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The Problem of the Reinvention of Practices in I. Stengers' Thought

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	6
1. THE REQUIREMENT FOR ANOTHER NOTION OF PRACTICE.....	21
1.1. The Disappointment with (Post-)Marxist Critical Approaches	21
1.2. From Gardening to Ecology of Practices	26
1.3. The Reciprocal Capture and Symbiosis	30
1.4. The Vulnerability of Practices: From Physics to Philosophy	34
1.5. Gaia and The Ecology of Writing	39
2. THE RELAY OF GUATTARI'S ECOSOPHY	47
2.1. The Continuous Distrust with Freudo-Marxist Discourses.....	47
2.2. The Problem of Values and Valorisation	50
2.3. The Aesthetics of a Territory and Its Affective-Carryings	52
2.4. The Aesthetic Adventures and Contemporary Art.....	57
2.5. The Eco-Logic of Intrusion and New Protagonists.....	61
3. TWO DIVERGENT READINGS OF ARISTOTLE'S <i>PRAXIS/POIESIS</i>	67
3.1. The Common Problem of Atrophy of <i>Praxis</i>	67
3.2. The Ambiguity of Aristotle's Separation <i>Praxis/Poiesis</i>	70
3.3. Agamben's Longing for The Value of <i>Poiesis</i>	73
3.4. Revisiting The Situationist Practices	76
3.5. The Emptied Fields of <i>Praxis</i>	79
4. PLATO'S CRITIQUE AND THE REINVENTION OF PRACTICES ...	83
4.1. The Unresolved Question of Illusion-Makers.....	83
4.2. Freud's Denunciation of Affective Mimesis.....	88
4.3. The Positive Notion of Influence	93
4.4. Refrains and The Political Power of Words.....	98
4.5. Starhawk's Assemblages and The Radical Reinvention of Practices ..	102
CONCLUSIONS.....	106
REFERENCES.....	109
SANTRAUKA	120
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	129
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF DISSERTATION ...	130
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	131

INTRODUCTION

The idea that we do not need protection typically refers to an idealistic conception of truth: if we have truth on our side, it will protect us. One way to circumvent this habit of thought is to never divide people into good and bad but to start instead from the fact that we all live in an unhealthy environment.

(Stengers, Davis, and Turpin 2013, 175)

Context and the Topic of the Research. The motives for this research have to be traced back to what now looks like a very distant; yet recent moment in time, a little while before the global pandemic of Covid-19, as I have been struck by an art historian and cultural critic T. J. Demos' notice of how possibly reckless the sphere of contemporary art is concerning the ecological crisis we have been experiencing for the last decades. Commenting on the case of dOCUMENTA (13) that took place in 2012 in Kassel, Germany, T. J. Demos wrote that despite its curator Carolyn's Christov-Bakargiev's attempt to address the political emergencies openly, the project failed to take any clear stance in relation to them. The lack of commitment to possibly one theoretical position or the lack of ability to foresee the consequences of one's artistic engagement have been presented as questionable but also deeply rooted tendencies in our neoliberal milieu of contemporary art. Why do curators and artists in this field often act "as if knowledge production releases us from any ethico-political responsibilities" (Demos 2016, 241)? What does it even mean to have such a responsibility in the field, which for a long time has been defined by seemingly the very lack of it—by the very sense of one's courage to venture into not yet articulated territories?

This discussion has started with more than just the awareness of changes brought by what has been coined as the era of Anthropocene¹. Though, as Walead Beshty has put it, despite the urgency in tone with which the socially and politically derived practices tend to be discussed more frequently, the theoretical discourse of it remains at a very early stage (Beshty 2015, 17–18). One way to look at it could be by recalling the discussion surrounding the development of socially engaged art and the term "relational aesthetics" that

¹ In 2000, the notion of the new era of the Anthropocene was popularised by the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer. It implies a period of significant changes caused by human activities measurable in the earth's layers or strata. As of 2023, the term still lacks the final official confirmation from the geologists' community.

followed in the late 1990s. The term “relational aesthetics” proposed by French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2009) meant to address the kind of “relational art” at the time focusing on fostering social relations within institutional spaces of contemporary art. Later the term was significantly questioned, most notably by British art historian and critic Claire Bishop (2004; 2012), who insisted on the differentiation of the ‘quality’ of social relations possibly enabled by socially engaged practices and proposed the alternative notion of “antagonism” to define them. Her proposition relied on the artistic practices that seek to sustain the tension and discomfort rather than perform the so-called democratic “microtopias” identified by Bourriaud (Bishop 2004, 70). Nevertheless, following Jason Miller’s critical analysis of this debate, we may ask whether the ethical aspect of relation-making can always be played down by the aesthetic notion of it (Miller 2016, 173).² What if, by avoiding ethical questions, we not only have more ‘freedom’ for experimentation but also refuse to admit our need for protection?

Curiously, this friction between the *consensus*-based politics of relational aesthetics and the *dissensual* politics of antagonism is also very much present in contemporary readings of a French psychoanalyst and political philosopher, Félix Guattari’s proposition of the “new aesthetic paradigm” (Guattari 1995; 2000) and new paradigms in general which are to be “ethico-aesthetic in inspiration” (Guattari 2000, 37). As we know, the importance of Guattari’s ontological aesthetics in this discussion is not accidental. In the special issue of *Chimères. Revue des schizoanalysis* (n°21—Félix Guattari, January 1994), dedicated to the memory of Félix Guattari, Bourriaud first published the article “Le paradigme esthétique”, which later appeared as a chapter in his book *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998), and cast a spell on how we perceive and connect Guattari’s thought and contemporary art. As it keeps being associated either with modernist singularisation of *dissensus* or institutional *consensus* and particular realms of participatory art (e.g., Alliez 2010; Zepke 2012; 2022; MacCormack and Gardner 2018), it seems to lack relevance for somewhat more layered state and significance of contemporary art practices today. Though the British scholarship is slightly exceptional in Guattari’s studies, as it notices the importance Guattari gives to the logic of affect (MacCormack and Gardner 2018b) and the responsibility that comes with it.

² Miller’s critical remarks point more specifically to Bishop’s employment of Santiago Sierra’s performances and a kind of “mimetic reproduction of exploitative relations” (2016, 176) that is left unattended or justified by the notion of aesthetics there. For more on this argument, see Miller 2016, 172–77.

But perhaps it is less known that the same issue of *Chimères* (n°21—Félix Guattari, January 1994) also contains Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers’ and psychiatrist Mony Elkaïm’s article “Du mariage des hétérogènes”³ where they suggest another genealogy for Guattari’s aesthetics—the one that is based on Leibnizian notion of perception and production of self (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 147). It is a proposition worthy of attention, as it claims to be the alternative point of view for the classical notion of aesthetics deriving from Kant’s transcendental aesthetic⁴. In this work, we rely on the ontological sense of ‘aesthetic’ instead, which, according to Stengers, is present in Guattari’s work and means “a production of existence that concerns one’s *capacity to feel*: the capacity to be affected by the world, not in a mode of subjected interaction, but rather in a double creation of meaning, of oneself and the world” (Stengers 2000, 148). Holding the logic of affect—the concern of being the one who affects and is affected by the environment with all its inhabitants,—their take on aesthetics inevitably implies the importance of a sense of responsibility. Thus, for a much more significant reason that has been interpreted so far, in his *Chaosmosis* (1992), Guattari asks,

[H]ow do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity—if it ever had it—a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos? (Guattari 1995, 119–20)

Another key term in this delicate inquiry of Guattari I would like to pay attention to is the notion of a ‘practice’. Today this expression is widespread in many areas, as well as contemporary art and used in singular, even in clearly collective practices such as contemporary dance. However, this preference for the notion of a ‘practice’ over the terms of ‘art’ or a ‘work of art’ is only a tendency of the early 21st century and has not always been the case. It is

³ For this reference, I am indebted to Christoph Brunner and Gerald Raunig (2013), who, in their article “The Obsession of Objects: Relational Art and Objecthood as Farce”, shortly mentions the original place of publication of Bourriaud’s text and the set-up of *Chimères* journal in 1994.

⁴ In the article “Du mariage des hétérogènes” Elkaïm and Stengers only briefly suggest that aesthetics as a discipline moves between two opposing poles: the ontological view of Leibniz and the narrower epistemological view of Kant. For more on this point, see Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 147–48. Nevertheless, the reasoning for this distinction and the genealogy of ontological aesthetics must be elaborated further.

intriguing to see how, for instance, in 1992, in an art critic Olivier Zahm's conversation with Guattari, Zahm is not so eager to accept the notion of practice for describing what conceptual art is about. The tension of the exchange lies in Guattari's perception of art, even conceptual art, as a way of creating sensations, even if one's means are conceptual material (Guattari and Zahm 2011, 43). Guattari establishes the distinction between artistic concepts that "create sensations" and philosophical ones that are made to "create concepts" (Guattari and Zahm 2011, 43). But that does not mean artistic concepts are less important or cannot lead to thinking and creating concepts. Many philosophers engage with artistic creations in that way. The artistic concepts might even hold the most potential for what Guattari and Gilles Deleuze call "deterritorialisation,"⁵ precisely because of the affective type of efficacy they can produce and deal with. Curiously, this is why Guattari suggests defining contemporary art via terms of "composition" and "*praxis*" (Guattari and Zahm 2011, 45). His notion of *praxis* implies a way of doing that is principally non-discursive, and the notion of non-discursivity brings a sense of responsibility.

But can a notion of a 'practice' alone help with the ability to respond with more awareness to what the environment may demand of us? What is exactly that "promise of practice"⁶ today? The idea of singularisation that a notion of 'one's practice' implies is not reliable enough. Bourriaud, who aligns his position with a particular notion of singularisation indicating the ineffable idea of novelty in 'one's practice'⁷, also appears very defensive towards any sense

⁵ Deterritorialisation can be defined as a process of becoming in relation to the exterior environment and its disruptive points. For the interior and further becoming, Deleuze and Guattari use the term "reterritorialisation", which happens in a complementary way (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 54). For more on these terms, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

⁶ It refers to the title of the same name of Marcus Boon's and Gabriel Levine's introduction to the book *Practice* (2018) from the "Documents of Contemporary Art" series by Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT Press.

⁷ Bourriaud claims singularity to be a special and the only reliable kind of 'quality' of contemporary art which he explains in mathematical rather philosophical terms. For him, singularity in the field of art is like the irreducible omega number in mathematics [$\omega+1$, or 'infinity plus one'] (Bourriaud, Čiučelis, and Matulaitytė 2015; Bourriaud 2022, 58). Curiously, Bourriaud distinguishes the notion of perceiving something as singular, even in the case of another human fellow, from the notion of being "seduced" by something or somebody. I will argue later in this work that this difference is crucial for defining a sense of ethics in artistic creation, as the close notions of suggestion and influence are at the core of Stengers' idea of singularity.

of responsibility it may entail simultaneously. For him, contemporary art production is too heterogeneous and broadly theoretically driven to allow for a coherent notion of the ethics (Bourriaud 2009a, 22). Such an idea of singularisation may leave us with a sense of “the haze of activity” (Boon and Levine 2018, 13) and align well with the reckless demands of today’s neoliberal economy where the requirement of ‘original’, and thus, ‘separate’, ‘possessive’, and ‘easily-marketable’ artistic production prevails, giving that very illusion of the possibility of the ‘original’ itself. However, at the same time, the notion of *praxis*, at least since Marx, has held a clear revolutionary potential, which in modern and contemporary art has manifested itself as a much-heightened focus on the political and social capabilities of artistic creation. Even if, by now, those ambitions are shaded away to a great extent, as Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine notice, there still lies a possibility of sensing a connection between other precariously working practitioners and taking a position toward collective action (Boon and Levine 2018, 17).

In addition to what the notion of *praxis* promises, it has also been important to ask what it cannot promise or what it has lost due to its exclusion from *poiēsis*, the productive activity that Aristotle most notably associated with the virtue of *technē* or know-how, which for Greeks was akin to an extensive range of crafts, forms of skills and even more generally—“a way of doing something, a means” (Chateau 2014, 42), including ways of what we later, in modern terms, separated as “art.” In other words, the shift towards the notion of *praxis*, as encountering artistic creation, besides other reasons, may have contributed to lessening attention to *how* something is done and made. This concern, albeit in its most radical form, can be found in the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s thinking on the archaeology of the work of art (Agamben 2019a)⁸. While completely rejecting the notion of contemporary art and its performative capabilities as “taking up of an essentially liturgical paradigm”, Agamben stresses the need to reconsider the “work” in the work of art, which for him, since modernity, has become as if it would be an unnecessary element of the work of art, a kind of “an awkward remainder” of the artistic activity (Agamben 2019a, 8; 11). But does this renewed effort to consider *how* something is done and made⁹, and perhaps to take the ethical dimension of

⁸ For making me aware of this reference, I am very grateful to a philosopher and the specialist on Agamben’s philosophy Vaiva Daraškevičiūtė.

⁹ It is worth mentioning that the philosophical interest in *technē* (also see, e.g., Staten 2019), traditional knowledges and crafts, or materiality more generally, can also be found within recent drifts of contemporary art practices. However, the current

activity back into the focus, necessarily must be proceeded by abandoning the notion of performative altogether?

Now here, I would like to propose a somewhat unexpected solution and reconsider the promise of practice with the help of Stengers' concept of "ecology of practices" stemming first from the philosophy of science and Stengers' experience of thinking with scientific practices such as physics, chemistry, biology but also psychoanalysis, hypnosis, and therapeutic practices more generally. It could seem like a safe move as Stengers invites us to rethink already well-known Greek distinctions and does not look out for entirely other kinds of genealogies of the concept of practice,—such as the Sanskrit *sadhana* and the Chinese *wu-wei*¹⁰, among others. After all, Stengers suggests reconnecting what, according to her, the notion of a city separated, that is, "human affairs (*praxis*) and the management-production of things (*technē*)" (Stengers 2000, 163). This is a bolder step than it might appear since she is arguably continuing the French-Diderot way of thinking about practices rather than the German-Kantian, on which the Marxist tradition is based¹¹. As such, Stengers relays the Aristotelian notion of political *praxis*, which is also ethical and inherently ambiguous: it implies a certain self-sufficiency of action while still being "burdened" by relations and concerns of social life (Balibar, Cassin, and Laugier 2014, 822).

The oscillation between independence and dependence is at the heart of what Stengers calls 'ecology' in the 'ecology of practices.' Her perspective continuously suggested that the questions around the ability to respond with more awareness towards the matters at work might be more precisely defined as "ecological" rather than ethical or aesthetic and imply the process of

thematic shift does not necessarily mean that the principles of craftsmanship can be easily reemployed, as such redistribution of sensible may take time and much more research in this area of art theory.

¹⁰ The reference to the Sanskrit and Chinese terms is connected to Boon's and Levine's mention of these and other non-European philosophical traditions that could suggest different ontological frameworks for thinking of practices. In their understanding, the Aristotelian tradition is too often unconsciously overtaken rather than being genuinely beneficial (Boon and Levine 2018, 17).

¹¹ The German-Kantian tradition can be characterised by the Kantian separation of moral and skill-based notions of practical that lead to setting an ethical mission of transforming the world. On the other hand, the French tradition is primarily based on positivist philosophies and tends to connect speculative and practical points of view (Balibar, Cassin, and Laugier 2014, 824–25). Stengers considers herself an inheritor of Denis Diderot's materialism because of its polemical and demanding features. For more on this relation, see Stengers 2011.

creating the relationships of interdependence (e.g., Stengers 2002; Stengers and Bononno 2010; Stengers 2020). According to Stengers, the relationships of interdependence can be created and nurtured by readdressing each other as practitioners and inventing a sense of “obligations” and “requirements” for each other. In one of many instances describing this proposition, Stengers writes:

What remains undetermined, even for the practitioners, is the question of how their obligations will be formulated, expressed, “represented,” that is to say, the way in which the practitioners justify themselves, define themselves in relation to others. It is not a reflexive question, “What are my obligations?”; it is an ecological one, in the sense that the response also depends on others, on the way in which they require one to think, or not (Stengers 2002b).¹²

The idea of obligations and requirements is very distinctive in the setting of our problem because it implies the multi-sidedness of what it takes to create a relationship. The practitioner engaged in such behaviour is asked to be sensible of how multiple other beings have enabled their activity and how their engagement affected other beings. First, acknowledging the influences that one’s becoming is created with—the existence of ‘external’ requirements—makes up part of interdependent relationships. As Stengers elaborates on it elsewhere, the creation of interdependent relationships differs from what we perceive as independent ones because it involves the realisation of being capable of becoming “thanks to, alongside, and at the risk of others” (Stengers 2020b). However, it is equally important to acknowledge one’s influences, the ways of producing meanings that last or ‘internal’ obligations while creating reciprocally enabling relationships. With the notion of ‘ecology,’ or the previous term of ‘cosmopolitics,’ Stengers takes up ecology as a political practice that involves carefully producing or creating values,—in Guattari’s terms, “value universes.”¹³ Thus, this notion of singularity suggests something other than ‘one’s activity,’ which can be owned alone. Stengers’ idea of practice strives to be defined through its ability to forge reciprocally

¹² This description of Stengers’ idea of requirements and obligations was partially quoted in Pignarre 2023, 58.

¹³ There is a direct link between Stengers’ “cosmopolitics” and Guattari’s “axiological creationism” or the creation of “value universes”. In *Cosmopolitics II*, Stengers mentions that she could be referencing Guattari’s “axiological creationism” by making the term “chaosmopolitical”. However, she stayed with the prefix ‘cosmo-’ to keep the notion of the speculative implied. For more on this point, see Stengers 2011a, 2:448.

enabling relationships with other practices, practitioners, and other living beings, of which long-lasting existence is not guaranteed.

Aim and objectives. This dissertation aims to disclose the conceptual value of Stengers' 'ecology of practices' in unlocking the contemporary problems of aesthetic, ethical, political, and environmental domains.

The aim will be realised by seeking the following objectives:

- 1) To provide a conceptual analysis of the ecology of practices, to track its role and function in Stengers' philosophical discourse, and to situate it among other compositionist and new materialist strands of thought.
- 2) To examine the links between Stengers' ecology of practices and Guattari's aesthetic paradigm, locate the main points of their connection, and contextualise them within the field of relevant ideas, such as 'lack of political strength,' 'creating values,' and 'aesthetic adventures.'
- 3) To conduct a comparison of several readings of Aristotle's *praxis/poiēsis* distinction, to show the particularities of Stengers' and Guattari's take in relation to Agamben's devaluation of *praxis* and to differentiate Stengers' and Guattari's interpretations as positive alternatives for the elaboration of performative practices.
- 4) To interpret the different forms of the invention of practice as a response to Plato's problem of affective mimesis in Stengers' analyses of therapeutic practices (from hypnosis and Freud's psychoanalysis to traditional therapeutic practices and Starhawk's witchcraft).

