likened to a collective state of grace and which, in political terms, can simply be called uprisings. Foucault defends uprisings against the notion that the passage of time will only be interrupted, profoundly shaken and structurally changed, by an overall revolution. All or nothing. In order *not* to minimise singular and out-of-the ordinary deeds, Foucault then does away with the notion of revolution and focuses on uprisings instead. Uprisings are of all kinds, he says. They can surge from an entire people or they can be limited to a single cry of protest. They can happen everywhere and well outside the usual confines of the so-called political arena. They are the deeds that interrupt “business as usual”. We must respect them, i.e. not trivialise them, for they make history:

*I don’t agree with those who say: “It’s useless to revolt for it will always be the same.” One doesn’t wave a finger at those who risk their lives against authority and power. Should one revolt or not? Let’s leave that question open. One revolts, that is a fact; and through that revolt subjectivity (not of great men but of anyone) introduces itself into history and gives it its breath. A delinquent risks his life opposing abusive sanctions; a madman no longer accepts to be locked up; a people refuses an oppressive regime. That doesn’t clear the delinquent’s name; nor does it cure the madman; nor does it insure a better world for the people. I do not mean to say we have to agree with them and join them. Nor do we have to find their voices superior to all others. It suffices for them to exist and to stubbornly resist all silencing, for us to pay attention, for us to try and understand what they’re saying. Is this a moral question? Perhaps. A reality question, certainly. All the disenchantments of the world won’t change this: these voices turn human times into something else than an evolution; they turn them into “history”.*⁸

Reading Foucault on his commitment to unyielding voices, brings to mind Friedrich Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*. For instance, when Nietzsche writes:

*And if you want biographies, do not desire those which bear the legend "Herr So-and-So and his age", but those upon whose title-page there would stand "a fighter against his age".*⁹

Or:

*[History] puts itself in the pillory by exalting precisely these men as the real historical natures who bothered little with the "thus it is" so as to follow "thus it shall be".*¹⁰

Or:

*[about so-called "failures" of the few:] That the many are alive and those few live no longer is nothing but a brute truth, that is to say an incorrigible stupidity, a blunt "thus it is" in opposition to morality's "it ought not to be thus". Yes, in opposition to morality! [...] In every case it becomes a virtue through rising against that blind power of the factual and tyranny of the actual.*¹¹

For Nietzsche, historical writings can take many forms, one of which is the monumental. Monumental history-writing is geared towards action. It turns improbable episodes of the past into monuments, into greatness, into sheer eventfulness, in order to shore up the present. Echoing links are established between the actions, the deeds, the improbable facts of past, present and future. But this only makes sense, Nietzsche hastens to add, if history is mobilised for action. "Greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again".¹² In other words, we're betting on repetition. We're writing echoing times.

Other types of history-writing imply other conditions: what Nietzsche calls "antiquarian"

history implies reverence, the love of details past; what he calls "critical" history implies there being a sense of burden, the need to free oneself from the yoke of the present. These other types of histories absolutely make sense and they are valuable as long as we acknowledge the need, the desire, they address. To put it concisely, knowledge, writing, never goes without passion. The monumental history-writing's passion is that of action and that which Nietzsche seems to favour the most, that which Foucault seems to have taken over in order to claim the importance of uprisings.

By way of illustration, I'd like to evoke the power of archival books, i.e. books which bring to us, make present, here and now, material traces of so-called "past" struggles. It seems to me these books are powerful because they do not analyse, categorise and label the struggles, but, as Foucault observes, they try and understand what these struggles are saying. In other words, these books present enigmas, matter for thinking, deeds for echoing and reinventing over and over again greatness or defiance. Books such as Philippe Artières' *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons. Archives d'une lutte 1970-1972*.¹³ This book tells the story of the prisoners and their allies who put forth existential and political claims at the beginning of the 1970s. In it you will find pamphlets, letters, claims, public announcements, testimonies and questionnaires set up by the alliance from within and without the prison walls. If there is any analysis, it is by way of recounting, storytelling and description.

Another book: Darrel Enck-Wanzer's *The Young Lords: A Reader*.¹⁴ The Young Lords are a Latino group inspired by the Black Panthers who set up community building in Chicago, New York and other cities of the US. By way of introduction, the editor describes what he feels to be the sense of importance carried by the Young Lords, and two Young Lord activists reflect upon their past experience in the 1970s. Then come the traces: articles of the Young Lords' journals, posters, interviews, pamphlets, claims. All written in the present tense.