General thesis. *The conceptualisation of 'ecology of practices' in relation to Guattari's ecosophy provides a philosophical framework that enables the definition of Stengers' thought as a critical response to aesthetic, ethical, political, and environmental challenges of modernity, which is achieved through the process of the reinvention of practices.*

The thesis is to be proved in four steps. First, by introducing Stengers' conception of the ecology of practices, which supports the notion of the invention of practices as a creation of the relationships of reciprocal capture, I will show that Stengers gives us the relational sense of a singularity of practice going beyond the typical binary of *consensus/dissensus*. Then, while linking Stengers' ecology of practices and Guattari's aesthetics of territory, I will indicate how Guattari's project is relayed and furthered in Stengers' work. This connection is also productive in that Stengers' reading allows us to perceive Guattari's aesthetics as a project of creating affective relationships, and thus also relevant in contemporary art when considering questions of

vulnerability and responsibility. In the further step, by contrasting two readings of Aristotle's *praxis/poiēsis*—Stengers' and Agamben's notions of the "atrophy of *praxis*," I will claim the possibility of a more positive take towards the relational idea of artistic creation. Finally, while pointing out the deeper issue of Plato's disqualification of affective mimesis and discussing Stengers' analyses of therapeutic practices, I will propose the idea of the invention of practice as a potentially courageous exercise in creating affective relationships for contemporary practices.

Method. The methodological design of this research has been motivated by the interdisciplinary approach. Unlike Guattari's notion of ethico-aesthetico-political paradigms, Stengers' ecology of practices is less likely to be discussed in connection with modern and contemporary art practices.¹⁴ It has been the case for at least a few reasons. First, it is necessary to acknowledge that the pragmatological background for the conception of the ecology of practices stems from scientific practices,—precisely the physics (Stengers 2005a), and has been primarily intended to address the lack of responsibility and accountability within scientific communities. In discussing the need for physicists to take a more inventive approach to the validity of their practices, Stengers has also drawn on her experience working with Nobel laureate physical chemist Ilya Prigogine.¹⁵ Likewise, her in-depth analyses of how psychoanalysis, modern medicine and related practices situate themselves have been informed by the long-term collaborations with several psychotherapists such as León Chertok, Mony Elkaim, and Tobie Nathan. In this regard, when it comes to practices, Stengers has been explicitly shying away from mentioning arts and tended to prioritise either scientific or, in some cases, spiritualistic work.¹⁶ Thus, considering that scientific and artistic

¹⁴ It has not been common for Stengers' ecology of practices to be employed for questioning the guiding ethical or political principles of contemporary art practices themselves; however, Stengers' notion of cosmopolitics as a project of more-than-human politics happens to be occasionally discussed by currently working artists, curators, etc. (e.g., Biemann 2015; Sheikh 2019; Elfving 2019).

¹⁵ The collaboration experience with Ilya Prigogine enabled Stengers to identify the side of physicists' practices that can embrace more inventive or creative support and not justify themselves by employing the sense of 'physical reality'. For more on this point, see Stengers 2005, 184.

¹⁶ Stengers' relationship with contemporary art practices seems ambiguous, if not antagonistic. Unlike her close colleagues in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), such as Bruno Latour, Vinciane Despret, Donna Haraway, and Anna L. Tsing, who tend to engage in curating and working with artists (e.g., Latour's co-

practices are often positioned on opposite sides, why engage and attempt to confront the notion of this gap in the first place?

I propose at least two motives for engaging with Stengers' ecology of practices while reconsidering the promise of the increasingly common idea of practice in contemporary art. First, in the Western canon of modern and contemporary art, artistic practices like scientific ones have defined themselves through their sense of 'autonomy' and independence. This idea of autonomy is nearly synonymous with the modern definition of 'art' in its singular use. Melanie Sehgal's notice of modern aesthetics being a "flipside to *the invention of modern science* described by Stengers" (Sehgal 2018, 112) could be equally applied to the idea of 'art' since the modern usage of art is in reversal with that of science. Another idea the Western canon of modern and contemporary art cannot help but lean on is the notion of 'progress', which is also intrinsic to modern science. Like the inventions of science, the modern movements of art aim to change and advance knowledge that at least partially fuels a knowledge-based economy. Thus, both types of modern practices are suffering from their alignment with 'progress' or another characteristic term for that matter, which must justify their autonomy while at the same time being in need to assert their 'freedom.' The ecology of practices can be helpful in bolstering this sense of security and in its attempt to create awareness of the unhealthy mechanisms of protection in use.

Because of the tight but at times less evident Stengers' connection with Guattari, the ecology of practices has been approached as a conception that relies on and significantly furthers Guattari's ecological proposal for practices—from therapeutic to artistic and urban practices (Guattari 1995, 135). Taking Stengers as a close reader of Guattari has allowed us to emphasise the affinity between their proposals and bring into the focus another reading of Guattari's ethico-aesthetico-political paradigms, which can actualise his work in the theory of contemporary art. Stengers reads the eco-political intention of Guattari's project neither as exclusively antagonistic nor

curated exhibitions "Reset Modernity!" (2016) and "Critical Zones – Observatories for Earthly Politics" (2020–2021) or Tsing's co-curated project "Feral Atlas: The More-than-Human Anthropocene" (2015–2020) to name just a few), Stengers has kept her distance from contemporary art practices. She has motivated her disinterest by their proneness to "*trends and brands.*" (Stengers, Davis, and Turpin 2013, 174) While analysing Deleuze's and Guattari's approach to art in their *What is Philosophy?* (1991), due to the similar permeability of art, Stengers has proposed to pay attention to more inventive practices, such as neo-pagan witch and political activist Starhawk's work (Stengers 2005b, 162).

relational in a consensual sense—as coming from the ‘micro’ institutional setting. Introducing the idea of ontologically affective and interdependent or ‘con-sensual’¹⁷ relationships in all kinds of political becomings opens the possibility to consider the ethical as being substantially interconnected with ontological in contemporary art practices. Given Stengers’ attention to Guattari’s activism and political philosophy rather than psychoanalytic work (Guattari 1995; 2000), the argument here is supported chiefly by drawing from Stengers’ political thought or, as she puts it herself, the texts that are meant “to engage thought, not to discuss philosophy” (Stengers, Davis, and Turpin 2013, 172). They mainly involve more recent works, which extend the early proposal with significant conceptual figures such as “Gaia”¹⁸ (e.g., Pignarre and Stengers 2011; Stengers and Despret 2014; Stengers 2015; 2018).

To unfold and differentiate the notion of *praxis* in connection to *poiēsis*, Agamben’s re-actualisation of Aristotle’s *praxis/poiēsis* (1999; 2019b) has been engaged in this work. Comparative and interpretative textual approaches have been adopted to realise this objective, complemented by case studies of relevant artistic practices. Agamben’s close reading of Aristotle’s *praxis/poiēsis* and its reworking in a more contemporary context while discussing performance art have been significant for at least two reasons. First, Agamben’s version of *praxis/poiēsis*, like Stengers, belongs to those very few cases of “contemporary philosophy of action”¹⁹ that have been stretching out

¹⁷ In the more recent article “Autonomy and the Intrusion of Gaia” (2017), while discussing the example of “palavers”, a way of conversing between traders and local habitants, extinct due to colonialism, Stengers differentiates another sense of *consensus*—which implies a situation of “sensing with” instead of agreeing for a pre-imposed offer (Stengers 2017, 391). To underline the importance of the middle of this proposal (between *consensus* and *dissensus*) and the specific notion of “sensing with”, when mentioning it, I have used the hyphen (*con-sensus*).

¹⁸ The reference to Gaia hypothesis (Lovelock and Margulis 1974)—the idea that the earth as a whole is a synergetic and self-regulating system—already appears in Stengers’ *Cosmopolitics*, but it is more directly approached in more recent texts (esp. see Stengers 2015). The notion of Gaia in a consistent manner was also conceptualised in the work of French sociologist and philosopher of science Bruno Latour (2004; 2013; 2017), who often acknowledged the reciprocal influence of each other’s ideas, including Gaia’s. For further on this concept, see the 2nd chapter.

¹⁹ The term “contemporary philosophy of action” designates the 20th-century philosophies that have actively returned to the problem of *praxis* and reconstitution of the philosophies of *praxis*. These involve diverse philosophies, including Georg Lukács, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others. For more, see Balibar, Cassin, and Laugier 2014.

back to Aristotle's separation *praxis/poiēsis* rather than relying on the Marxist-Kantian version. In other words, Agamben shares Stengers' side in a way that both found the Marxist take insufficient. Second, taking Agamben's contrasting view into perspective has been helpful because it permitted me to consider the idea of the re-creation of practices in the debate on aesthetics, which seeks to reclaim the notion of *poiēsis*. Stengers' reading of Aristotle's *praxis/poiēsis* (2000; 2006) has given a different perspective to this debate, as it implies a similar but more generally applied aim of reclaiming the sense of *practices* and also the significance of their *know-how*, without undermining the notion of *praxis* and performative practices.

However, reclaiming the sense of *practices* is deeper than resolving the Marxist issue of *praxis* and its ultimate political-revolutionary aspirations. Stengers' use of 'reclaiming,' the term that she has borrowed from the American neo-pagan witch Starhawk's practice, brings us to Plato's division of uneven activities, at the beginning of her *Cosmopolitics* framed as a 'sophist's problem' (Stengers 2010, 1:28–29). Drawing on Stengers' analyses of Plato's disqualification of affective mimesis and its appearance within different therapeutic practices (from hypnosis and Freud's psychoanalysis to traditional therapeutic practices and Starhawk's witchcraft), it has been possible to locate the problem of *affectivity*, which connects a variety of practices involved in Plato's debate—from philosophy and medicine to rhetoric, witchcraft, arts, and other 'illusion-making' activities. The primary sources analysed in this part range from Stengers' lesser-known work (Stengers 1992; 2002a) to her more well-known collaborations with psychotherapists Chertok and Nathan (e.g., Chertok and Stengers 1992; 1999; Nathan and Stengers 2018), and include some of the more frequently-used sources in her work by Nathan and Starhawk (Nathan and Hounkpatin 1998; Starhawk 1988). Reconsidering Stengers' refusal to privilege artistic practices and her idea of drawing attention to the inventive character of Starhawk's witchcraft (Stengers 2005b, 162) opened up the possibility of noticing the differences between these practices and their capacity to learn from each other, rather than equating them, as suggested in Bourriaud's recent research (Bourriaud 2022, 9, 103)²⁰.

²⁰ By equating the current practices of contemporary art and those of magic, Bourriaud reduces the contemporary significance of the latter. In his *Inclusions: Aesthetics of the Capitalocene* (2022), Bourriaud claims the spiritual significance of artistic practices that replaced the analogous benefit of medieval magic practices: "Once, this was magic, but now it is art that supplies us with the mental equipment we need to survive in our jungle" (Bourriaud 2022, 103).

Relevance. By reconsidering the promise of practice and its ecological implications within contemporary practices, this study aims to suggest the conceptual path that has been informing and could ground its understanding and usage today. For many reasons, bringing in Stengers' perspective of the 'ecology of practices' in the field of contemporary art theory can be helpful. First, Stengers' notion of 'ecology' suggests the study of the dynamics of different reciprocally enabling and disabling relationships between practices, practitioners, and a multiplicity of other beings, which could be an alternative to the frequently overlooked question of ethics regarding contemporary art practices. Second, this work intends to ask about the potential future of Guattari's "new aesthetic paradigm" if it had been built on Stengers' terms instead. What kind of different 'relay' could be created? Stengers' reading of Guattari's notion of practices and their reinvention as being based on the logic of affect could help to shift the attention from political change and the potential for different kinds of 'revolutions' to the affective transformation induced by the possible forms of relationship-making. Finally, considering contemporary art practices as less privileged and distinctive from contemporary witchcraft or different therapeutic practices can invite a sense of vulnerability and the possibility of more radical self-reinvention.

Due to its interdisciplinary character, this study also aims to be relevant to the emergent field of Stengers' philosophy studies, and more specifically, it responds to the inquiry of less speculative consideration of Stengers' interest in a variety of philosophies which are distinct in their attention to the field of aesthetics and their significant elaboration of aesthetic vocabularies. As Melanie Sehgal has noticed, besides Guattari's "new aesthetic paradigm", these philosophies involve Étienne Sourriau's notion of different "modes of existence", John Dewey's take on art as experience, and Alfred North Whitehead's "Critique of Pure Feeling" (Sehgal 2018, 112–13). In one of a few (if not the only) analyses of Stengers' relationship to the modern field of aesthetics and the different aesthetic vocabularies, Sehgal opens this line of inquiry, leaving much space for future studies that could further it from an interdisciplinary perspective. Unlike Sehgal's approach, which is indebted to Whitehead's idea of the bifurcation of nature and the modern binary of art and science (Sehgal 2018, 124), this study tests the possibility of their common ground beyond the existence of aesthetic qualities, which is typically associated with artistic practices. Its relevance lies in the idea that it is vital to "stay with the trouble", which is—the more adaptive character of

contemporary art practices' continuous modern history²¹, and further ways in which Stengers' sense of 'ecology' within these practices can matter.

Previous research. So far, very few studies would link the problem of practice within contemporary art theory and Stengers' proposal of the ecology of practices. The closest to this ambition would be Sehgal's article "Aesthetic Concerns, Philosophical Fabulations: The Importance of a 'New Aesthetic Paradigm'" (2018). It is a part of the special issue of *SubStance* titled "Isabelle Stengers and the Dramatization of Philosophy," edited by Martin Savransky. The issue is one of the few and most significant works dedicated to Stengers' philosophy. While mapping the possible connections between Stengers' ecology of practices and various vocabularies of modern continental aesthetics, Sehgal has identified the contrasting nature of 'ecology' compared to 'modern aesthetics.' The idea of an ecologist differs greatly from that of an aesthetician known for holding the "sovereign" power of judgement and selection (Sehgal 2018, 123). In the case of ecology, such power is not given; thus, the question of meaning-making is a subject of responsibility closely linked to the demands of the environment. This study relies on Sehgal's interpretation of 'ecology,' seeking to further it by asking what it would mean to disassociate contemporary art practices from the heritage of modern aesthetics and think of it in terms of 'ecology' and the careful evaluation of the reciprocally contingent relationships.

For locating Stengers' idea of the reinvention of practices within her work and in her partner-in-thinking Bruno Latour's corpus, it has been beneficial to employ Philippe Pignarre's study *Latour-Stengers: An Entangled Flight* (2023). As a co-author (2011) and a long-year editor of Stengers' work, Pignarre has taken a very systematic and chronological approach, showing that Stengers' research on Whitehead, which is much better known to English-speaking audience, has been equally complemented by her alongside interest in the break of psychoanalysis and the attempt to "de-epistemologise" scientific practices while engaging in the history of their practical change. Pignarre also has acknowledged the importance of Guattari's *Three Ecologies*

²¹ I refer to Sehgal's notice, which is characteristic of Stengers' approach to contemporary art practices too, that one of the reasons to step away and engage in other creative practices, in our case, spiritual or therapeutic practices, is their integral connection with modern aesthetic paradigm (Sehgal 2018, 128). In Stengers' view, considering the radical creative possibilities of contemporary art practices, it is necessary not to forget their ability to adapt to multiple requirements of "modernisation" and the price of "domestication" they had and continue having to pay (Stengers 2005b, 162).

(1989) to Stengers' understanding of the capitalist destruction of practices and their possible reinvention (Pignarre 2023, 115). Guattari's attention to the fragile state of various practices informs Stengers' notion of the ecology of practices as the political, ethical, and aesthetical proposal. These conceptual connections made by Pignarre are helpful in this study as it attempts to strengthen and further them by tracing the question of the destruction of practices even deeper—beyond the Marxist disappointment with “atrophy of *praxis*”—back to Plato's uneasiness with sophists.

1. THE REQUIREMENT FOR ANOTHER NOTION OF PRACTICE

To reimagine the promise of practice from the perspective of Isabelle Stengers' philosophy, it is first necessary to present the theoretical landscape in which the need for a different conception of practice emerged and has been sustained more recently. As I mentioned in the introduction and will elaborate on later in this chapter, the idea of the ecology of practices was partially motivated by Stengers' engagement with the community of physicists and, in parallel, it also stemmed from her interest in activist politics. However, Stengers' need to rethink the political nature of practices also corresponds with the broader philosophical inclinations of current strands of contemporary philosophy, such as Science and Technology Studies (STS), new materialisms, and critical posthumanism, which, despite their different conceptual frameworks, often share the points of references and ideas. Such ideas include a broader attempt to propose an alternative to the notion of political practice as it is understood within (post-)Marxist approaches and to raise the necessity of treating the scientific or philosophical practice itself as prone to political and ethical concerns. I claim that Stengers requires another notion of practice that is distinct in its emphasis on a practice which is never stable or static but is relational—and, thus, permeable to be destroyed or continuously reinvented.

1.1. The Disappointment with (Post-)Marxist Critical Approaches

“We are divided.”—repeated Stengers in her essay addressed to the community of art practitioners, and one can feel the urgency in her tone.²² It came out as a reaction to the inability to act of the diplomats in the Conferences of the Parties (COP) at the UN Climate Change Conferences taking place every year for the past twenty-eight years now. In her critical diagnosis and a call for political action that has pricked my ears lies a challenge that connects different constructivist and new materialist approaches in contemporary thought. What they share, among other things, is their distrust of failed “political promises” made by various Marxist and post-

²² See Stengers 2020. “We are divided” has been the proposed refrain, first referring to Bruno Latour's words and the article's title, which appeared in 2020 in *e-flux #114*, a journal featuring contributions of contemporary artists and thinkers. The previous and more well-known publication by Stengers in this journal focused on animism and writing (Stengers 2012).

Marxist alliances. It is one of the reasons why the last two decades have seen a rising interest in materialism, including recently coined new or new feminist materialisms. As Elisabeth Grosz rightly noted, it has come in part as a reaction to the political preoccupation of Marxist, post-Marxist, feminist, anti-racist and other intellectual activists who have promoted more language and the representation-orientated notion of politics and have believed in the clear distinction between the true and the false, such as the ideas of the anti-ideological and strictly ideological sort (Grosz and Mercier 2021, 145–46).²³

In addition to a Marxist preference for discursive politics, there are many other reasons for the Marxist and post-Marxist approaches to be recreated entirely or even “betrayed”, to use Stengers’ term. In “An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto” (2010), Bruno Latour draws a stark contrast between the (post-)Marxist and constructivist or compositionist notions of political and critical activity. The Marxist and post-Marxist approaches are accused of being loyal to the science of economics, its claimed superiority to other sciences, and the neglect of liberty that reaches beyond its critique of liberal politics. But an even more fundamental philosophical difference lies in its commitment to dialectics and the power of negation. For many who align themselves with the compositionist approach, it is the question of proper tools (e.g., (Latour 2010; Pignarre and Stengers 2011; De Castro, Danowski, and Sabolius 2021). To put it into Latour’s words,

It is really a mundane question of having the right tools for the right job. With a hammer (or a sledgehammer) in hand you can do a lot of things: break down the walls, destroy idols, ridicule prejudices, but you cannot repair, take care, assemble, reassemble, stitch together. It is no more possible to compose with the paraphernalia of critique than it is to cook with a seesaw (Latour 2010, 475).