The third book dates from the 1980s and will soon be translated and published by Cambourakis Editions in France: Alice Cook and Gwyn Kirk's *Greenham Women Everywhere: Dreams, Ideas and Actions from the Women's Peace Movement*.¹⁵

Greenham Common is the name of a decennia-long occupation of a military base in England, by women protesting against nuclear, capitalist and other destructive ways. The book assembles fragments taken from the peace encampment's logbooks. It was literally written on the camp site, during the protest. All these books are hard to trivialise. When you leaf through them, you cannot but wonder: who is to say what time these words and experiences belong to? Why wouldn't they be part of our present?

Lead 3: Thick present

I define the "thick present" following Donna Haraway. Haraway borrows that definition from Deborah Bird Rose who borrows it from the Yarralin, a people living in North Australia.¹⁶ According to them, according to her, the present unfolds along the marrow of the events people tell one another; it unfolds along the plots and stories one still recalls with a minimum of detail; it involves events of which the actors and agents still bear a name; it gathers up episodes that are still connected and embodied by the situations and concrete spaces we inhabit, here and now. So the present can be poor or rich, bare or flourishing, deserted or crowded, depending on the stories we tell. In any case, such a present must continuously be maintained by retaking these stories and relaying the experiences. Not any story, not any experience,

but those we tell, those that make us wonder, very often because they defy the general tendencies of "business as usual". Without continuous re-enactment of these stories and experience, no thickness nor flourishing can prevail. According to the Yarralin, Deborah Bird Rose, Donna Haraway, a present without stories becomes an evanescent present, one that gives nothing to hold onto nor care for. A bare present offers no resistance.

Or, stated inversely, everything we've come to care for through the stories we tell belongs to the thick present. The stories of devices, agencies and assemblages, which are carried forth and embodied by the very situation we live in, define the thick present. Every cell of our bodies, as Haraway would have it, any ingredient of our daily lives and deaths and their infinite ramifications into calendar pasts, presents and futures, are part of the thick present. And they will be part of it for as long as their stories are told. Thus, the point of entry and of exit, into and out of the thick present, is not a matter of years but rather one of dramatic storytelling. How to make things present, how to trigger in and through the storytelling, is the key question for those storytellers who want to thicken our present and multiply its possibilities and potentialities.

2. How Dingdong shuffle(s) times

Valérie Pihet

The lines of thinking about time brewing, suggested by Benedikte Zitouni, as lures for thinking/narrating,

9. Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life". In *Untimely Meditation*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. 1997. p. 95.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

13. Artières, Philippe (ed.). *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons. Archives d'une lutte 1970-1972*. Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe: IMEC—Institut de Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine. 2003.

14. Enck-Wanzer, Darrel (ed.). *The Young Lords: A Reader*. New York, NY: New York University Press. 2010.

15. Cook, Alice and Kirk, Gwyn (eds.). *Greenham Women Everywhere: Dreams, Ideas and Actions from the Women's Peace Movement*. London: Pluto Press. 1983.

16. Bird Rose, Deborah. *Dingo Makes us Human. Life and Land in an Aboriginal Australian Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992; *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonization*. Kensington: University of New South Wales Press. 2004; *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction*. University of Virginia Press. 2011. For Donna Haraway's use of Deborah Bird Rose's work, see, for instance: Haraway, Donna. *Staying in Trouble: Becoming—with the Creatures of Empire*. San Francisco: CCA – California College of the Arts. 2009. 20 October <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F0XdXfVDXw> (Accessed 2016-07-29).

lead me to share with you the story of a collective that I co-founded with Alice Rivières and about fifteen other people.¹⁷ This is the Collectif Dingdingdong, otherwise known as the Institut de coproduction de savoir sur la maladie de Huntington (Institute of Coproduction of Knowledge about Huntington's disease).

I knew Alice even before she took a test indicating she had a so-called neuro-degenerative disease, Huntington's. The doctors informed her straight away that it was going to be terrible, then swiftly turned to the two close friends with her to let them know that things would be truly dreadful for them as well. This announcement made Alice very angry, not because, contrary to what one might think, she had been told she would develop Huntington's disease, but because the doctors on that day assigned to her a pre-determined, even hopeless, future.