The destructive tools of negation and the politics of progress-making that often enable positional power and reckless political activity are questioned by proposing a sense of ‘ethical’ that is closely intertwined with ‘political’. As we find in Latour’s “Compositionist Manifesto” or his prominent essay “Why has critique run out of steam? From the matters of fact to the matters of concern” (2004)²⁴, the proper tools of politics are presumed to involve a

²³ For more detailed reasoning for the political appeal of new materialism, see Grosz and Mercier 2021.

²⁴ It is worth mentioning that Latour’s attempts to question the relevance of ‘critique’ since his lecture “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to

particular awareness of the consequences of one's actions or readiness to take the necessary precautions. The compositionist type of politics involves the mechanisms of protection that imply a different relationship with time. Past patterns must be remembered, re-examined, and not simply dismissed as less valuable. The political aspiration of moving forward and reaching out to the truth is challenged by the task of creating a more lasting relationship with the past and its patterns of knowledge-making. As Stengers claims in the conversation with Latour, Anna Tsing and Nils Bubandt, the critical task posed by Marxists is not to be reduced to the awareness of ideological lies (Latour et al. 2018, 520).

Yet, for an urgent requirement to create more lasting relationships with the past that unceasingly haunts us, the compositionist and the (post-)Marxist approaches share at least a few points of convergence. For Latour, "The Compositionist Manifesto" and "The Communist Manifesto" are similar in the sense that they both have the desire to find a way of creating a "Common World". But unlike in the communist version of creating commons where "we" is taken for granted, Latour claims a possibility of its slow re-composition (Latour 2010, 488). Likewise, Stengers acknowledges the commonality of the shared struggles: the struggles against separation, alienation, and exploitation of capitalism, but she accuses Marxists of not considering the very social fabric of the commons they seek to create, namely, the practices. She writes: "What I am confronting here is the fact that the orthodox Marxist vision, whatever its conceptual beauty, left practices undefended. It even defined practitioners as 'not to be trusted' because they would always cultivate their own way of having situations and questions matter [...]" (Stengers 2011c, 378). In other words, Stengers claims the unnoticed vulnerability of the social fabric produced by various practitioners holding them together and being a subject of the ongoing capitalist dismantling.

In line with the compositionist's efforts to turn away from the language of critique, doubts regarding the practice of critique or "critical reflexivity" have

Matters of Concern" on 8 April 2003 at Stanford University have resonated within various disciplines. Still, it has caused particular tensions in the humanities discourse. His idea that critique 'run out of steam' has been perceived, on the one hand, as a diagnosis rushing the humanities to demodernise and radically dehumanise themselves (Harman 2020). On the other hand, it has been taken as an invitation to singularise and, at the same time, to reconsider functions of criticism, including the activities of 'curating', 'conveying', 'criticising', and 'composing'; in short, relating and making relationships (Felski 2020).

appeared in the new materialist discourse of reflective and diffractive practices, which Stengers occasionally refers to. In 1991 Donna Haraway proposed that to grasp the relations of difference between human and non-human organisms, machines, and other beings, we should think of different optics and practices than that of reflection—such as practices of diffraction (Haraway 1991, 300).²⁵ More recently, Haraway’s doubts on the validity of reflection as an optical metaphor and a dominant critical practice have been elaborated by Karen Barad in her attempt to devise an alternative to reflection practices, i.e., the methodology of diffraction. In doing so, in her seminal study *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), she addresses the flawed idea of separateness in the view of “representationalism” and the resulting problem of analogical thinking used to compare and classify various complex and, thus, simplified things. According to Barad, the analogical approaches presume the possibility of accurately reaching or drawing parallels between the “*micro*- and *macro*-worlds, particles and people, scientific and social questions, nature and culture”, etc. (Barad 2007, 24) and allow for bracketing out the means of representation or considering it insignificant. Like in the case of Latour’s compositionism, the methodology of diffraction supported by Haraway and Barad implies a need for more careful(l) approaches to knowledge-making and the “patterns of difference” it produces.

In Stengers’ references to the problem of the activity of critique, critical reflexivity, and its methodological alternative—the diffractive patterning and its careful(l) attendance, she differentiates the perspective of her speculative proposal of the ecology of practices from the position taken within the notion of critique or critical reflexivity. Stengers perceives the idea of critique as twofold. On the one hand, she does not deny its usefulness in the past, but on the other hand, she questions its necessity today. As we know, the idea of critique has derived from Immanuel Kant’s conceptualisation of *Aufklärung*, where he claims one’s need to have a right to use reason without being directed by an authority (Kant 2007), or as Michel Foucault defined it, to learn “the art of not being governed quite so much” (Foucault 2007, 45). Stengers takes the *Aufklärung* as an important event or moment in

²⁵ Elsewhere, Haraway also argued that reflexivity as a critical practice in as much as the optical process of reflection raises unnecessary anxieties about the copy and the original and leads to a search for authenticity and real realness (Haraway 2018, 16). For the sake of genealogy, it is crucial to notice that Haraway’s and Barad’s relational perception of difference is much influenced by literary theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha’s notion of difference. For more about Minh-ha’s influence on the concept of diffraction, see Geerts and Van Der Tuin 2021.

modern history. It played a principal role in cultivating “a taste for thinking and for the imagination as exercises in insubordination” and enabling it to be experienced widely (Stengers 2015, 108).

However, for Stengers, this activity of critical thinking, since *Aufklärung* perceived “as the remedy par excellence for the erring of humanity”, has become poisonous now. Over time, the notion of *Aufklärung* generated the epic genre in which Man, the *Anthropos* (currently also the main subject of the story of the Anthropocene²⁶), has evolved, became the great master of his own destiny, and liberated himself from any “illusory transcendences”. This narrative presumes the environmentally destructive privilege of neutral “knowing subjects”²⁷ having the capacity to clear off the illusions, which makes a case for a safe position²⁸ to judge, define and classify others, other realities, and kinds of knowledge. Stengers claims that, eventually, critique has become somewhat redundant—as acting on the ground of what already has been carried out, “digging up weeds that are dying or already dead” (Stengers 2015, 111), and thus, there is a need to find other ways of cultivating “a taste for thinking and for imagination”, which first requires to giving up a safe position of critique.

For Stengers, it is precisely this sort of shrinkage of ecological *praxis* that the Marxists’ conceptual tools could not prevent, including the practice of critique or philosophical practice more generally. She writes, “Today all Marxist or post-Marxist scripts must confront a perspective of destruction that Marx could not anticipate, whatever his “pre-ecological” work” (Stengers 2017, 383). Consequently, the problem of the environmental destruction of practices and the ecological crisis, more generally, may require other conceptual tools of resistance—beyond the division of *consensual* and *dissensual* politics,—of which the latter still belongs to the (post-)Marxist heritage of thought. Being brought into the realm of creation or *techne* in

²⁶ The story of the Anthropocene in its philosophical sense will be elaborated more in further chapters.

²⁷ Stengers describes this feature of “knowing subjects”, for instance, when mentioning the critiques of the proclaimed objectivity of science which involves the assumption of “detached”, neutral, “viewing from nowhere”, disembodied” knowing subjects (Stengers 2008, 45). Here she declares the deliberate choice to write not of “reflexivity” which scientists are missing of but of Deleuze’s notion of “discrimination,”—a capacity which is a matter of learning (Stengers 2008, 44).

²⁸ The notion of a safe position given by the privilege of critical reflexivity is more elaborated in Stengers 2018b. Here, Stengers also writes of “diffractive operations” as a possible way of unlearning to occupy safe positions (see Stengers 2018b, 102).

Stengers' ecology of practices, *praxis* as a political activity acquires the power of creative resistance and becomes a matter of affective relation-making—a matter of (de)territorialisation, putting it into Deleuze's and Guattari's terms. As we will see later, this is a crucial element of contemporary political practices that tends to be overlooked in the (post-)Marxist and poststructuralist approaches.²⁹

1.2. From Gardening to Ecology of Practices

In light of Stengers' suggestion to revise the idea of critical practices as having solely *dissensual* or *consensual* character, it is helpful to look at the description of the ecology of practices in which the gardening metaphor appears. In the first part of her *Cosmopolitics*, Stengers distinguishes 'ecology' as very different from two practices at opposite poles: gardening and creating a vivarium. The gardening practice I associate with a *dissensual* critique or judgment-making, as it requires making many decisions about what should be involved while engaging with various species. Accordingly, creating a vivarium can be linked with a *consensual* submission, as the idea of a vivarium implies as little involvement as possible. What Stengers calls 'ecology' as a practice lies somewhere in-between: neither does it presume the neutrality of activity, as creating a vivarium does, nor does it invite the idea of comparison and selection implied by gardening. I propose that it can be close to the notions of soil or its amendment—compost, which lately have been used in many critical and artistic contexts, including works by Bruno Latour, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Karen Barad, and others. Composting as a critical practice may imply a well-informed choice based on close consideration of multiple beings' desires and needs and the consequences of their reciprocal relationship-makings.

Let us start by looking into what Stengers means by 'gardening' and 'creating a vivarium' when she contrasts these practices with engagement in ecological practice. First, Stengers writes that it is the practice of gardening which enables the gardener to freely "select her plants, to arrange them as she pleases, to prune them as needed, and to try to get rid of whatever she considers weeds" (Stengers 2010, 1:56). In short, it is the idea of a practice guided by the notion of judgement and assuming the transcendent stance of the stable categories defining the truth, reality, or any other fixed types and

²⁹ For more on the new materialist critique of the influences of so-called cultural theory in the 1980s and 1990s that have "leached" the flesh out of art (and, I would claim, more generally out of politics), see Bolt 2013.

values. While practice at the first extreme, such as gardening, allows selection and judgement, the practice at another extreme can be defined as a radical absence of choice and judgement, but also care and attention more generally. It is similar to creating some ideal vivarium, “where different species are left on their own, some disappearing, others surviving, others proliferating” (Stengers 2010, 1:56). According to Stengers, both practices presume a radical temporal difference between “the time of the human project” and “the time that characterises the way beings affected by such projects relate to their milieu” (Stengers 2010, 1:56). The ecological practice, on the other hand, is more attuned to the milieu of the beings involved and is a *con-sensual* instead—capable of sensing-with, including the very presence of the observer, researcher, or creator.

As I have mentioned, Stengers’ idea of ‘ecology’ contrasts with the Kantian setting of critique or critical reflexivity. Besides, it also questions the notion of “knowing” subject implied in Kant’s take on aesthetic judgement and aesthetics more broadly. Curiously, as Melanie Sehgal notices, in her conception of the ecology of practices, Stengers suggests a notion of an ‘ecology’ that is sharply different from an aesthetic practice understood in a modern way (Sehgal 2018, 122). And vice versa, it is possible to claim that the Kantian tradition of aesthetics is akin to what Stengers has called the practice of gardening. The Kantian concept of aesthetics corresponds well to gardening because it is based on judgment, which happens at a certain distance from the object of perception and depends on pre-defined fixed categories of judgment. Like a gardener, the Kantian observer acts independently from what is observed in his own temporality and has a superior power to sort out and judge what is deemed not valuable.³⁰ Thus, Stengers’ idea of ‘ecology’ as both a critical and aesthetic practice challenges the Kantian notion of the power of judgment and possibly implies a more relational notion of sense-making.

³⁰ It is worth mentioning that even more generally, Stengers’ conception of ‘cosmopolitics,’ which later took on the term ‘ecology of practices’ (see Stengers 2005a), has been developed in critical relation to a Kantian political project. In explaining the problem of universal laws, be it epistemological or political, Stengers writes that the methodological law or the Kantian ‘tribunal’, which can examine practices under the pre-determined rules they must obey, can only be an instrument of war, acting against everything that attempts to break those rules (Stengers 2010, 1:80). As such, her take on Kant and her idea of methodological instability of aesthetics differs from post-Marxist elaborations of aesthetics, for instance, Jacques Rancière’s notion of Kant’s aesthetic equality. For more on these divergences, see Rybačiauskaitė 2019.

But what exactly does Stengers mean by defining the ecology of practices and the role of an ecologist in contrast with gardening and a vivarium creation? Stengers writes that the ecology of practices is specific in the way practices introduce and justify themselves among others: “the way they define their requirements and obligations, the way they are described, the way they attract interest, the way they are accountable to others, are interdependent and belong to the same temporality” (Stengers 2010, 1:56–57). In the ecology of invention or creation of practice, there is no transcendent stance of stable categories defining that practice, such as truth or beauty; thus, there is no safe position of distance to sort out and make a judgement. As Sehgal puts it, in Stengers’ entanglement of *oïkos* (or household and hearth) and *polis* (or milieu), there is nothing more but “pragmatics of *reciprocal capture*” (Sehgal 2018, 123). Accordingly, it seems that, unlike the gardener who has the rule to judge, namely, a power to freely select, arrange, prune, or eliminate if needed, and the vivarium creator who only observes without engagement, the ecologist takes the unstable position of a curator or a caretaker who acknowledges other in its relational becoming and is aware of mutual dependence.

The idea of relational becoming and mutual dependence characteristic of the ecology of practices brings us back to gardening, soil, and compost metaphors. If we think of ecological critical practice and aesthetics in terms of gardening in any way, it could be the kind of gardening that creates soil. As far as I am aware, Stengers does not refer, at least not broadly, to soil-making, but the idea to employ the notions of ‘soil’ and ‘compost’ to recreate our critical practices is used in some close contexts. For instance, Latour, in his “Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto” (2010), besides other forms of construction, mentions the matter of compost and de-composition (Latour 2010, 474) and Puig de la Bellacasa draws on soil sciences to rethink the temporalities of inter-species practices (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Barad also links her diffraction methodology with the processes happening in soil cultivation. For Barad, the ‘response-able’ writing practices could be like the work of compost worms when they are “turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing the new life into it” (Barad 2014, 168).

Similarly, it is possible to make a parallel between a figure of a burrowing worm and a writer or researcher who engages in writing. We used to think of writers and researchers as somewhat outside their objects while observing them, or to put it more precisely,—we used to believe that this space outside is right where the writers and researchers belong. The metaphors of soil or

compost for critical writing challenge this strict separation between inside and outside and bring the writer closer to the material of the phenomena they are busy reworking and burrowing through. In the framework of soil and compost, the writer is already entangled within the phenomena they write about and share the same temporality. This prevents their possible self-assumption of spatial and temporal separation from their environment and invites them to raise eco-critical awareness, attentiveness, and care questions. It opens the area of concerns that could be introduced as trying to think and imagine more self-aware critical practices, including very general and little specified questions of how we write, interpret, forge relationships, and create habitats that would slowly unfold and turn into aerated environments.

Considering the sense of ecology of practices, even more than to a figure of a burrowing worm, a writer could be linked to a figure of a healthy soil builder. In the first part of her *Cosmopolitics*, Stengers describes ecology as a “science of multiplicities” that aims to attend to the consequences of meaning-creation and its possibly hierarchical structuring, both intentional and unintentional. She writes,

Ecology is, then, the science of multiplicities, disparate causalities, and unintentional creations of meaning. The field of ecological questions is one where the consequences of the meanings we create, the judgments we produce and to which we assign the status of “fact,” concerning what is primary and what is secondary, must be addressed immediately, whether those consequences are intentional or unforeseen (Stengers 2010, 1:34–35).

As we can see, Stengers’ definition of ‘ecology’ concerns the material consequences of meaning-creation and implies the need for continuous effort to revisit the patterns of those consequences. The attentive activity of attending to the uneven structures of relation-making seems akin to the kind of undertakings of a healthy soil builder. According to the writer and ecologist Catriona Sandilands—, and this is what many gardeners already know,—garden world-making is related to a multiplicity of more-than-human desires, and this life brewing in the garden can sometimes be entirely out of hand and unwanted (Cluitmans 2021, 180). Therefore, to create favourable growing conditions, it is necessary to take into account the needs and desires of many different organisms and consider their inter-dependencies but also dependencies on such fundamental actors as light, cold, warmth, water, air, minerals, etc. Dirt is not the same habitat as cultivated soil; thus, favourable growing conditions require much more than getting one’s hands dirty. It demands a particular knowledge of the co-influences of different organisms

and the ability to ‘curate’ the consequences of those influences. The idea of ‘ecology’ as a critical and aesthetic practice, thus, can be linked with the notion of soil or compost building, as both activities require the informed awareness and sensibility of multiple others without excluding the role of protagonists themselves.

1.3. The Reciprocal Capture and Symbiosis

So far, we have discussed three types of critical or ethico-aesthetic environments given by Stengers in which a particular kind of relationship-making is dominant. We considered the ‘ecology’ of practices as in-between settings where only the *dissensual* or *consensual* character of relationship-making prevails. On one side of the pole, the kind of critical practice is defined by the relationship of negative judgment-making. And on the other side of the pole, the relationship of assumingly neutral submission is more prominent. Enfolding the notion of a *con-sensual* or reciprocal relationship-making that also can define the critical environment and is promoted by Stengers, I suggest diving further into what it means to be fully aware of mutual dependency so it would be possible to make well-informed choices and not barely judgments. For this reason, looking at the terms Stengers brings from evolutionary biology, specifically American evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis’s symbiosis theory, is helpful. Similarly, as in the case of the soil cultivating metaphors, here the notion of ‘symbiotic’ relationships helps to define the concept of ‘ecology’ and reciprocal relationship-making in contrast to ‘parasitic’ or ‘mutualist’ relationships, which entail respectively *dissensual* and *consensual* character.

Let us start by looking closer at the “pragmatics of *reciprocal capture*” (Sehgal 2018, 123), which can be easily confused with submission or some devotion if we look at it from a traditionally perceived caring position. Instead, as a description of the type of relationship, this concept is very similar to the notion of aesthetics of a territory discussed in Elkaïm and Stengers’ article “Du mariage des hétérogènes [On the marriage of heterogeneous]” (1994), which is central to Stengers’ interpretation of Guattari’s aesthetics to be discussed later in this work. As in the aesthetics of a territory, the concept of “reciprocal capture” refers to the kind of “marriage” of heterogeneous elements, which is the onto-aesthetic question of mutual exchange and becoming. Likewise, the specificity of this relationship and its difference from

other relationships between different beings, such as parasitism or predation³¹, is defined by Stengers as “a *dual* process of identity construction” produced by the beings involved (Stengers 2010, 1:36). It means that regardless of their distinct ways of construction, which can differ and often differ significantly, the relationship of a reciprocal capture co-invents identities, or the identities are co-invented by it, in the process of “each integrat[ing] a reference to the other for their own benefit” (Stengers 2010, 1:36).

The notion of “reciprocal capture” itself has been derived from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “double capture”, used to describe the type of relation or exchange when two very different beings from different kingdoms are setting up the ‘marriage’. For instance, they use the well-known example of a ‘marriage’ of a wasp and an orchid as heterogenous elements forming a “rhizome.” According to Deleuze and Guattari, in the case of the connection of a wasp and an orchid,—when a wasp becomes a piece of an orchid’s reproductive apparatus, what is happening is not a double signification but a double “capture of code”, “surplus value of code”, “an increase in valence”, or “a veritable becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 10). In the broader notion of a “double capture,” as Deleuze and Guattari use, every relationship is perceived as an event. That implies that every knot consisting of some heterogeneous elements would make a case for a double capture.³² But Stengers proposes the concept of “reciprocal capture” in a slightly narrower sense, as it explicitly describes “a double capture that creates a relationship endowed with a certain stability”, especially this common in the production of relations of ‘marriage’ (Stengers 2010, 1:266). Thus, it does not apply to all kinds of relationships defined by a mutual exchange but only to those to whom the possibility of knot-making gives specific strength or stability.

The symbiotic relations are vital to what Stengers considers as relationships of reciprocal capture. They refer to the positive relationships in which each party is interested in supporting and being supported by each other, as their well-being and elaboration are reciprocally dependent on each other’s efforts. It is perhaps no coincidence that Stengers brings up the symbiotic relations, putting them in contrast to situations of *consensus* since, as Margulis has observed, for a long time, symbiosis has been confused and

³¹ The predatory kind of relationship Stengers describes as a “relation of capture” or a “cameral capture”. For more about it, see the sub-chapter “Symbioses” at Stengers 2018a, 72–80.

³² Stengers uses Deleuze’s example of an interview as being such a broad double capture or, as she writes, “any situation where one might be tempted to speak of an *exchange*” Stengers 2010, 1:266.

equated with a relationship of mutual aid or mutualism in general—as “a beneficial relationship between organisms of different species” (Margulis 1997, 297). Too narrow a perception of what ‘beneficial’ can entail and how to measure it has often led to situations where the cases of symbiosis remained unrecognised. Margulis has argued that since the beginning of the 20th century and later, symbiosis and mutualism have been perceived as “political slogans” and received very little attention, let alone the possibility of being seen as creating “heritable variation” in the evolution (Margulis 1997, 300).

This distinction between mutualism and symbiosis and the latter’s ability to create “heritable variations” or even significant biological discontinuities—, in short, the new ways of existence— addressed in Stengers’ ecology of practices. As she explains: “The “ecological” perspective invites us not to mistake a *consensus* situation, where the population of our practices finds itself subjected to criteria that transcend their diversity in the name of shared intent, a superior good, for an ideal peace,” and then suggests that instead: “The “symbiotic agreement” is an event, the production of new, immanent modes of existence [...]” (Stengers 2010, 1:35). Like this, Stengers suggests the third way between usually perceived *consensus* and *dissensus*; political, ontological, and aesthetical agreements and disagreements. In the case of symbiotic relationships between humans, non-humans, more-than-humans, and their practices, there is a kind of *con-sensual* reciprocal capture at work, which enables the creation of new modes of existence.

Accordingly, the “ecological” perspective questions the idea of “disinterested *consensus*” and argues for a different notion of an ‘interest,’ which implies a positive sense of being vulnerable to the attraction of the other. As Stengers puts it, the ‘interest’ deriving from *inter-esse* (to be situated between) primarily refers to making a link rather than being an obstacle; and thus, “[t]hose who let themselves become interested in an experimental statement accept the hypothesis of a link that engages them, and this link is defined by a very precise claim, which prescribes a duty and confers a right” (Stengers 2000, 95). Stengers writes that contrary to what is implicit in the idea of authority transcending interests such as the True, the Good, or the Beautiful, interests themselves do not have this kind of power to “orient humans in unanimous direction, to assure their agreement.” And precisely because they do not have such unifying authority, they can be linked to many other disparate interests (Stengers 2000, 95–96). Thus, the well-informed choice of *con-sensus* or a symbiotic agreement implies the interest which resists being predefined as it is hard to grasp in advance and is being created as a part of new modes of existence.

The interests in this sense have a similar function to Latour's "matters of concern," which he has proposed in contrast to "matters of fact" (e.g., Latour 2004b; 2008). Perhaps it has been created in a reciprocal relationship to Stengers' work as both argue for the "empirical cosmopolitics"³³, but their approaches have specific differences. Latour's need to talk about matters of concern seems to stem from his thinking of the agency of things, and thus, he aims to emphasise their aesthetic activity or affectivity. "Things that gather cannot be thrown at you like objects," writes Latour (2004b, 234)³⁴. Unlike still-standing objects, matters of concern "have to be liked, appreciated, tasted, experimented upon, prepared, put to the test" (Latour 2008, 39). Curiously, while Stengers is also concerned with the moving power of matters of concern, as María Puig de la Bellacasa rightly notices, Stengers, more than Latour, is attentive to the violence of composition and its limitations; she opens the space even for those who have not power to represent themselves, e.g., "victims" and "idiots" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, 101; Watson 2014, 89). For Stengers, matters of concern invite us to engage, feel differently but also act differently—hesitate, pay attention, and relate, which is to experience a slow care process.³⁵

³³ In his article "Derrida, Stengers, Latour, and Subalternist Cosmopolitics" (2014), Matthew C. Watson convincingly distinguishes three kinds of cosmopolitics: "critical cosmopolitics" (Derrida), "empirical cosmopolitics" (Latour, Stengers), and "subalternist cosmopolitics" (Chakrabarty, Guha, Spivak). Empirical cosmopolitics points out the "ethical and empirical paralysis" of the critical project of hospitality; however, according to Watson, from the subalternist ethics view, it lacks a stronger emphasis on the importance of openness to the unknown, including the unexpected guests, and on the ways of attending the violence inherent to the activity of hosting and representing. For more, see Watson 2014.

³⁴ It is noteworthy to mention that to illustrate the tendency of simplification and purification, Latour uses the case of philosophical objects. He ironically notices that in their arguments, philosophers often use very simple carriers for pouring liquids, such as pots, mugs, and jugs, or some plain rocks which can be easily thrown and caught. Still, according to Latour, the thinking process could take much more diverse paths if philosophers would challenge themselves with more complicated or more specific things that, for example, scientific studies have to deal with (such as dolomite instead of a simple rock) (Latour 2004b, 233–34). He argues that there are things which resist being turned into matters of fact so easily, and if we consider their long and complex histories, they could be perceived as matters of concern. For more on this point, see Latour 2004b.

³⁵ Stengers' notion of "matters of concern" is closer to what Puig de la Bellacasa, in her analysis of Latour, proposed to call "matters of care." In both cases, there is a

Thus, another way Stengers promotes revisiting the idea of critical practices as having solely *dissensual* or *consensual* character is by specifying the possibility of relationship-making as reciprocal capture. The notion of reciprocal capture suggests the ways of relationship-making that are not in a predetermined manner necessarily damaging or beneficial, positive or negative, but are defined by their capability of creating new increases of valence and immanent modes of existence. In other words, the critical environment populated by the relationships of ‘reciprocal capture’ or the events of ‘symbiotic agreements’ can be characterised by the possibility of reciprocal identity construction or reconstruction and mutual transformation. Unlike negative judgment or disinterested/neutral agreement, the well-informed choice of *con-sensus* implies the ground for interest, concern, link, or attachment to be made within that very symbiotic relationship itself. Such agreements are made by slowly gathering knowledge through various acts of relating and establishing a novel knot of mutual dependence. As mentioned, these three kinds of relationship-making are also characteristic of practices; thus, in what follows, let us look into Stengers’ analysis of practical examples.

1.4. The Vulnerability of Practices: From Physics to Philosophy

Like in the becoming between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans, Stengers argues that similar immanent difference-making exists in the reciprocal construction of the identities of practices. As we already know, Stengers’ idea of the ecology of practices came out first as a reaction to the discussions over questions of authority and legitimacy of science, better known as ‘science wars’ in the United States in the mid-1990s. Being trained as a chemist and known for her collaboration with a physical chemist, Ilya Prigogine Stengers has been associated with scientific practices and science philosophy. Thus, the questions of polarising *dissensus* and submissive *consensus* emerge first as kinds of case studies in the history of scientific practices, such as the inquiry into the status of ‘physical reality’ in physics. However, these studies overlap with Stengers’ interest in psychoanalysis and

particular awareness of the complexity and belonging expressed, but “matters of care” are much more action-orientated and have a stronger sense of commitment. As Puig de la Bellacasa writes: “One can make oneself concerned, but ‘to care’ more strongly directs us to a notion of material doing. Understanding caring as something we do extends a vision of care as an ethically and politically charged *practice*, one that has been at the forefront of feminist concern with devalued labours” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, 90). For more on this distinction, see Puig de la Bellacasa 2011; 2017.

its attempt to become scientific at the expense of hypnosis (Pignarre 2023, 35). Stengers' recent work on the vulnerable state of practices in the era of the Anthropocene also includes a notice of the apolitical *consensus* that defines the troubling state of knowledge production within universities, among other institutions.

Let us start with the types of polarising *dissensus* and submissive *consensus* within the practices of physics. In her "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices" (2005), Stengers distinguishes two kinds of identity developments in modern physics. The first is based on the 'exclusive position' of judgment regarding the notion of 'physical reality' over other notions of reality, including those in other sciences.³⁶ According to Stengers, physicists have felt they must secure their position or their practice will be destroyed. By equating the question of reality with that of reason or rationality, they have given ultimatums, such as: "Either you are with us and accept physical reality the way we present it, or you are against us, and an enemy of reason" (Stengers 2005a, 184). The issue with similar means of injunctions is that they limit the number of choices and the possibility of questions or options being shaped by others. The critical judgment tool then invites the only remaining option: obeying. This situation of defining oneself as a practice using an ultimatum can thus be related to the notion of *dissensus*, where relationship-making is based on negating others and other practices.

The second kind of identity development of modern physics relates to a more general process of state subjugation, in which physics, among other scientific practices, according to Stengers, is instrumentalised while being perceived as a part of a "broader intellect," having to solve the problems defined by the same benefits and productivity (Stengers 2005a, 184). State subjugation presupposes predefined measurements that force practices to obey, if not higher 'values' such as reason or rationality, then to such ideas as the more general value of scientific practices or very concrete ends to which scientific practices should aspire in general. Thus, on the one hand, physics has threatened other less compatible practices with its imposing view of 'physical reality.' Still, on the other hand, it is possible that it was done from the position of submissive *consensus*—as minding to the requirements of a "broader intellect." In this precarious situation of practices being endangered by various unifying requirements, the ecological perspective of *con-sensus* proposes the symbiotic way of self-creation, which promotes the awareness

³⁶ For more concrete examples of predatory domination over specific facts or submission for values within the history of modern physics, see Stengers 2006; 2010; 2011a.

and possible recreation of one's own 'requirements' and 'obligations' to the environment and other practices.

Regarding other practices, Stengers, for instance, does not hesitate to discuss the situation of philosophical practices, which is inevitably linked to university management politics and the knowledge economy more generally.³⁷ While abandoning the philosophical references in some of her latest work and making them more accessible to think and act with (e.g., Stengers 2015; 2018a), Stengers, like Guattari, addresses a similar issue of the shrinkage of political communities and promotes the possibility of (de)territorialisation of political practices.³⁸ The need for more plurality or diversity in posing questions and taking on political roles is very present when facing crises and emergencies. It is also apparent in at least some current branches of continental philosophy. This rhetoric urges us to be proactive and act immediately against the effects of environmental devastation and exploitation or what Jaia Syvitski (2012) calls "the cumulative impact of civilisation."³⁹

³⁷ See, for instance, the chapter "We Who Are at the University" in Stengers and Despret 2014. Here, Stengers and Despret discuss some of the externally imposed and dominating principles within the politics of university management, such as competition, production of useful knowledge, and objective evaluation. According to them, in the field of philosophy, this comes down to very specific criteria of excellence, such as the ability to publish in high-impact philosophical journals (Stengers and Despret 2014, 16).

³⁸ What is meant here by politics or "political practices" applies to the politics of various practices, including scientific practices, performed internally and externally while relating to other practices and political bodies. Stengers distinguishes between politics and what is perceived as "political politics." As she puts it herself in *The Invention of Modern Science*, "Just as human politics is not reducible to the politics of baboons, the "politics of reason" I am trying to characterise is not reducible to the games of power we today associate with "political politics" (Stengers 2000, 64). Thus, my concern in this work is also not a "political politics" but a variety of political practices, ranging from knowledge production at the universities to agreement-makings at the Conferences of the Parties (COP) at the UN Climate Change Conferences.

³⁹ This is another way of describing the effects of what has been recently called 'an era of Anthropocene.' Since its first grasps in geological terms, further definitions of Anthropocene come not only from the field of Geology but also the broader interdisciplinary domain of Earth system science and deploy an array of evidence in addition to stratigraphic evidence, such as the anticipated sea-level rise due to anthropogenic warming, large-scale shifting of sediment or rapid rates of species extinction. The broader notions of human impact on the planet would involve even

Yet, an overreaching sense of powerlessness constantly prevents us from taking action—beyond the limits of a capitalist toolkit. This feeling of powerlessness and inability to act, which for Stengers is the direct ‘political affect’ of capitalist or state mobilisation, can also be seen as one of the symptoms of the politics of submission or *consensus*.

Let us use a few examples of such political mobilisation to see how the politics of submission or *consensus* can be linked with political disarmament and a lack of political plurality. At the beginning of her book *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (2015), Stengers describes the recurring calls for mobilisation for economic growth. No matter the changing eras of capitalism, she writes, we are constantly facing the challenge to “relaunch economic growth,” and the order repeats: “We have no choice, we must grit our teeth, accept that times are hard and mobilise for the economic growth outside of which there is no conceivable solution. If ‘we’ do not do so, others will take advantage of our lack of courage and confidence” (Stengers 2015, 18). The mobilisation for economic growth also manifests itself as the imperative for the productivity of workers: “[it] demands that we accept the ineluctable character of the sacrifices imposed by global economic competition—growth or death” (Stengers 2015, 23) What is important then is that the mobilising narrative of economic growth determines and downsizes the number of political choices. It reduces them into “infernal alternatives,” such as “growth or death,” even though our future selves may “define this type of growth as irresponsible, even criminal.”⁴⁰

Yet, as economic exploitation outlines only a very small part of capitalism, Stengers emphasises using examples of less traceable mobilisation that might result from capitalist logic’s absorption into various areas of life. Such a mobilising story that has already succeeded in the academic and artistic realms is the story of the Anthropocene.⁴¹ I write ‘succeeded’ because recent years

more characteristics, such as global landscape transformations, urbanisation, and overall ecosystem disturbances of terrestrial and marine environments (Syvitski et al. 2020).

⁴⁰ What is assumed here is several devastating effects on the environment caused by capitalist solutions, such as “growing social inequality, pollution, poisoning by pesticides, exhaustion of raw materials, groundwater depletion, etc.” (Stengers 2015, 18). For more on the political mobilisation of capitalism and “infernal alternatives,” see Pignarre and Stengers 2011.

⁴¹ It also generated many reactions, criticisms, and propositions of alternative ‘stories’ such as Capitalocene (Moore 2015), Plantationocene and Chthulucene (Haraway 2015), each being concerned with different reasons and kinds of evidence for the decisive role of human activity on earth.

have seen a high rise within academic and artistic knowledge production in taking up the mission of dealing with catastrophic climate changes brought by the era of the Anthropocene. According to Stengers, the term ‘Anthropocene’ refers to discovering that the climate is not a self-stabilising force but a sensitive, disturbing, and ominously complex reality that threatens us today. But it also implies a missionary story of the power of Man: “the epic story of the “Age of Man,” of Man having “attained” the status of a geological force and now being required to shoulder the corresponding responsibility, learning to rationally govern the earth” (Stengers 2017, 384).

For Stengers, the Anthropocene story suggests a mission that traps us in the impossible task of taking responsibility for the whole planet, and thus, it is an apolitical mission. It generates a sense of powerlessness while asking to deal with a too-big and abstract task. But it is also apolitical in that it determines or even imposes the choices and solutions to be taken. As she claims, it asks to agree that the “problem” has to be left to those who are responsible for it, meaning the state and capitalist powers,” even if they are not equipped to take care of it (Stengers 2017, 386–87). And eventually, such a mission may lead to “an authoritarian disciplinary regime with no tolerance for troublemakers” (Stengers 2017, 389). To sum up, the mobilising story of Anthropocene, like the separating manner of “infernal alternatives,” contributes to a problem of atrophy of *praxis* or, in Stengers’ words, it “kills politics” because it reduces the number of possible political actors or carries them toward pre-determined political decisions.

Stengers’ analyses of how various scientific practices relate with each other, among other human, non-human, and more-than-human bodies, show the idea of the environmental dominance of similar structures, which has been indicated previously. One powerful way of relating is by using the knot of *dissensus*—by approaching others in the terms of negation: using an ultimatum, “infernal alternatives,” or simply a unifying requirement, *order-word* which enables one to put oneself into an even structure with others. Another way of relating that populates our institutional environments is the knot of *consensus*. It is a state of submitting to that ultimatum, those “infernal alternatives,” and that unifying, internally or externally imposed requirement. What is evident in these practical analyses is that they show the tight relation between the two kinds of relationships of *dissensus* and *consensus*. One kind of situation and relation-making necessarily requires another one. It is even possible to impose *dissensus* and be submitted to *consensus* simultaneously. The state of the latter also prevents practices from being able to act politically and contributes to the shrinkage of political communities. But is it possible

the political version of *consensus*? In what follows, let us tackle Stengers' practical ecology proposal for practices.

1.5. Gaia and The Ecology of Writing

In *We Are Divided* (2020), Stengers differentiates between relationships of dependence and interdependence, which I suggest considering as relationships of *consensus* and political version of *consensus* (or *con-sensus*). Stengers claims that during modernity, we have developed not the relationships of interdependence but “ever longer chains of dependence.” The chains of dependence refer to what was previously introduced as a ‘political affect’ of mobilisation. These are the relationships that, in Stengers’ words, define “soldiers as beings whose behaviour should depend solely upon the orders they receive, communicated down a chain of command,” so the desired result would be achieved as soon as possible (Stengers 2020b). The relationships of interdependence, on the contrary, presume their actors to be beings who principally depend on each other and, thus, are in the process of becoming “thanks to, alongside and at the risk of others.” Their actors share the understanding that they are mutually enabling each other and furthering their common aims.