Huntington's, in its starkest medical definition, is a rare, incurable genetic disease, causing cognitive, motor and psychiatric degeneration, gradually bringing on progressive loss of autonomy and death. Since 1993, when the genetic anomaly in question was identified, a test has existed enabling people with one parent affected to find out whether they too are carriers of this disease. Technically, nothing could be simpler: all it requires is a blood test to see whether you carry the bad gene. Yet ethically, psychologically, existentially, nothing could be more complicated. The genetic specificity of the disease is such that if you carry the gene you are certain to develop Huntington's one day, though neither when (between the ages of 35 and 55 according to the statistics), nor how, can be predicted since its expression is very different and variable. The "neither when nor how" is the essence of the problem. Huntington's is a disease whose progression is not straightforward. Today we are starting to describe it as a neuro-evolutive rather than a neuro-degenerative disease, which is more accurate. After all, life itself is to a certain extent neuro-degenerative. But that said, the one thing we cannot predict with any certainty

at all is how the person will experience their disease, nor how they will be able to cope with it.

Here we have a situation where you are informed of a looming disaster, although nothing much more can be said or done about it. But where is the sense in seeing a person's catastrophic future and letting them know in this way? We often think that looking ahead means imagining a probable future, but this can lead to using words, pronouncements, even actions whose effects may be dangerous, such as envisaging and transmitting the idea of the worst that could possibly happen when telling someone they have a disease such as Huntington's. The news then takes on the form of a terrifying prediction, immediately slamming the door on all "possibles" and propelling you into a terrifying enigma, far beyond the routine medical consultation which triggered the whole thing. I believe, as Benedikte Zitouni so rightly emphasises, that this has to do with our linear way of envisaging time which determines and encloses present time. Linear time literally immobilises us, preventing us from seeking out the "possibles" necessarily contained in a situation. To revert to Deleuze, based on the work of Katrin Solhdju, a problem without a solution is a badly formulated problem. There is always something to be done when the problem is that of life.¹⁸

Alice wrote a text very soon after taking the test, in a moment of rage, but at the time she had not yet discovered how to channel it. This became the Manifesto of Dingdingdong.¹⁹ Alice's expression of anger is an act of resistance against viewing the disease simply as a disaster-in-waiting, turning it instead into an invitation to reflect, or rather to "develop thought" so as to build a world in which as of now the sick and their entourage can live. The day we decided to set up Dingdingdong, we boldly assumed that behind Alice's story was something much larger, a challenge of a political nature. So we decided to get involved in the issue of knowledge established on the back of these experiences, to force a slowdown when medical definitions move too fast,

are too crude, or flatten the mystery of the enigmas of “what is already known”. We understand that medicine is already caught up in its own time frame and in the constraints tied to its own practices, but in so doing it runs the risk of reducing the experience of the people affected, which might take years to unfold, Huntington’s being all familial, so much so that we can learn nothing more from it. This creates a sometimes enormous gap between a medical definition and the experience thereof, which is violent for the people concerned, as well as for the doctors, and all too often leads to disastrous situations.

We started from the principle that the universe we are calling Huntingtonian or Huntingtonland was as mysterious as an unknown planet and that we needed to set off to explore it, to transform our puzzlement into true enigmas, that is to say into questions giving rise to many hypotheses none of which could claim dominance, and which commit us to invent possible ways of coping with Huntington’s. No question of replacing the medical definition with a more subjective one, but rather of enabling several versions of Huntington’s to coexist. Our mission is to nurture the multiple experiences of the disease, both from the space of those people affected (patients, carriers, entourage), as well as from that of the professionals, and in so doing to construct an as yet unrecognised form of knowledge, which our interlocutors, particularly the doctors, could make alliances with. For patients (users in the broadest sense), all too often their experience is associated with their day-to-day existence, generally considered the province of the psy-

chologists. This daily existence throws the patients back upon their emotions and feelings. It is as if on the one hand patients are reduced to their emotional experiences, and on the other, the professionals to their scientific knowledge.

At Dingdingdong, we are working on the idea of experiential knowledge. We are not the only ones using this term, but we place it in a very specific take on experience, that used by the pragmatist philosophers. They believe that an experience cannot be reduced to the mere fact of being affected or of feeling something. An experience is complete only when the fact of being affected commits us to a resulting action—of whatever kind—such as to transform the very conditions of the experience. This being so, discussing experiential knowledge means taking very seriously everything the users do every day to tame the disease. It means that they do not merely feel or have things done to them but that they employ strategies, gestures, attitudes enabling them to live with the disease and that this is true knowledge. Our task is precisely to find a way of encountering this knowledge, which, since it is still invisible, cannot be used; to collect this knowledge and enable it to be shared so that it can truly change the ways we describe the disease and therefore experience it. This is an extremely painstaking task since for the experience to truly engage with all those concerned, each word, each action, each thing, each way of doing things has its own importance. This fragile ensemble must constantly be readjusted because if only one element shifts this is enough to alter the whole course of the experience. In Dingdingdong, what we are interested

17. See Debaise, Dider. *L'appât des possibles. Reprise de Whitehead*. Paris: Les presses du réel. 2015.

18. Solhdju, Katrin. *L'épreuve du savoir. Propositions pour une écologie du diagnostic*. Paris: Editions Dingdongdong. Paris. 2015

19. Manifesto of Dingdingdong, preceded by “De la chorée” by Georges Huntington. Trans. Vincent Bergerat. Paris: Editions Dingdingdong. 2013.

in doing is putting together and nurturing the right environment in the ecological and ecosystemic, even cosmogonic sense of the term, to follow Vinciane Despret, a founding member of Dingdingdong.²⁰ This is a “milieu” that will allow the experience to fully unfold and extend in other possibles even outside Huntington’s and, most importantly, to be capable of adjustment.

Therefore, rather than considering that the catastrophe lies somewhere in the future, we at Dingdingdong prefer to consider that disaster is already here and we have to act from within it. It is already with us and already the players are taking action by using a great deal of *savoir-faire* in their daily lives. This is the take proposed by Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers and others as concerns the present ecological crisis. Huntington’s becomes an interesting situation in which to learn to reflect upon the catastrophe from within. Dingdingdong is the sound of alarm bells ringing, urging people to gather together but above all sounding a note of warning, announcing time out, a break from “business as usual”, in the words of Zitouni, following Foucault and Nietzsche.

Today, faced with strong feelings of powerlessness and widespread discouragement, the hardest, most complicated political task is to avoid being overwhelmed by the irreversible flow of time, by the “that’s just the way it is, hard luck” attitude, in the words of Thierry Drumm, who is interested in William James’s pragmatist philosophy.²¹ When Dingdingdong was being set up, I got my students to read the book of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, which calls on us to fundamentally rethink what it means to be political, to give back its meaning to this adjective all too quickly attached to all kinds of activity. Dewey proposes reviewing the place and role of the political through a new reading of “public” in its double meaning where, for him, there is no omnipotent public supposed to have an enlightened opinion on everything on the one hand,

and on the other, where the category public/private does not correspond to the usual distinction of public good versus individual good. For him politics is not only a sphere, a profession, an occupation, it is above all a certain type of concern about “causes”, “problems”, each of which requires a particular form of public.²² The public in the singular does not exist, in the sense of a sovereign people represented by its elected officials, and embodied by the State. On the contrary, a public must be made to emerge for each “cause” or “problem”. So therefore there is not one single, but multiple, publics concerned by specific problems and transformed by them appearing and disappearing, depending on their state of resolution. The publics must be made and unmade, reinvented each time. If indeed there is a “crisis of the Public” then it is in Dewey’s sense, the spontaneous emergence of publics. As Joëlle Zask, in her preface to the translation of Dewey’s book, reminds us, he always worked as “a philosopher, teacher and militant to rebuild an effective public more fundamentally concerned with defining its own interests and making them political rather than controlling those who govern us.”²³