This feeling of interdependence, according to Stengers, is a basis for political creation. It requires an effort of cultivation, of working it through, as it is susceptible and subject to change. Such a proposal implies that it is not a difference or conflict that is a basis for political *praxis* but an attempt to work it through a co-creation. Conversely, mobilising for a common aim can be a means of political becoming if interdependency is acknowledged, concerns are co-created, and no strict directions are pre-given. Thus, though Stengers recognises the policing nature of mobilisation and the possibly destructive inclinations of narratives co-produced with it, the alternative she proposes is not to abandon the possibility of working together entirely or claim that only individual struggle matters. Quite contrary, she sees value in what, later, with Guattari, we will call a “good activism” and proposes a ‘mobilising’ story of Gaia. This story seems to be coming from searching for another, less anthropocentric and more empowering understanding of the earth, in which it is no longer just “an object of destructive predation” but “an awesome protagonist,” in fact, the main character of the story and not a part of its background (Stengers 2017, 386). How does the story of Gaia fulfil the idea of political *consensus* and enable another type of critical writing?

Let us start with the point that Stengers completely recreates the notion of Gaia, which initially appeared at the start of the 1970s in the Gaia hypothesis

by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. The scientists of chemistry and microbiology respectively proposed that by interrelating with living organisms, the earth shapes a synergetic, self-regulating, and self-maintaining system (Lovelock and Margulis 1974). Unlike scientists who first and foremost emphasise the self-regulating processes within the living organisms and in terms of various environmental variables, Stengers claims a need to perceive Gaia as “a being” and a much less peaceful one. According to her, “We are no longer dealing (only) with a wild and threatening nature, nor with a fragile nature to be protected, nor a nature to be mercilessly exploited” (Stengers 2015, 46). Stengers’ Gaia is the touchy one, “the one who intrudes,” and thus, not the one who would care about our excuses.⁴²

How is this story any different from other mobilising stories? Alongside the differently placed roles, it does not impose the pre-defined aims one should sacrifice. It seeks to imply a situation of creating interdependence and not submitting oneself to an unconsented form of dependence. But how do you make consent with Gaia, “an unprecedented or a forgotten form of transcendence,” deprived of any “noble qualities” that would make her function as an arbiter, guarantor, or resource (Stengers 2015, 47)? Stengers proposes that one may act as a villager act when they encounter the power they cannot fully control or what Greeks were doing before they “conferred on their gods a sense of the just and unjust” and before “attributed to them a particular interest in our destinies” (Stengers 2015, 45). This way of acting involves a sense of modesty: an awareness of certain limitations of oneself and others and eagerness to build a fabric of interdependence by “paying attention” or “being careful.”⁴³ Unlike other forms of transcendence (such as capitalism⁴⁴), Gaia does not overcome *dissensus* or any other form of conflict

⁴² Stengers’ Gaia is not the only form of Gaia that appears in the current theorisations of the Anthropocene. For instance, Latour proposes another concept of Gaia that instead expands its scientific notion and focuses on the possibility of rediscovery and recomposition of the Earth. For more on Latour’s idea of Gaia, see, e.g., Latour 2017. For a comparison of Stengers’ and Latour’s understanding of Gaia, see Stengers, Davis, and Turpin 2013 and Pignarre 2023.

⁴³ The French expression “*faire attention*” is more capacious than the English equivalents: it contains at least two different significations that can be used here interchangeably, “to pay attention” and “be careful.” Interestingly, the French word “*faire*” covers both forms of activity analysed in this work; it means both “to make” and “to do.”

⁴⁴ Stengers refers to capitalism as a form of transcendence, claiming that it is a “power that captures, segments and redefines always more and more dimensions of what

but invites for a possibly political *consensus*, which indicates “a sensing together”: mainly, sensing together what the place or the issue that people gather around demands (Stengers 2017, 391). Thus, the Gaia story aims both to mobilise or gather together towards action and then not to provide us with any clear answers or *order-words* simultaneously.

We could say that the capability of the story not to provide any clear answers or strict directions equals opening the space of thinking and imagining for oneself. Yet human capabilities of sense-making and imagining are just as limited as immanently situated. Gaia is only one name to describe what is intruding on when facing climate instability, but its formulation signals a more general problem of creation or, as Kristupas Sabolius puts it, Stengers’ Gaia requires a radically different imagination (Sabolius 2019, 183). To be able to act creatively (and politically) with whatever intrusion comes at hand, one needs to address their own “deeply ingrained habits of thought” (Stengers, Davis, and Turpin 2013, 176) and embrace the possibility of a self-transformative change. But this change can only happen in active relationship-making to others. According to Stengers, no one has been prepared for what she calls “Gaia’s intrusion”; hence, it is meant to support the creation of bonds and the feeling of a need for each other (Stengers and Schaffner 2019, 26).

By insisting on (re)creation of politics, Stengers also calls for a different understanding of an act of creation— *poiesis*, which is perceived as a collective activity. It implies a notion of shared creativity characteristic of sympoietic systems⁴⁵ and another imaginary activity. As Sabolius explains it, “within the sympoietic regime, the common field of potentiality plays a more fundamental role in shaping its constituents than any individual part,” and thus, to imagine sympoietically means not “to indulge in your dreams”, but instead “to hear, to respond, to open up creatively for an uncertainty of

makes up our reality, our lives, our practices, in its service.” (Stengers 2015, 53). For more, see Stengers 2015.

⁴⁵ The term “sympoietic systems” refers to the distinction between autopoietic and sympoietic systems proposed in 1998 by environmental studies scholar Beth Dempster, which also informs Donna Haraway’s concept of *sympoiesis* (see Haraway 2016). Unlike *autopoietic* systems, *sympoietic* systems do not have self-defined spatial and temporal boundaries and are more amenable to spontaneous change. Haraway’s notion of *sympoiesis* is also crucial to Stengers. When Stengers describes the process of creating the fabric of interdependence, *sympoiesis* comes into the hand, as it entails the similar meaning of “faire avec, ou faire grâce aux autres, et au risqué des autres” [to do with, or to do thanks to, and at risk of others] (Stengers and Schaffner 2019, 25).

environment that includes us in the processes of making-together” (Sabolius 2021, 84–85). Similarly, engaging in *praxis* sympoietically suggests an activity of co-creation that cannot happen without a bunch of intermediaries, which, in Stengers’ view, shake our habits of thought but also (re)(in)form them so a different kind of political imagination could be cultivated. Taking the example of such an intermediary for thinking and imagining as Gaia, we can see that in political *consensus*-making, dependence on others opens as a condition for, rather than an obstacle to, a more radical imagination.

Besides and additionally to the story of Gaia, Stengers suggests the critical tools of “reclaiming” and “relaying.” These concepts, like the story of Gaia, are created as a reaction to the destruction of practices and the pollution of our discursive and material territory. For instance, Stengers mentions “reclaiming” when proposing the idea of a slow science and noticing the disastrous impact on research practice that has emerged with the knowledge economy system, redefining the terms of research practice in many universities in Europe, the US and elsewhere. Stengers writes, “Reclaiming always begins by accepting that we are sick rather than guilty and understanding how our environment makes us sick. From this perspective, we might consider the way in which our universities, once so proud of their autonomy, have, in the name of the market, accepted the imperative of competition and benchmarking evaluation” (Stengers 2018a, 121). These conceptual tools thus are proposed to recover from the destruction of the environment partly caused by the “thought-forms” of domination and subjugation of various practices and by our present inability to account for the consequences of knowledge-making.

Following Stengers, it seems necessary to start from oneself and ask what the critical writing practice could look like if doing it from the ecological perspective or the attempt at interdependent relationship-making. It is no coincidence that in her article “Reclaiming Animism” (2012), Stengers suggests that the first step towards recovering from the destruction of practices must be acknowledging the indeterminacy of writing experience. It means that in the case of critical writing, Stengers’ proposal of political *consensus*-making translates into acknowledging the presence of others. This presence of others could be perceived on at least two levels. First, it is possible to attend to the company of others by looking back—by actively and continuously remembering others and noticing the importance of the stories of others who are entangled in the issue or the situation one is concerned about. Second, we can also acknowledge others from a closer perspective, such as noticing the immediate environment and various characters influencing the writing as it unfolds.

Let us start by discussing the role of returning to a more distant presence in Stengers' thought. Stengers' practices of "reclaiming" and "relaying" imply a sense of coming back toward the familiar: that is, remembering what was taken away or destroyed, and this way, regaining the strength to create something again. There is a reference to the demolition of practices related to the consequences of modernisation and the practices which were disowned in the name of progress and reason. Even more generally, it can be thought of in relation to reclaiming the commons or recovering what we have been separated from or the separation itself (Stengers 2012). However, reclaiming is a different operation than just 'returning,' as engaging the past and, at the same time, meeting the present and future is not neutral or isolated but material or, in Donna Haraway's and Karen Barad's terms, diffractive activity. As Stengers puts it herself, the process of reclaiming the past is not "a matter of dreaming of resurrecting some "true," "authentic" tradition, of healing what cannot be healed, of making whole what has been destroyed." It is instead "a matter of reactivating it" (Stengers 2018b, 103).⁴⁶

The continuous manner of Stengers' conceptual tool is induced by involving the notion of "relaying."⁴⁷ Stengers claims that reclaiming as an

⁴⁶ One of the characteristic examples of such reactivation could be the idea and practice of recipes. In Stengers' framework, the idea of recipes could be another way of writing theory because, by definition, they must be reinvented and at least slightly modified each time they are used. Similarly, philosophical ideas and concepts could be created not to define reality but to invite to reinvent it. For more, see Pignarre and Stengers 2011, 133.

⁴⁷ Because of its notion of continuity and the underlying question of justice or ethics, it shares an affinity with Barad's concept of "re-turning." It is a practice of coming back and re/un/doing what has been just fixed by asking the questions of justice at every level of meaning-making. For Barad, similarly to Stengers, the questions of justice are already within scientific practices. However, putting them into light in the relational research process is critical to creating techniques or devising apparatuses (Barad 2020, 124, 139). Then, within the act of re-turning, not only are we turning back to the questions of justice and fixing them up by the process of writing, but also, the meanings themselves are constantly reworked—using various discursive-material circumstances of the writing process. It involves, for instance, rethinking the conditions of understanding the phenomenon in question, how the relationships were built around it, and which situations and actors contributed to its meaning-making. In other words, it is suggested that the writing apparatus would also involve taking responsibility and (or) response-ability, enabling us to rethink the effect of the meanings produced or, in the case of research practices, specifically, the consequences of the writing process. For more about the resonances between the practices of

experimental operation needs critical attention, but this attention should differ from the activity of judging or “reflecting on” (Stengers 2017, 396). The difference between a reflective researcher and a relayer is that a relayer not only defines or evaluates but also adds to the question created and becomes responsible or accountable for it, as research is a collective process and usually engages many different human, non-human, and more-than-human actors. Thus, since the shared creation of meaning can be a volatile and unintentional process, Stengers adds to reclaiming the notion of relaying—the concern arising from the need to attend to the effects or consequences of meaning-making. Her attention to the impact of meaning or knowledge-making corresponds to Haraway’s and Barad’s notion of overlapping “patterns of difference” and diffraction methodology.⁴⁸ As Haraway puts it, “A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear but rather maps where the effects of difference appear” (Haraway 1991, 300).⁴⁹

Another way to acknowledge the presence of others is connected to a closer layer of reality—to the very writing practice itself, which can be a livelihood activity for groups of both researchers and artists. First, let us notice that writing in Stengers’ approach is proposed to be understood as an assemblage or *un agencement*. It means that the writing process is shaping, and simultaneously, it is shaped by various material forces such as the keyboard, screen, paper, fingers, ideas, etc. When Stengers describes her writing process, she says, “To write means to be in a very particular cerebral assemblage” (Stengers and Dolphijn 2018, 64). It is cerebral because in the making of the words, they fold, twist, and connect, and this multi-layered

reclaiming & relaying, and re-turning and their link with writing, see Rybačiauskaitė 2022.

⁴⁸ Karen Barad’s apparatus of “re-turning” is devised to revisit the effects of one’s engagements with the world in its becoming. Thus, as such, it implies a need to look back and to do it repeatedly since each engagement produces more and more “patterns of difference.” In the diffractive understanding of knowledge making, the act of repetition does not only make the indeterminate effects or “what gets lost, disperses and multiplies itself” (Derrida 1983, 168) in Jacques Derrida’s account in *Plato’s Pharmacy* (1983), but as an ethico-political tool, it is proposed to be used for revisiting, again and again, these ends, lapses, and slips.

⁴⁹ Curiously, unlike, for instance, in the case of a search for a typical or ideal sort of presentation, here, from a diffractive perspective, there is a notion of collecting, which is vertical rather than horizontal: creation happens not through selecting and putting together into one but through layering: revisiting and adding to.

process is indeed an embodied experience.⁵⁰ Treating the text this way means noticing its animating power and allowing oneself to be animated by it: respect this experience “as not ours, but rather as animating us, making us witness to what is not us” (Stengers, 2012). Writing as reclaiming or relaying in Stengers’ sense, thus, is about transforming the world in its relationality and acknowledging mutual support from both more distant and closer perspectives.

Stengers’ take on the accountability of critical writing also involves acknowledging the shared agency or the optimistic notion of being influenced. This at least two-step ‘art of effects’ implies that one should be aware of one’s power to transform and the ability to be changed and open to such transformation. As Stengers puts it, relaying demands “accepting that what is added can make a difference” and “becoming accountable for the manner of that difference” (Stengers 2017, 396). Suppose we were to consider writing as an activity that draws in not only those who write or are objects of the writerly attention but also those who repeatedly become entangled and are tangled up by the writing process (whether we notice it or not). In that case, we could create writing techniques to respond more carefully to these condensing and enfolding realities. Therefore, having in mind Stengers’ call for honouring the transformative power of what is not us, we can perceive these tools of practice-shaping as demanding not only to actively perform and take up the challenge of changing the environment but, first and foremost, be able to open oneself for transformation.

⁵⁰ The embodied character of writing can be well described and expanded using Karen Barad’s example of a scanning tunnelling microscope (STM). This complex scanning technique requires special conditions such as spotless and stable surfaces, sharp edges, direct light, muted vibrations, etc. In contrast to the formation of a photographic image, it is not enough to point the gaze and press the shutter button here. In STM scanning, image formation is more akin to creating a tactile than a visual image. Just as a blind person uses a white cane to “scan” a landscape relief, a microscope tip is used in the case of STM (Barad 2007, 52). If, for instance, in photography, we can sometimes forget the capturing influence of the photographer and their apparatus on the represented object, then the STM example clearly shows how many variables can be at play in the image-making process. Writing, too, could be perceived as a complex or, in Stengers’ terms, ‘assemblage-like’ process, determined by touch and practical *know-how*. While writing, one mimetically repeats the familiar writing practices but also feels, flips, and collects the words about the matter, contributing to their embodied creation.

To conclude, Stengers' conception of the ecology of practices has come out of tension with arguably less effective (post-)Marxist approaches to a notion of *practice*, "thanks to, alongside and at the risk of other" related points of view—particularly Haraway's and Barad's versions of diffraction methodology. Opposing the idea of critical practices having either *dissensual* or *consensual* character, Stengers' conception of the ecology of practices evolves around the concepts that imply the simultaneous creation of both kinds of relations. They involve the ideas of "reciprocal capture," "symbiotic agreements," and "matter of concern," as opposed to the delimiting view of a "matter of fact" or being disinterested altogether. Practical analyses of the political activity of scientific practices and critical reactions to the demands of the state of Anthropocene in Stengers' work show similar relationship-making models as prevailing. The Gaia story is thus an example of a critical concept that requires making a political *consensus* or an interdependent relationship, which implies both the submission to the idea of taking the initiative and agency in forming one's critical stance concerning that initiative—in other words, both dependent and independent or *consensual* and possibly *dissensual* behaviours. This oscillation between two co-existing ways of political action gives Stengers' concept of a *practice* a relational character. Any practice then is permeable to be destroyed or has open possibilities to be continuously reinvented.

2. THE RELAY OF GUATTARI'S ECOSOPHY

As we already know, Stengers' doubts about the activity of critique and critical reflexivity are in dialogue with several attempts to consider alternatives to (post-)Marxist critical approaches, mainly from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Feminist Technoscience Studies.⁵¹ However, unlike related approaches, which have been primarily emerging in response to the unsettling experiences and the lack of ethics in the field of science, among other reasons, Stengers' perspective has also been evolving closely to Félix Guattari's ecosophy. In other words, it is grounded and elaborated on from a rarely apparent philosophical connection with Guattari's idea of three ecologies and ethico-aesthetic paradigms. This chapter will address the main connection points between Stengers' ecology of practices and Guattari's ecological proposal for the reinvention of practices. They involve the common distrust of Freudo-Marxist perspectives and the urge to create alternatives. On the more conceptual side, both projects share the relational character of creating practices and its double route: possibly *consensual* and *dissensual*—in Guattari's terms, territorialising or deterritorialising—directions of any creative activity. In addition to Guattari's take on *praxis*, though, Stengers opens the possibility of more kinds of (de)territorialising figures, and the artist's role seems less, if not the least, plausible.

2.1. The Continuous Distrust with Freudo-Marxist Discourses

Stengers' writings on the sense of political powerlessness and inability to act—, especially when it comes to writing theory or doing philosophy within the current state of knowledge economy, can share the affinity or be seen as the continuation of similar disappointment with the lack of politics within universities in Guattari's works. The distrust with what Guattari calls the "Marxist discourse" is marked, for instance, in Guattari's book *Three Ecologies* (1989), in which he writes that "[a]lthough Marx's own writings

⁵¹ As mentioned previously, Latour's notion of critique and the urge for its alternatives resonated much in the humanities, among other fields (e.g., Felski and Muecke 2020). Haraway's and Barad's diffraction methodology has also led to many attempts of reading diffractively and rethinking ways of reading & writing in the field more generally (see, e.g., *Parallax* special issue (2014) "Diffracted Worlds—Diffractive Readings: Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities" (B. M. Kaiser, K. Thiele, eds.)).

still have great value, the Marxist discourse has lost its value” (Guattari 2000, 43). For Guattari, the failure of Marxist discourse has manifested itself through the signs of massive extinction of human solidarity, including international solidarity, and the unattended proliferation of destructive political activity⁵². As he writes,

It is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity. A stifling cloak of silence has been thrown over the emancipatory struggles of women, and of the new proletariat: the unemployed, the ‘marginalised’, immigrants (Guattari 2000, 44).