Seen from this angle it appears possible, even essential, to think and create a setting to allow the emergence of publics capable of acting, proposing, objecting, enabling a problem to come into being. Getting a problem right goes hand in hand with the prospect of solving it as well as with the emergence of a public. These three dimensions must interact, constituting the enquiry, still in Dewey’s sense. This requires time, a setting and tools to find ways and means of going about it. A public is never given. Anger, such as that felt by Alice after her experience of the test protocol, if you are willing to transform it, can be a very good driver for seeking a possible public. This is what we decided to do. Alice was no longer alone, nor was I, we were two, and we needed to set up a team. We therefore went to seek out people with whom we wished to work to invent ways of dealing with Huntington’s. In so doing we were assuming that practical specialists would be interested, from their position,

in the problem we then formulated. We also assumed that you didn't necessarily need to be affected by Huntington's to be interested. Being concerned means being put to work by the way the problem, as posed, also questions the practice in which we are engaged, whether or not as professionals. We set up a multidisciplinary Franco-Belgian team consisting of researchers in human sciences (philosophy, history of sciences, psychology), artists (dance and choreography, literature, the plastic arts, videos and video games) and one specialist physician (neurology). We still needed to discover how we wanted to work. We decided to create an association under the 1901 French law, but several people in the collective, including Fabrizio Terranova and Sophie Toporkoff, immediately pushed us to go further and to dream up an institute of co-production of knowledge even before we could make it a reality. They were right because the fact of dreaming it up helped make it become real.

Pragmatist thinking is the foundation of Dingdingdong and this is why we devoted a whole department to it. It would be absurd to hope to sum up in a few lines the multiple contributions of this approach, especially since we have not finished exploring it. But we can say that it is especially important to us because it forces us, through William James and John Dewey, to think and create bearing in mind the effects we wish to bring about in real life or in a situation in which we are of necessity stakeholders, rather than merely along the lines of what our practices alone would commit us to doing. We borrow from James a very powerful expression which gave him the title of one of his books, *The Will to Believe*.²⁴ According

to him a fact can only occur, and thus become true, if preceded by a deeply held belief in it before its arrival. Further, he believes that it is extremely important to cultivate this belief, in other words this confidence, to nurture it, to maintain it, since it is a contributory factor to the transformation into the real which we desire to bring about. As we have already seen, Dingdingdong arose from the faith we had in its success, which for us meant that we had begun to noticeably change the situation in France through our work. Our work in Dingdongdong helped us build confidence, and especially the confidence to "allow ourselves" to speak out, to be heard, to act and also to equip ourselves for this, starting with proposing a multiplicity of possible versions of the disease. When we start work, we always begin by thinking what transformation, what difference it is we wish to bring about and then we try to make use of the means we believe are relevant for this to happen. Obviously this approach goes hand-in-hand with the risk of making mistakes and of missing our target. This is par for the course for any form of experimentation, and particularly when the purpose of the experiment is to bring about true change.

The Department of Speculative Narration starts from exactly the same basis and aims at experimenting with the effects and power of storytelling, seen not as an escape into the imaginary, but as opting for possibles versus probables, to use the terms of the philosopher Isabelle Stengers, who is also the godmother of Dingdingdong. The term comes from Donna Haraway but is tweaked by a large number of members of our collective. Fabrizio Terranova went so far

20. Despret, Vinciane. *Au bonheur des morts*. Paris: La Découverte. 2015.

21. Intervention in the Seminar "Pratiques de soin et collectifs", 31 March 2015, Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris.

22. Dewey, John. *The Public and Its Problems*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. 1927.

23. Dewey, John. *Le public et ses problèmes* (1927). Trans. Joëlle Zask. Paris: Galilée. 2003. p. 17.

24. James, William. "The Will to Believe". *The New World*. Vol. 5. 1896. pp. 327-347.

as to create a Masters in Speculative Narration in the *École de Recherche Graphique de Bruxelles*.

This methodology of creation is anchored in the reality of experiences and situations, aiming at detaching itself slightly from the real in order to upset it. A concept, an idea or a work cannot be a priori evaluated away from concrete situations. On the contrary, their value depends uniquely on their effects, that is to say their capacity to intervene transformatively in the reality concerned. Linking the terms of speculation and narration is at one and the same time examining and detecting the possibles necessarily contained in a situation or problem, and finding a way of making stories from them which can contribute to bringing the possibles into being. This is feasible since they will have enabled us to believe in them sufficiently for us to commit to making them reality, as advocated by the philosopher William James.