Likewise, Guattari sees the perspective of psychoanalysis and its derivations of Freudianism and Freudo-Marxism as insufficient in providing tools of resistance against mental, social, and environmental devastation. He claims these practices to be trapped in their much ‘safe’ routines and stalled concepts.⁵³ Guattari states the vital role of theoreticians whose narratives and refrains strengthen political passivity. To put it in his words, “a dogmatic ignorance has been maintained by a number of theoreticians, which only serves to reinforce a workerism and a corporatism that have profoundly distorted and handicapped anticapitalist movements of emancipation over the last few decades” (Guattari 2000, 49).⁵⁴ What is called here “a stifling cloak of silence” or “a dogmatic ignorance” refers to a *consensual* kind of politics or, in fact, a lack of politics when the specific value systems and subjective ways of formulating problems are cut down. Thus, the sense of passivity and inability to act politically, which in Stengers’ work is associated with the political effects of mobilisation as a reaction to the current ecological crisis, is also described by Guattari in his *Three Ecologies* (1989), where he claims the

⁵² As one of the examples of social devastation, Guattari mentions unattended Donald Trump’s ‘redevelopments’ in the entire districts of New York and Atlantic City at the time, resulting in unprecedented homelessness (Guattari 2000, 43).

⁵³ Still, despite considering the Marxist discourse and psychoanalytic practices to be dysfunctional, Guattari does not deny the influences of Marx and Freud on the epoch and himself. For instance, he mentions that while creating his “institutional analysis”, he reappropriated certain stances of both of these thinkers (Guattari 1996a, 121–22).

⁵⁴ It is worth mentioning that the Marxist discourse is not the only kind of political theory that reinforces *consensual* politics. Albeit very generally, Guattari also says that structuralism and, afterwards, postmodernism “has accustomed us to a vision of the world drained of the significance of human interventions, embodied as they are in concrete politics and micropolitics” (Guattari 2000, 41).

political limitations of the Freudo-Marxist discourse and the theory more generally.

In Guattari's approach, it can seem that future politics should be based on the opposite of *consensual* politics, the principle of *dissensus* or the conflict that tends to be neutralised by the standard capitalist or state mobilisation policies. Guattari proclaims: "Rather than looking for a stupefying and infantilising *consensus*, it will be a question in the future of cultivating a *dissensus* and the singular production of existence" (Guattari 2000, 51). However, at the same time, Guattari does not only talk about the over-taking political passivity and the conflict-free 'handicapped' movements of emancipation but also suggests the possibility of "an immense site of theoretical recomposition and the invention of new practices" which has opened (Guattari 1995, 58). If we follow Stengers' interpretation, we will see that *con-sensus* ("sensing with") or what I previously indicated as political *consensus* would be the more exact notion of what Guattari proposes here by the cultivation of *dissensus*. In that case, their shared "ecological perspective" can be perceived as implying the importance of both *consensus* and *dissensus*—of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, so far as the becomings of practices respect the mutually invented singularisation and resingularisation.

As if prolonging Guattari's proposition of resingularising and remodelling the individual and collective subjectivities with the help of such practices as "psychoanalysis, institutional analysis, film, literature, poetry, innovative pedagogies, town planning and architecture" (Guattari 1995, 135), Stengers claims the potential of two-fold "aesthetic adventures"⁵⁵ of territorialisation and deterritorialisation carried on by the human activity concerned with "newness" or change, including artistic as well as therapeutic and other kinds

⁵⁵ Besides Guattari's intake on this point, Stengers' thinking was also influenced by the English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), whose philosophy she wrote multiple books on. For instance, the notion of 'adventure' comes from Whitehead's idea of the philosophy beginning from wonder, which could be linked with Socratic questioning in the streets of Athens and the activation of the thought (Stengers 2020a, 12). This point can signify both one tradition's beginning and another's 'unrealised' potential. Stengers claims that if Socrates had not presented himself as a judge, he could have made the divergences of a definition a collective concern, a question of Whitehead's *common sense*" (Stengers 2020a, 11). Elsewhere, Stengers also mentions Plato's idea of a "man being sensible to the Idea" [l'homme est sensible à l'Idée], being "seduced" by the Idea, important to Whitehead's thinking, which could be another close point of departure for ontological aesthetics (see Stengers 2004, 65–69).

of practices (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 150). Stengers' interpretation of the dangers and possibilities of *consensual* activities let us see their affinity in the shared disappointment of the political incapability of "Freudo-Marxist discourses" and the theory more generally. Thus, she has relayed Guattari's invitation for more politically enabling activities in doing philosophy in universities. Nevertheless, Stengers' focus on the possibly double direction of new kinds of *praxis* shows that Guattari's proposal for the cultivation of *dissensus* can be perceived as a more complex set of gestures than a simple effort in negation. This argument can also be confirmed by reconsidering Guattari's idea of "value creation" and cultivating "value-universes."

2.2. The Problem of Values and Valorisation

Guattari's invitation to cultivate *dissensus* is related to "value creation." It is close to what Stengers means by a political *consensus* based on the "matter of concern": interest, link, or attachment created in the process of interdependent relationship-making. Stengers furthers Guattari's notion of "value creation" in her conception of the ecology of practices and continues resisting destructive "modes of valorisation" in her practical analyses of therapeutic techniques (e.g., Stengers 2002a; Nathan and Stengers 2018) or the political state of scientific practices (e.g., Pignarre and Stengers 2011; Stengers 2015; 2018a). Here, value has a similar sense of interest or what has been discussed as a "matter of concern," as it does not imply the unifying authority (as if acting 'in the name of values') but suggests that identities, even the collective identities of practices, through their singularisation and resingularisation of requirements and obligations, create the specific modes of life and thus, specific values—"what counts for [their] mode of life" (Stengers 2010, 1:37). Therefore, it is possible to see Guattari's idea of cultivation of *dissensus* as a creation of political *consensus* in Stengers' ecological perspective, which does not only support the necessity of resistance as a part of political action but also aims for political creation of shared values.

But first, let us see how Guattari defines 'value.' Guattari's idea of value creation is a part of his understanding of subjectivity and how subjectivity could be recreated. In his *Three Ecologies* (1989), Guattari writes,

We must ward off, by every means possible, the entropic rise of a dominant subjectivity. Rather than remaining subject, in perpetuity, to the seductive efficiency of economic competition, we must reappropriate Universes of value, so that processes of singularisation can rediscover their consistency. We need new social and aesthetic practices, new practices of the Self in relation to the

other, to the foreign, the strange—a whole programme that seems far removed from current concerns. And yet, ultimately, we will only escape from the major crises of our era through the articulation of: a nascent subjectivity; a constantly mutating *socius*; an environment in the process of being reinvented (Guattari 2000, 68).

Here, we see that for Guattari, reappropriation and recreation of “Universes of value” is a way of facing different social, mental, and environmental crises. Again, it is evident that in what he calls the “sectorisation and bipolarisation of values” (Guattari 1995, 104), a key role is played by the capitalist policies that neutralise and equalise different “modes of valorisation.” Thus, what is perceived here as a ‘value’ has a specific meaning that can seem unusual given the standard perception of value. As Brian Massumi describes it, bearing in mind the most-sounding formulations of values today, such as “family values” or “democratic values,” it might seem that values should be associated with the meaning of universal and absolute norms (Massumi 2017, 345). Similarly, the invitation to ‘create values,’ like ‘create practices,’ could appear ambiguous, as creation implies flexibility and change. However, in Guattari’s understanding of subjectivity, contrary to standard formulation, values are connected to constant re-articulation of Self and environment. Guattari’s take on value corresponds to the broader shift in contemporary thought of rethinking values when, as Massumi puts it, value “re-all[ies] with the singular, while somehow still provid[es] a compass” (Massumi 2017, 346).

Additionally, Guattari’s notion of value is connected to *praxis*. As we have seen, the recreation of values must happen by creating “new social and aesthetic practices.” The emergence of new practices reflects different values and *vice versa*. Hence, commenting on the new aesthetic practices, Guattari writes, “The Universes of the beautiful, the true and the good are inseparable from territorialised practices of expression. Values only have universal significance to the extent that they are supported by the Territories of practice, experience, of intensive power that transversalise them” (Guattari 1995, 130). Thus, not only do values provide us with some compass, but furthermore, in Guattari’s understanding of subjectivity, values are created “thanks to, alongside and at the risk of others.” Like in the case of what Stengers calls ‘interests,’ values alone do not have authority that can guide individuals towards a “unanimous direction,” but they become links or attachments when the interdependent relationship-making appears, forming a practice. Guattari’s invitation to cultivate *dissensus* and recreate our values and practices can be perceived as having an affirmative element—closer to what, for Stengers, is a

symbiotic agreement, as values ally both with the singular and the practical, and become the question of relation rather than the judgement.

2.3. The Aesthetics of a Territory and Its Affective-Carryings

Another idea of Guattari's ecosophy, relayed in Stengers' ecology of practices, is that *praxis* is a *pathic* creation of a territory⁵⁶ that aesthetically can lead to double routes in one's subjectivity-making. As a definition of a particular type of relationship-making, Stengers' idea of a "reciprocal capture" is very similar to what she proposes as Guattari's "aesthetics of a territory" discussed in Elkaïm and Stengers' article "Du mariage des hétérogènes [On the marriage of heterogeneous]" (1994), which is central to Stengers' interpretation of Guattari's aesthetics and aesthetics more generally. The "reciprocal capture," like the aesthetic creation of a "territory," refers to the "marriage" of heterogeneous elements, which is the onto-aesthetic question of mutual exchange and becoming. In Elkaïm's and Stengers' view, Guattari's concept of a "new aesthetic paradigm" continues the Leibnizian aesthetic tradition as the transformative process of aesthetic relationship-making here also implies the possible changes in one's subjectivity. This connection helps us see that what, for Stengers, is an interdependent relationship-making or a "reciprocal capture" is an affective endeavour. Thus, the creation of practices, too, is primarily affective.

In *The Invention of Modern Science*, Stengers writes that every scientific question as a vector of becoming involves responsibility, but the notion of becoming is more than just ethical. She refers to Guattari's idea of a 'new aesthetic paradigm' to claim that it is instead an aesthetic process in which "*aesthetic* designates first of all a production of existence that concerns one's *capacity to feel*: the capacity to be affected by the world, not in a mode of subjected interaction, but rather in a double creation of meaning, of oneself and the world" (Stengers 2000, 148). Thus, the question of attentive *symbiotic* becoming is an integral part of a complex ethical, aesthetical, and ontological process, the concept of which, as Stengers takes it, draws from Guattari's idea

⁵⁶ It is worth mentioning that the idea of a 'territory' as some other earthy concepts in Guattari's (and co-written with Deleuze) philosophy, such as plateau of intensity and rhizome (see Shaw 2015), could be influenced by George Bateson's thought. In *Steps to An Ecology of Mind* (1972), Bateson emphasises that a map never captures the entirety of a territory, and an individual's control is limited over it (Bateson 1987, 462). Similarly, Guattari's 'territory' is helpful for Stengers, as it implies ungraspability and a lack of ownership.

of ethico-aesthetic paradigms. Let us see first in more detail what exactly Stengers means when she refers to “aesthetic,” as it implies another genealogy of aesthetics—of ontological aesthetics, the most extensively and thoroughly defined in Elkaïm’s and Stengers’ article “Du mariage des hétérogènes” (1994), as a part of the special issue of “Chimères. Revue des schizoanalysis” dedicated to the memory of the late Guattari’s work.

Taking as their starting point Sigmund Freud’s opposition between play and discipline or pleasure and rule-keeping—in short, the question of reciprocal relationship-making, and mysteriously missing the idea of aesthetics in Freud’s account of play, in the article “Du mariage des hétérogènes” (1994), Elkaïm and Stengers notice that the term ‘aesthetics’ has always been ambiguous. Sometimes, it has designated a general problem of one’s world perception. In other cases, the question of art and beauty has been concerned. According to them, this ramification has led to quite different and even contradictory problems: either we seek to determine the condition of objectivity and norms, or we aim to focus on the arbitrariness of the taste and the very absence of those norms (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 147). Further on, Elkaïm and Stengers give two diverging references or two different genealogies of aesthetics: the Leibnizian and the Kantian traditions of aesthetics, of which the latter is the source of these terminological discrepancies.⁵⁷

As for the Leibnizian view, Elkaïm and Stengers argue that Leibniz brings aesthetics to the level of ontology. In his notion of the perception of the world, each piece of existence or a monad integrates an infinite number of “small perceptions” of all kinds, of which most do not even reach the stage of consciousness, and it continues to produce itself through perception in an unstable way. Thus, the production of an aesthetic relation to the world is, at the same time, the production of subjectivity. The Kantian approach is presented here as a fundamentally different view of perception in which aesthetics as a branch of epistemology is the science of its stable *a priori* conditions. Kant separates ‘transcendental aesthetics’ from ‘transcendental logic’, all *a priori* conditions of sensibility and *a priori conditions* of knowledge. Thus, Kant’s aesthetics is narrowed down to perception, which concerns “the emotion in front of the work of art” and is related to the features of beauty, taste, sublime, and genius but is kept apart from the understanding

⁵⁷ For more on the Leibnizian tradition of aesthetics and its possible development to what Sjoerd van Tuinen calls the “mannerist aesthetics,” see Tuinen 2023. As van Tuinen frames it, the Leibnizian view concerns ‘manners of composition’ and their further modifications rather than bodies in their essences (Tuinen 2023, 84).

of objects and common perception more generally (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 147–48).

The ecological perspective can be attributed to the ontological aesthetics or what Stengers and Elkaïm later call Guattari’s “aesthetics of a territory.” The two-fold aesthetics of territory consists of two minor branches: the aesthetics of common sense (*l’esthétique du sens commun*)⁵⁸ and the mutation aesthetics (*la mutation esthétique*) (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 150). Leibnizian view of both epistemological and ontological knowledge production resembles Guattari’s notion of a “transversalist” subjectivity. In his *Chaosmosis*, Guattari argues for what he calls a more “transversalist” conception of subjectivity that involves the simultaneous creation of the self and the world, or in his terms, both the “idiosyncratic territorialised couplings (Existential Territories)” and “its opening onto value systems (Incorporeal Universes)” (Guattari 1995, 4). The ‘transversalist’ is defined as a ‘pathic’ and ‘non-discursive’ process of resingularisation of subjectivity that would avoid strict delimitation in spatio-temporal terms and go beyond the ontological binarism (Guattari 1995, 50). Here we see that, as Stengers notices, Guattari resists the distinction between ‘epistemology’ and ‘ontology’, which has been expressed even in his more personal attempt to withstand “any model pre-defining what we ‘can’ know” (Stengers 2011b, 140).

The ethico-aesthetic practice, as it is called in Guattari’s notion of “new aesthetic paradigm,” like Stengers’ ecology of practices and the concept of “reciprocal capture,” is based on the previously mentioned idea of an assemblage or *agencement* of elements through which the territory is created and continually recreated. *Agencement* is akin to the “reciprocal capture” concept because both processes are based on mutual support. For instance, Vinciane Despret describes an *agencement* as the indeterminate “rapport of forces that makes some beings capable of making other beings capable” (Despret 2013, 38). It is also worth noting Martin Savransky’s suggestion to use the term *agencement* instead of assemblage because, in French, it keeps the sense of ‘agency’ and ‘intention’ belonging to the assemblage itself and not to the control of its separate parts (Savransky 2021, 277–78). In their article “Du mariage des hétérogènes,” Stengers and Elkaïm further the notion

⁵⁸ I use the term ‘common sense’ to refer to the English version of the term often used in Alfred North Whitehead’s work, e.g., his book *Modes of Thought* (1938). But based on the English translation of Stengers’ book *Réactiver le sens commun: Lecture de Whitehead en temps de debacle* (2020), we could also use the wordier version of *sens commun* and put it as the aesthetics of “making sense in common” (see Stengers 2023).

of an assemblage as a marriage of heterogenous elements, discussed when considering the idea of a reciprocal capture, by writing of an assemblage⁵⁹ as the main activity of a therapist—which is predominantly the affective kind of activity.

In more detail, let us investigate the example of a therapy practice as a territory-making, possibly territorialising or deterritorialising activity.⁶⁰ First, who is this ‘matchmaker’ [marieur] of the heterogenous, and how does the therapist become one? The therapist, as a matchmaker, is proposed to be perceived as somebody who, at the same time, is a part of the assemblage and has to tackle the problem of the possibilities of the aesthetic mutation of subjectivity (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 155). What Stengers and Elkaïm call a “good matchmaker” is characterised by an attempt to prepare such an ‘event’ that would create a “possibility of a link”, enabling heterogeneous elements to make a territory together. It means that a good matchmaker is neither a figure at whose disposal there is “unilateral omnipotence” to control the assemblage process nor somebody whose task is to find the pre-existent elements for an ideal match (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 156). Like in the case of Savransky’s description of *agencement*, the good matchmaker does not hold the power to control, but the ‘agency’ and ‘intention’ lie within the assemblage itself.

To describe the process of selection carried on by a matchmaker, Elkaïm and Stengers use the term “resonance” as creating this symbiotic assemblage that holds together and supports itself is not a matter of a resembling form but is open to a more complex and broader variety of ways of connection (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 156). As the practitioner of the art of relationship-making and affective change-making, the therapist has to address the problem of ethics, which concerns Stengers and Elkaïm with the capability of the “sensitivity that allows resonances” (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 157).

⁵⁹ It is an intriguing choice of the term that they have used the French word ‘assemblage’ because of its root of ‘assembling’ and the link with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s term ‘agencement’, which tends to be translated in English as an ‘assemblage’, too, and has been the subject of much debate. The sense of an assemblage, besides the prompting idea of the political in the act of assembling, there is also a much stronger sense of the artistic.

⁶⁰ The example of a therapy practice is crucial for both Stengers and Guattari, as they share this interest. Like Guattari, who dedicated an essential part of his life to psychiatric practices and, in his *Chaosmosis*, claimed for a ‘constellation of universes’ instead of pre-established structures of subjectivity in psychoanalysis (Guattari 1995, 17), Stengers has been collaborating with various psychiatrists including Mony Elkaïm, Léon Chertok, and Tobie Nathan, to analyse the mechanisms of establishing the structures of subjectivity and has suggested the tools of questioning them.

According to them, this sense of relation within the notion of assemblage keeps in mind the responsibility involved in the creation process. Thus, the concept of a territory enabling heterogeneous elements to make it together implies aesthetic becoming and ethical relationship-making simultaneously. When we take the example of a therapy practice, the close relationship between ethics and aesthetics seems inevitable.

The notion of assemblage and the ‘artificiality’ of its heterogeneous elements corresponds well with Guattari’s idea of the production of subjectivity and a “non-discursive, pathic knowledge” induced by ‘dramatic’ or ‘affective’ mimesis we will discuss more in the fourth chapter of this work. There is a strong theatrical characteristic of the production of subjectivity described by Guattari in his *Chaosmosis* (as referring to the anti-psychiatry movement in the 1970s and the pioneer practice of family therapy by Mony Elkaïm). Unlike Freud perceived it, Guattari sees the active “psychodramatic” role of therapists, as they “get involved, take risks and put their fantasms into operation”, and this way make “a paradoxical climate of existential authenticity accompanied by a playful freedom and simulacra” (Guattari 1995, 8). According to Guattari, the therapists’ awareness of therapeutic practice’s dramatic, playful, embodied character helps to “accept the singularities” developed within the therapy. This complex theatrical aspect of the production of subjectivity lets us understand its “artificial and creative” disposition.

Curiously, Guattari distinguishes and gives special importance to this therapy form, which operates within a theatrical framework, prioritising the playfulness and artificiality of a setting. He separates theatrically induced therapy and the roles of their figures from other therapeutic relationship-making, such as in the case of the “traditional psychoanalyst with an averted gaze” or simply “classical psychodrama” (Guattari 1995, 8). Being aware of Chertok and Stengers’ work on psychoanalytic reason, among others, Guattari does not differentiate the operational principle of psychoanalytic practice as being significantly different from hypnosis and other practices of suggestion, including “televsual consumption” and seeks to understand but also shift these complex conditions and sources of “pathic subjectivation” in the contemporary societies (Guattari 1995, 26). Thus, the connection between Stengers’ concept of a “reciprocal capture” and Guattari’s “aesthetics of territory,” especially in the case of particular forms of therapeutic practices, helps us see that *praxis* here are inseparable from relationship-making and that these kinds of relationships are necessarily affective ones. In what follows, let us explore how this notion of *praxis* applies to contemporary art practices.

2.4. The Aesthetic Adventures and Contemporary Art

Considering the case of contemporary art practices, looking more at the different aesthetic movements involved in *praxis* directed at producing change would be helpful. Rarely writing about artistic practices, Stengers uses the example of surrealist art in already mentioned Elkaïm's and Stengers' "Du mariage des hétérogènes". Here, they specify three different aesthetic dimensions or "aesthetic adventures," nevertheless closely intertwined and hardly separable. In Elkaïm's and Stengers' account of Guattari's aesthetics of a territory, the artistic *praxis*, such as the practices of the surrealist movement, belongs to the third aesthetic dimension of exposure, which, like the other two dimensions or "aesthetic adventures," can be characterised by the double possibility—of territorialisation or deterritorialisation. For instance, according to Elkaïm and Stengers', the first appearance of Pablo Picasso's sculpture *Bull's Head* (1942), consisting of the seat and handlebars of a bicycle, was a deterritorialising event, "a new territory." However, it is also possible that such event is not happening. Instead, a mere "Picasso effect" is continuously repeated (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 153–54). Thus, like in any other kind of relationship-making, artistic *praxis* holds the possibility of both *consensual* and *dissensual* enactments.

To see these dynamics more evidently, let us look at the definitions of the three aesthetic dimensions or "aesthetic adventures." The first is presented as a way one "activates oneself" (*s'activer*) or gets a grip (*avoir prise*). It involves raising problems and anticipating possibilities (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 150). Drawing from Thomas Kuhn's notion of a paradigm, Stengers claims that learning the sense of paradigm is precisely this kind of aesthetic process of activation, which makes sure that the scholar having the possibility of entering the territory of a paradigm shares the "common sense" of a discipline and can differentiate the specific problems, has the "appetite" for them (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 151). As such, it implies the operation within an already familiar territory, and the process of getting acquainted with it or making sense of it happens in two differing ways: on the one hand, by active participation, but on the other hand, it may occur pathetically: by displaying vulnerability and being subjected (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 151).

It is important to note that Stengers' interpretation of Kuhn's "paradigm" and his notion of "incommensurability" of diverging paradigms is also specific in the context of the dominant views of Kuhn. Unlike the interpretations which see Kuhn as primarily a social constructivist or, on the other side of the spectrum, as an antirealist and relativist, Stengers argues for his materialist version (or aesthetic in this sense) when the divergence between

practices is taken not only as relational but also constitutive—a matter of partial connection and always only partial communication (Stengers 2011d, 61). Stengers stresses the importance of activity and active scientists' participation in Kuhn's idea of a paradigm. In her view, the point that the rival paradigms cannot find a single unifying criterion implied in the notion of incommensurability does not mean that scientists' reasoning does not matter (Stengers 2011d, 52). Kuhn does not underestimate the efforts of scientists to decide about the production of scientific knowledge that is reliable to them. They are bound by the "collective concern,"⁶¹ but at the same time, what is also important is their active effort to get a sense of the disciplinary territory, to test its boundaries, and to redefine them. This reasoning implies that both movements are at play: gathering around the concern as a *consensual* act and possibly a *dissensual* redefinition of a disciplinary territory.

The second aesthetic dimension that Elkaïm and Stengers specify is how one "engages oneself" (*s'engager*), which implies the manner of involvement of other(s) and the way this problem of relations with other(s) is posed (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 150). It is the question of how one commits to each other, and, as the authors notice, it is the most predominant in practices such diverse as moral philosophy, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, politics, and pedagogy, among others, focusing on the transformation of the other, where one knows that their way of addressing the other is likely to bring about change or is even intended to change the other. Then we can see that the questions of ethics overlap with aesthetics, as they include the issues of the "danger of manipulating the other, treating them as something to be 'acted upon,' or having the power to influence and suggest" (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 152). In this case, the nature of affective influence also can be double: either *consensual*, if a submission is at stake, or *dissensual*, if a radically different change in one's subjectivity is enacted.

The notion of ethics that Elkaïm and Stengers employ in this passage is close to the ethics of the immanent ontology of Deleuze and Guattari. As Elkaïm and Stengers claim, this close relationship between aesthetics and

⁶¹ In the line of her ecology of practices, Stengers claims that Kuhn's interpreters of his "incommensurability" while discussing the often-used example of a parable of the tree blind men and the elephant tend to miss his point of the collective concern. She argues that in this parable, when one blind man perceives a trunk, the second a snake, and the third a fly swatter, it is not the divergence itself that matters to Kuhn but that they are being tied to a single collective interest (Stengers 2011d, 53). Precisely, the notion of interest suggests not to expect one 'right answer'. For more on this point, see Stengers 2011d, 53–54.

ethics does not imply aesthetics is to solve ethical problems. But it points out the possibility of recognising the ethical imperative implicit in relationship-making, whether it is the diverse views as feeling not committed or imprisoned in the commitments. The solutions then depend on very particular territories, the ‘collective assemblages of enunciation’ (*agencements collectifs d’énonciation*) (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 152). This ethical position corresponds to, for instance, Kathrin Thiele’s interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s ethics, among other propositions of contemporary relational ontologies, when the question of ethics is always implicitly present, “always/already at stake in the processes of meaning-making and knowledge production” (Thiele 2016).⁶² For the argument of this work, the idea of a close connection between aesthetics and ethics is crucial, as the notion of the latter tends to be missing in the current reworkings of Guattari’s aesthetics.

The third aesthetic dimension touches upon how one ‘exposes oneself’ (*s’exposer*). It again involves two divergent actions: how one clings to a territory or is caught on by it and its “order-words” and, alternatively, how one has enough courage to take a risk and begin to mutate (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 150). According to Elkaïm and Stengers, the question of risk is most prevalent within artistic practices, besides the activity and commitment. They write, “To create is to expose oneself. To create a work of art, it is also to run the risk that how one exposes oneself, or something is exposed, does not propagate, or propagates differently” (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 153).⁶³ Curiously, in this passage on the exposure, they quote the French writer Jean Genet’s letter from 1960 to his American literary agent Bernard Frechtman, where he describes his experience reading the absurd novels of Czech writer Franz Kafka and his failure to identify with Kafkian characters, as he not feeling haunted by some “elusive transcendence,” but quite the opposite—by having a strong responsibility for what happens to him and for others (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 153).

This final reference indicates the possibly different propagation and reception of one’s work of art than intended, no matter if *consensual* or *dissensual*, or both movements simultaneously. And yet, it creates the contrast between somebody with a strong sense of commitment and somebody being

⁶² To be more precise, Thiele suggests perceiving Deleuze and Guattari’s immanent ethics as ethics of mattering and reading it in line with Karen Barad’s diffraction methodology. For more, see Thiele 2016.

⁶³ [Créer, c’est s’exposer. Créer une œuvre, c’est aussi courir le risque que la manière dont on s’expose, ou ce que l’on expose, ne se propage pas ou se propage autrement.] (Elkaïm and Stengers 1994, 153).

under control or a mediator of some transcendence. Perhaps this is not the case for Kafka specifically. However, the latter view still haunts contemporary art history and theory, while the committed version of the artist seems oddly out of place as if it does not belong to the artist's figure. Nevertheless, by proposing the notion of exposure as mainly characteristic of artistic activity, Stengers does not imply the idea of the artist as a mediator of some form of "elusive transcendence." In contrast to this view, exposing does not mean conveying force independent of oneself, but it implies the core activity of taking risks and, therefore, being vulnerable—articulating unarticulated, yet at a given paradigm; and this idea suggests that a price must be paid for the risks taken.

Reconsidering the place of an artistic *praxis* in Elkaïm and Stengers' interpretation of Guattari's aesthetics of a territory helps us to see that the artistic *praxis* also can belong to the enactments of a double kind of aesthetic movement. This interpretation liberates Guattari from being tied to an exclusively *dissensual* position, which connects Guattari's idea of singularisation and resingularisation with modern art or a solely *consensual* activity while being a hostage to the apolitical *consensus* of relational aesthetics. Here, we see that in all three adventures of aesthetic relationship-making, Elkaïm and Stengers promote the conception of a double play: either it leads to territorialisation and the aesthetics of common sense, or it takes a road of deterritorialisation and mutation aesthetics. Stengers' relay of Guattari's ethico-aesthetics again manifests the importance of commitment and care, which are part of relationship-making in practices.⁶⁴ And yet, Stengers claims that she does not share with Guattari either "the adventure of art" or the problem of the form of the unconscious (Stengers 2011b, 135). Thus, in what follows, let us see what kind of protagonists she envisages aesthetic adventures for.

⁶⁴ The emphasis on *affective* in Guattari's ethico-aesthetics helps us see different creative strategies as more productive for his aesthetics. For instance, Nicolas Bourriaud argued for 'mimetic parasitism' being such a strategy of the relational art (Bourriaud 2009b, 48). From Stengers' ecological perspective, speaking of an 'affective mimesis' being at play would be more exact. For more about this point, see the fourth chapter of this work.

2.5. The Eco-Logic of Intrusion and New Protagonists

Unlike Félix Guattari, who often uses artistic examples to discuss the inventive potential of human practices and, as we will see later in this chapter—unlike Deleuze, who connects human struggle with art making, Stengers is not so quick to privilege artistic practices over other forms of *praxis*. When Guattari in his *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (1992) calls for a new paradigm, which is an ethico-aesthetico-political “in inspiration,” or when Deleuze and Guattari in their *What is Philosophy?* (1991) distinguish art in line with the other two creative endeavours—philosophy and science, Stengers argues that they, too, do not make the exception for the artistic practices. She pays more attention to the price for survival that artistic practices have had to pay than their political potential and asks,

Are ‘actual’ contemporary art practices, but also (and maybe primordially so) their commentators, able not to claim that their adventures are ‘paradigmatic’, that they confront the very challenges associated with the coming ethico-aesthetic machine? (Stengers 2011b, 136)

However, Guattari’s proposal of eco-logical creation and Deleuze’s notion of creation seem to be closely related with the figure of the artist and what Stengers calls ecology of practices. Already in Guattari’s account of ecosophy, which is at once ethico-political and aesthetic and consists of three complementary branches of social, mental, and environmental ecologies, we find the claim that in contrast to Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, the eco-logic does not insist on “a ‘resolution’ of opposites.” Thus, in a specific domain of social ecology, according to Guattari, it should be distributed the times of struggle in which “everyone will feel impelled to decide on common objectives and to act ‘like little soldiers’” or ‘good activists’ and then the times of creative expression when the collective aims will be altered, and the creative activity will play a more significant role (Guattari 2000, 52). To elaborate on the creative route of *praxis*, Guattari takes the example of an artist dealing with their matter. He writes:

This new ecosophical logic—and I want to emphasize this point—resembles the manner in which an artist may be led to alter his work after the intrusion of some accidental detail, an event-incident that suddenly makes his initial project bifurcate, making it drift [dérivée] far from its previous path, however certain it had once appeared to be (Guattari 2000, 52).

Here, Guattari proposes that the logic of praxis is not only dissensual in the sense that it is to be expressed in the form of opposition but, simultaneously, is a creative response or creative work. Curiously, unlike, for instance, Giorgio Agamben, whose project will be analysed more in the next chapter and who emphasises the unveiling gesture of *poiesis* and voluntary characteristic of *praxis*, Guattari argues that it is *praxis*, which carries the power of opening out and is mainly characterised by it. For him, what he calls an “eco-art”—a creative process of politics, the art of *oikos*, habitat or milieu, that makes the territories “habitable” by a human project—is an expression of “praxic opening-out” (Guattari 2000, 53). To put it differently, *praxis* is perceived as a kind of creative activity constituted by opening out new paths and the ability to variate spontaneously. It is intrinsic to some forms of politics but can also be a characteristic of artistic activity or any other situation of ‘doing’ and ‘making’ simultaneously. Guattari’s notions of eco-logical routes of *praxis* correspond well with Stengers’ already analysed account of *consensual* and *dissensual* behaviours and the possibility of both, a form of political *consensus*-making. However, Stengers invites us to turn our attention to activities other than artistic practices as potentially more relevant for the radical transformation of practices.

First, I would like to remind the previous example of Gaia as one of the main protagonists having the potential for political environmental change to show how it relays Guattari’s account of eco-logical routes of political *praxis*. In Stengers’ framework, Gaia is a form of transcendence that informs us about its existence while simultaneously being an intrusion. Following the ecosophical logic proposed by Guattari, it is possible to claim that it is an intrusion that, similarly to other “accidental details” or “event-incidents,” may alter our projects and lead to different creative paths: either/or, or both submitting to the idea of taking an initiative and being able to develop a critical stance towards it simultaneously. Thus, it is necessary not to confuse a kind of transcendence that is to unify and determine conflicts and a kind of impulse as Gaia—that instead has a very material in its power: as some “accidental detail” that changes the course of the initial path and brings forth unexpected results.

As Martin Savransky argues, let us not get confused about the transcendental categories as such, as they are to be employed not to determine and authorise but rather “they have the enigmatic character of what [William] James would have described as a “push, an urgency, *within our very experience*,” which makes itself felt and over which we do not have control, which our experiments and struggles cannot simply ignore, with which they

have to contend, from which they must learn to protect themselves, in whose wake they might learn how to compose” (Savransky Forthcoming). In other words, by being an “*empirical* transcendence”, to use Savransky’s term, Gaia is felt. Thus, her presence and the ways of dealing with her influence are material. Like when dealing with some “accidental detail” in the process of creation, here one is invited to be *doing* as creating in the presence of Gaia. The possible routes are again double: it can be less or more deriving paths from the existing one, just like within the creative process earlier given by Guattari.

However, the intrusive Gaia is not the only protagonist in Stengers’ thought that has the function of shaking one’s habits of thought and opening the twofold creative paths of political action. One of these ambiguous actors that can have the ability to (re)activate imagination is a type of diplomat. The choice of considering the art of diplomacy to further the notion of (re)creation of politics may seem like it could be more credible. Since the 20th century and especially after the 1961 Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations, modern diplomacy is perceived as being a highly professionalised system or set of methods, practices, and principles, perhaps the most widely used in foreign policy and international relations, to ensure the peaceful relations between different sovereign parties. The functions of diplomacy now range from communication, negotiation and intelligence gathering to advocacy and brand management. In brief, it is packed with firmly established meanings and is subjected to development in respective fields. Hence, it is not easy to disconnect diplomacy from its modern usage and practice and link it with what Stengers calls an “art of diplomacy.” Still, for Stengers, it is a principal step to start thinking of politics as an “art of diplomacy.”

When defining her notion of politics, Stengers questions the Greek idea of politics that presumes the equality of law application and the homogeneity of space and composition of political community. Instead, we find a notion of politics that implies a gathering around a “cause” in which parties do not defend their “opinions” but manipulate the terms of the agreement being created (Stengers 2018b, 83). In other words, Stengers’ “art of diplomacy” is not to celebrate the efficacy of diplomatic negotiations in a common political space. But it may work as a tool for thinking of another kind of political action,—I would say, a creative kind of *praxis*, possibly shaking the deep-rooted understanding of modern diplomacy itself. As Stengers reassures it, “Diplomacy does not refer to goodwill, togetherness, a common language, or an intersubjective understanding. It is not a matter of negotiation among free humans who must be ready to change as the situation changes, but of

constructions among humans as constrained by diverging attachments, such as belonging” (Stengers 2005a, 193).

In a political space defined by diplomacy, the subject of the agreement should be constructed by mutual modification of the terms of the agreement while knowing that each millimetre of this kind of adjustment contains a risk of becoming a traitor. Thus, Stengers’ notion of an “art of diplomacy” suggests that a political *praxis* can be a creative process, a kind of “technology of belonging,” a technology of betraying when it is necessary to “drift” [dériver], in Guattari’s sense. And still, practically speaking, the idea of the “art of diplomacy” becoming a part of our political imagination is a future project. The construction is indeed liable, as we tightly hold the identity of obligation-free “children of modernity” (Stengers 2020b). Hence, the space for creativity in political *praxis* and agreement-making is yet to be regained, and it would have a bodily character of *making*. As Stengers explains it,

Diplomatic agreements would then have the character of partial connections, like all communication between vernacular languages. They would not guarantee the persistence of an original purity, but if successful they would generate tales and accounts of what has been learned, of what has made the involved parties grow, each in their own, now correlated, ways. And this would be what diplomats would convey—not models or arguments but *activators of the imagination*⁶⁵, incentives to expand the scope of the possible reinvention of new ways to formulate problems, freed from the scalable, state-imposed imperative (Stengers 2020b).⁶⁶

The formula of these diplomatic agreements elsewhere expressed as “translation-betrayal-invention” (Stengers 2011a, 2:348) can be better understood if considering Guattari’s but also his partner in thinking Deleuze’s notion of creation. In the short talk titled as *Qu’est-ce que l’acte de création?* [What is the creative act?] (1987), Deleuze aligns a creative act with an act of resistance by distinguishing it from the systems of information and counter-information and the system of communication more generally. For Deleuze, informing means simply circulating what he calls “order-words”: imperatives,

⁶⁵ Italics are mine.

⁶⁶ It is worth noting that the practical example that Stengers use to discuss diplomacy in this essay, the Conferences of the Parties (COP) at the UN Climate Change Conferences, has more likely to have a character of indeterminacy and, thus, a space for making modifications that still indulge in creation. Unlike in the case of bilateral agreements between two modern states, here, the highly complex multilateral agreements are at stake.

slogans, directions, etc. “When you are informed,” says Deleuze, “you are told what you are supposed to believe,” or to put it more precisely, you are told what you are supposed “to be ready to or have to, or be held to” believe (Deleuze 2007, 320). Similarly, counter-information means the existence of information based on counter-narratives and can become an alternative to information—an alternative to a “controlled system⁶⁷ of the order-words used in a given society” (Deleuze 2007, 322).