We were convinced of the power of believing in our dream from the outset since we had conjured up an Institute of Coproduction of Knowledge around Huntington's disease even before the Institute effectively came into existence and before our work had gradually conferred reality upon it. It also appeared urgent to invent a story to express the violence of an action like the test predicting genetic status, so as to begin the task of taming the disease. On the basis of interviews carried out with users, we are working with Fabrizio Terranova to make a series of video capsules, featuring the performer Olivier Marboeuf, alias Dr. Marboeuf. This series stages scenes with a medical doctor who gradually transforms a situation where terrible news about an incurable disease turns into a situation which creates possibles, in other words, where everything is open. In the first capsule, Dr. Marboeuf reports on a clinical situation linked to the pre-symptomatic test which made a deep impression on him. After he had given a negative result to a young woman, she and her sister emphatically objected, saying, "We'll be back when you're able to admit what you don't

know." For him, this retort gradually turned into a constructive provocation, a "pro-vocation" which led to the establishment of an experimental research unit to explore all aspects of Huntington's in close collaboration with those affected. The second capsule takes up the story a good year later. Dr. Marboeuf reads and comments on a letter he had received from a well-known French clairvoyant, Maud Kristen, about announcing bad news. The words of the clairvoyant meant so much to him that he considered experimenting in alternative ways of telling a patient they have HD. These videos are posted on YouTube and presented in several contexts, including medical congresses.²⁵ Whether the effects are visible or not, are great or small, we would like to believe, as William James urges us to do, that they will gradually bring about a transformation from a closed situation into one which demands we cope with it.

In *Dingdingdong* we like to develop things with time because what matters are the effects of what we are producing. These effects must almost immediately be altered as we factor them in so the experiment can continue. To follow (*pour-suivre*, *pur-sue*), the proposition of Didier Debaise, the concept of experience is not restricted to the viewpoint of the person who had the experience but extends to every thing/situation/moment/activity/event, which then becomes the subject of the experience.²⁶ That being the case, if even only one element shifts, the whole course of the experience will be altered and it is the continuum of the experience which is vital. As the clairvoyant Maud Kristen said in her long letter to Dr. Marboeuf, "only movement is eternal". To follow that route it is important to take account of every single thing—I insist, anything and everything—involved in the experiences, including the time frames required. Huntington's exists in multiple time frames: the genetic evolution of mankind, family ancestry (hereditary disease), a life. Huntington's is a disease in movement. *Dingdingdong* is keen to nurture the multiple experiences of the disease from its multiple perspectives: the patients, their nearest and dearest,

the professionals, but also that of the gene responsible, the mice working with scientists in laboratories etc., and to create stories to link them all. To do this we need the specific inventiveness of each one of us. We work with artists since they are exploring the experiences in Huntingtonland just like other researchers. All Dingdingdong's activities resonate with and nourish one another.

We are very conscious of the way in which we constitute a collective. If we might want to slow down when medical definitions go too fast, we also want to slow down when our ways of setting about things seem too obvious. Establishing a collective demands a great deal of tact and caution, which must always be present. Working in enjoyable conditions in a co-production of knowledge means constantly learning to question what it is that gets us working together without necessarily being at the same place and time. Working together also means getting each person interested from their own practice in what the situation requires. We do not spend much time discussing our process but we commit to the work, that is to staying with what we are working on as long as the situation requires it, regardless of where the problem lies and who formulates it. Dingdingdong viewed itself as an institution from the very beginning, piecing together fragile knowledge and using alternative research methods, in contrast to established knowledge usually covered by the term "institution". What is most important to us is to produce relevant knowledge, effective for its users and in coping with HD, while at the same time honing our methods in the HD school (or rather anti-school). It is not first and

foremost our practices or methods we are committed to, but rather the problem which made the institute necessary: how to cope with Huntington's? When we work on this project we are not "only" researchers, we are also involved in some way or other. We do not seek to remain neutral, to produce evidence, to avoid methodological bias at all costs. We do commit ourselves to reporting very strictly the way in which our attachments, our hesitations, our uncertainties, mirroring those of our interlocutors, may contribute to co-producing knowledge with them. In other words, we are not seeking to make science but to make knowledge. Situated knowledge, knowledge allowing a plural, potential present, knowledge anchored in the present yet a present put together with ingredients from the past, present and future.

25. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1WqbRB9a6Q> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1WqbRB9a6Q> (Accessed 2016-07-15.)

26. Debaise, Didier, *L'invention d'un univers pluraliste*, colloquium "Au tournant de l'expérience", Cité de l'architecture et du Patrimoine de Paris, 2016, p. 2.