Yet, for Deleuze, counter-information is not an act of resistance (or an act of creation) in itself; to be effective, it needs to *become* an act of resistance (Deleuze 2007, 322). Becoming implies that it requires becoming something other than communication, i.e., a form of creation. Deleuze also notices a strong affinity between the human struggle and art making as both activities “resist death” in André Malraux’s words (Deleuze 2007, 323). In addition to it, both activities circulate in the form of “refrains” [ritournelle or ritornello⁶⁸] rather than order-words. We will come back to the notion of refrains later but for now it is necessary to say that the embodied form of text—a refrain, plays a special role in creating a territory or *formation* of politics. For Deleuze and Guattari, refrains convey the powerful dynamisms of social fields—those closely entangled knots of territories where movements of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation take place (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 68). Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari, but also for Stengers, refrains embody a twofold form of creative *praxis* and express another kind of communication: a bodily form of creative politics.

Drawing the parallel between Stengers’ notion of diplomacy and Deleuze’s creative resistance, it is helpful to employ another Deleuze and Guattari’s term—that of a “psychosocial type”. In one of the chapters of her seminal book *Cosmopolitics II*, named “The betrayal of the diplomats,” Stengers calls a diplomat “a psychosocial type”, claiming that their practice involves

⁶⁷ By calling the usage of order-words “a controlled system,” Deleuze refers to Michel Foucault’s distinction between *sovereign* and *disciplinary* societies. Foucault claimed the social change from disciplinary societies having spaces of “confinement” to be controlled, such as prisons, schools, and hospitals, to sovereign societies or, in Deleuze’s words—*control societies*, in which other forms of control have been used (e.g., communication) (Deleuze 2007, 322).

⁶⁸ When asked about the concepts created in his and Guattari’s work, Deleuze pays particular attention to *ritornello*; the original Italian version of the term is preferred (see Lapoujade 2007). It is most notably explained in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where there is a plateau dedicated to it: “1987: Of the Refrain” (pp. 361–408).

exchange and “incorporates the tension between territoriality and deterritorialisation”: paradoxically, diplomats have characteristic of *belonging* to a particular group of people and sharing their interests, but at the same time, they need to accept the rules of the diplomatic game and be *reliable* to their colleagues (Stengers 2011a, 2:376). This kind of dual function, according to Stengers, results in diplomats’ requirement of being translators and traitors—ones who are not staying intact but are translating and thus betraying (Stengers 2011a, 2:377).

The description of diplomats’ contrasting functions corresponds well with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a psychosocial type. In *What is philosophy?* (1991), they distinguish psychosocial types from conceptual personae and aesthetic figures, claiming that these are usually very unstable in appearance types, such as “the stranger, the exile, the migrant, the transient, the native, the homecomer,” whose function is to form and re-form the territories (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 67). As they define it further, psychosocial types do “make perceptible, in the most insignificant or most important circumstances, the formation of territories, the vectors of deterritorialisation, and the process of reterritorialisation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 68). Thus, Stengers’ diplomats, being the actors of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, display a form of creativity in their *praxis*—it is an activity of *betraying*, *resisting*, and *escaping* what limits them, and that can also mean that it is an activity of *form-making*, a capability of moving away, being plastic, if needed. As such, the figures of diplomats defined by belonging are preferred to artists as having better capacities for becoming drifters and choosing the unarticulated ways without completely losing the sites of their territory. In what follows, let us see how this twofold ecological proposal for practices relayed by Stengers can be an aesthetic alternative to other accounts of *praxis*, notably Giorgio Agamben’s position.

3. TWO DIVERGENT READINGS OF ARISTOTLE'S *PRAXIS/POIESIS*

The twofold ecological proposal for practices, which appears in Stengers' and Guattari's accounts of the aesthetic creation of practices, seems to be inviting us to reformulate the modern and contemporary problem of the "atrophy of *praxis*" (Márkus 2011) altogether. The varying formulations of this problem could be related to the different approaches to the Aristotelian terms of *praxis/poiesis*. The difference in views is already inherent in the very treatment of this difference. Stengers keeps saying that we need to invent a different way of doing politics, one that combines human affairs (*praxis*) and the production of things (*poiesis*) (Stengers 2000, 163). Conversely, Agamben thinks that the decline of practices lies in the very entanglement of these things and our inability to keep the separation clear enough. Another difference lies in their interpretation of *praxis* and *poiesis*, which leads to Agamben's longing for the lost exceptional status of *poiesis* as the production of truth. For Stengers, on the other hand, the destruction of practices means losing the shrinking political space where conflict, skill, and a multiplicity of protagonists could prevail. I claim that Stengers' and Guattari's ecological proposal of practices potentially can give us an alternative to the more predominant strand of Agamben's aesthetics and invite a positive take on the performativity of practices.

3.1. The Common Problem of Atrophy of *Praxis*

The problem of the destruction of practices as an issue in the modern tradition of thought, which French philosophers Étienne Balibar, Barbara Cassin, and Sandra Laugier have called "contemporary philosophy of action" (2014), is not particularly new. In *The Dictionary of Untranslatables*, they differentiated two the most common usages of the term *praxis*: either as referring to an Aristotelian version of the separation *praxis/poiesis* and connecting it to the virtue of *phronesis* or prudence as building on a Marxist understanding of *praxis* and its link with the need of social transformation (Balibar, Cassin, and Laugier 2014, 820). According to Balibar, Cassin and Laugier, the latter is the more dominant version of the notion of *praxis*, adopting the Kantian understanding of the practical, which stresses the "primacy of practical reason" and obliges the subject to emancipate themselves through the imperative of transforming the world (Balibar, Cassin, and Laugier 2014, 824). Among the philosophers who have developed this German-Kantian and

post-Kantian perspective are Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jürgen Habermas, and Hannah Arendt. At least some of this practice philosophy can be characterised by identifying a modern atrophy of *praxis*. As György Márkus frames it, from Arendt, Habermas to many so-called humanist Marxists, what they share is a troubling diagnosis of the “degradation of practical reason to mere instrumental control” (Márkus 2011, 37).

In this differentiation of the development of the idea of *praxis*, returning to the Aristotelian separation *praxis/poiesis* seems like an attempt at thinking of an alternative to the Marxist version. In Balibar, Cassin and Laugier’s understanding, Aristotelian *praxis* is specific in its link between politics and ethics. They write that this kind of “practical,” in contrast to the Kantian account of it, revolves around two central characteristics. On the one hand, in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 B.C.E.), there is a mention of ethical behaviour concerning the value of individuals. But on the other hand, there is also an emphasis on the political and how the ethical virtues themselves have the quality of the political. In other words, the Aristotelian version of practical implies both aspects. It suggests “‘making oneself’ by acting for the common good in accord with the virtue of *phronesis*, ‘prudence’ or ‘practical intelligence’” (Balibar, Cassin, and Laugier 2014, 821). As we have seen, Stengers’ and Guattari’s notions of practices especially align with this version of *praxis*. In both cases, we deal with the ontological view of practices when the reinvention of practices simultaneously implies the making of oneself. Because it is a process of ‘making,’ for Stengers, it also cannot be separated from the idea of *poiesis*.

Like Stengers and Guattari, Agamben seems to be making a similar sort of cry, a cry of the atrophy of *praxis*, characteristic of various above-mentioned modern and contemporary philosophies of action. Additionally, Agamben relies on the primarily Aristotle-based version of *praxis*, as he discusses Aristotle’s separation of *praxis/poiesis* and suggests the need for an alternative to the Marxist-Kantian relays. Putting it differently, Stengers, Guattari, and Agamben are siding so that they all find the Marxist take on *praxis* insufficient. We have already seen that for Stengers and Guattari, the problem lies in not giving enough autonomy or voice for practitioners to propose their “own way of having situations and questions matter” (Stengers 2011c, 378). How is this problem expressed in Agamben’s works on aesthetics? In his book *The Man Without Content* (1970), Agamben pays close attention to the development of Aristotle’s interpretation of *praxis/poiesis* and argues that it is precisely the process of blurring the boundaries between these two concepts that led to the proliferation of the transcendent notion of artistic production. A

similar cry also has appeared recently in *Creation and Anarchy* (2017), where Agamben deplors the destruction of the meaning of work in the ‘work of art’ and its disappearance from the artistic production, leaving only the “pathological forms of the repressed work” or what he claims to be contemporary art today (Agamben 2019b, 3–4).⁶⁹

In Agamben’s understanding of Aristotle’s *praxis/poiesis* separation and the later Marxist inversion of the two, the modern obscuring between these two kinds of activities, action and production, is perceived as a problem itself. In what ways did Marx assimilate the features of *praxis* into his notion of production? Agamben claims that Marx influentially reversed the guiding hierarchical schema of *praxis* over *poiesis*, and the latter then appeared in place of the more noble activity of *praxis*. Yet, the Aristotelian characterisation of *praxis* as a will has not changed and continued to be inscribed in Marx’s notion of production, as the Marxist ‘capacity for work’ is connected with the notion of a man as ‘active natural being’ with his vital instincts (Agamben 1999, 71).⁷⁰ For Agamben, it also explains the current situation, in which the distinction between the kinds of making, such as the activity of an artist, craftsman, or worker, and the kinds of doing, such as political activity, has been gradually obscuring. This process has resulted in the state in which we are haunted by the assumption that all of our ‘makings’ are principally ‘doings’—and, according to Agamben, it leads us to treat ‘makings’ as it would be a “manifestation of a will” producing concrete effects (Agamben 1999, 68). Agamben thus takes the blurring boundaries of Aristotelian *praxis/poiesis* as a problem caused by the Marxist approach and argues for a more fundamental notion of production dissociated from any *praxis* features.

As we can see, Stengers’ and Guattari’s approaches to the invention of practices and Agamben’s take on the disappearance of practices are exceptional in the sense that they invite us to return to the Aristotelian distinction of *praxis/poiesis*, as searching for the alternatives to the Marxist-Kantian version of *praxis*. More notably, in the aesthetic theory, Agamben has

⁶⁹ Agamben identifies these forms as contemporary art, in which work has been replaced by “performance” and creative or conceptual artistic activity” (Agamben 2019b, 3). For more on this point, see Agamben 2019a.

⁷⁰ Though it is not a closed question. Agamben aligns the Marxist notion of production with a particular form of *praxis*—, a form of “actualisation of a will” that one’s life is driven by. Still, significant attempts are to analyse it as a form of *poiesis*. For more on the relation between the Marxist notion of *labour* and Aristotelian *poiesis* and its inconsistencies, see Márkus 2011.

held the uneasiness with the Marxist inversion of *poiesis* with *praxis*, bringing to the forefront the activity of production as a core sensuous human activity (*praxis*) and, this way, devaluing the idea of practices, including artistic practices or artistic work. Nevertheless, the notion of practices is also a key point of departure between these thinkers, as, for Stengers, the messianic politics of Agamben represents a part of the inherited tradition that she seeks to escape (Stengers and Bordeleau 2011, 13). I suggest that the main reason for this contrast is their different understandings of Aristotle's *praxis/poiesis* distinction, which leads to a different definition of the problem of the atrophy of *praxis* itself. Still, let us first examine how Aristotle defined the separation of *praxis* and *poiesis* and why it is far from a clear-cut separation.

3.2. The Ambiguity of Aristotle's Separation *Praxis/Poiesis*

We could be questioning Agamben's cry for devaluing the idea of artistic practices and obscuring boundaries of *praxis/poiesis* by asking whether the 'making' and 'doing' activities must be wholly separated. Does the fact that they overlap more and more frequently only do injustice to their 'true' meaning? What are their implications, as Aristotle has it? As we will see later, Agamben and Stengers have entirely different views on this problem. Considering some more recent research on the problem of Aristotle's distinction *praxis/poiesis* in particular (e.g., Dunne 1997; Márkus 2011; Staten 2019), it seems that although Aristotle clearly distinguishes between these activities in his *Metaphysics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, at the same time, it is evident that he finds it very difficult to maintain this distinction and be consistent in separating them when it comes to the actual examples of *praxis* or *poiesis*. To elaborate on this argument, analysing some relevant practices, such as politics, medicine, and music playing, can be helpful.

But let us start with Aristotle's distinction *praxis/poiesis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book VI, dedicated to the notion of intellectual virtue, Aristotle distinguishes five chief intellectual virtues: scientific knowledge, art, practical wisdom, philosophical wisdom, and intuitive reason, from which both two art (or *technē*) and practical wisdom (or *phronēsis*) belong to practical thinking as opposed to theoretical one (Aristotle 2009, VI.3, 1139b 16-17). The 'official' or more classical version of Aristotle's separation *praxis/poiesis* expects to emphasise the distinction of virtues Aristotle attributed to the kind of 'makings' and 'doings,' of which the first one is associated with the virtue of art (or *technē*) as the "knowledge of making things" and the latter is the question of the virtue of practical wisdom (or

phronēsis) as the “knowledge of how to secure the ends of human life.” As Aristotle describes it in the case of the virtue of art,

In the variable are included both things made and things done; making and acting are different (for their nature we treat even the discussions outside our school as reliable); so that the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make. Hence too they are not included one in the other; for neither is acting making nor is making acting. [...] Making and acting being different, art must be a matter of making, not of acting (Aristotle 2009, VI.5, 1140a 1-18).

And then later elaborates on the case of the virtue of practical wisdom,

Therefore, since scientific knowledge involves demonstration, but there is no demonstration of things whose first principles are variable (for all such things might actually be otherwise), and since it is impossible to deliberate about things that are of necessity, practical wisdom cannot be scientific knowledge or art; not science because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise, not art because action and making are different kinds of thing. The remaining alternative, then, is that it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man (Aristotle 2009, VI.5, 1140a34-36-1140b1-6).

Through this, we can see that Aristotle quite sharply separates ‘makings’ from ‘doings’ and associates them with different virtues that must not be mixed. He writes of the “reasoned state of capacity to make” and the “reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man” as two entirely different states. Accordingly, unlike ‘makings,’ ‘doings’ or *praxis* cannot be a question of skill, as Aristotle claims that “there is no such as excellence in practical wisdom” (Aristotle 2009, VI.5, 1140b 23).

Yet, considering practical examples scattered throughout many of Aristotle’s writings, the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* is not as clear-cut as one might think. In some contexts, there are specific activities that are perceived by Aristotle as ‘doings,’ as *praxis*, and in others—as ‘makings,’ as *poiesis*. György Márkus suggests the range of activities Aristotle assigns to *praxis* as wide as listing from the “simple acts of sensation,” such as seeing, consuming and using, to the more “complex achievements,” like playing the instrument, healing the illness and doing politics or other kinds of military activities (Márkus 2011, 40). For Márkus, the latter case shows that in practice, the action attributed to *praxis*, such as politics, can be guided by the virtue of art, so perhaps the reverse is also possible, and the virtue of practical

wisdom could guide *poiesis*. He writes, “While there is no doubt that politics represents for Aristotle the main terrain of *praxis*, he also maintains that the excellent and noble political and military actions “aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake”⁷¹” (Márkus 2011, 40). Furthermore, adds Márkus, Aristotle “compares the highest political activity, legislation, to the doings of manual labourers;⁷² and often designates the habitual disposition necessary to act in the right way politically as *techne*, that is, skill” (Márkus 2011, 40).

We can find that many other activities in Aristotle’s framework do not fall within the above categorisation. Henry Staten gives the example of medicine, which is itself an ambiguous activity, as noted by Staten—in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* VII.7 taken as “paradigmatic *techne*” (Staten 2019, 70). Referring to Joseph Dunne’s argument, he notices that this kind of discipline, which, for Aristotle, is “less ‘mechanical’,” such as medicine, navigation and rhetoric, Aristotle distinguishes as demanding continuous adaptation to unforeseen factors, and thus implying the aspect of unpredictability, which brings them closer to the virtue of art (Staten 2019, 70). Dunne demonstrates even more evidently that although the ends of exercising these disciplines cannot be defined by being the ends of the “productive” knowledge such as a “durable product” and functions more as “a state-of-affairs,” like a person’s good health or a safe journey, they all seem to be closely related with the sense of opportunity, luck, or chance, which is the definitive aspect of the virtue of art or *techne* (Dunne 1997, 254). As Aristotle states while using the saying of Plato’s protagonist Agathon, “Art loves chance, and chance loves art.” (Aristotle 2009, VI.5 1140a 19-20).

Given that one of this study’s aims is to consider the potential of the notion of practices in contemporary art, it can also be helpful to look at Aristotle’s example of playing a musical instrument. Unlike other kinds of arts, for instance, what is today called ‘visual arts,’ which tend to result in some more tangible product, music playing is a form of art making that we are used to perceiving as performative rather than productive. Considering Aristotle’s example of playing a musical instrument, Dunne notices that Aristotle, too, clearly differentiates between the activities of *techne*, whose exercise is *praxis* and whose—*poiesis*, and keeps firmly separated such activities as music performance and, say, architecture (Dunne 1997, 254). Thus, the performativity of arts is not such an unknown concept, even in Aristotle’s terminology, as to cast doubt on Agamben’s assertion that the performative

⁷¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, X.7, 1177b 17, as cited in Márkus 2011.

⁷² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.8, 1141b 39, as cited in Márkus 2011.

notion of art as an event is a purely liturgical influence (Agamben 2019b, 10). Accordingly, art forms closer to *praxis*, such as music performance, could be more closely related to, or at least connected with, the value of practical wisdom. This example shows again that Aristotle's distinction of *praxis/poiesis* is far from clear-cut and that the exact degree to which these terms are intertwined may depend on the practice in question. Let us see how this problem is addressed in Agamben's and Stengers' interpretations.

3.3. Agamben's Longing for The Value of *Poiesis*

As mentioned previously, in some of Agamben's works on aesthetic theory, notably *The Man Without Content* (1970) and *Creation and Anarchy* (2017), Agamben has raised the concern about the haunting modern assumption that all of our 'makings' are principally 'doings'—and for him, it means that we treat our 'makings' as a "manifestation of a will" producing concrete effects (Agamben 1999, 68). In the production of contemporary art, this problem has manifested itself in the disappearance of the meaning of "work" when the sense of work became "some awkward remainder of the creative activity and the genius of the artist" (Agamben 2019b, 8) and has later returned to contemporary art in some "unwittingly parodic" forms. How exactly did he arrive at this point? I suggest that how Agamben frames the problem of the atrophy of *praxis* is related not only to the fact of blurring boundaries of Aristotelian cut of *praxis* and *poiesis* but also to the very meanings he attributes to *praxis* and *poiesis*. Considering their exact purposes will help us see what type of practices Agamben eventually longs for. In *The Man Without Content* (1970), he writes:

The Greeks, [...] made a clear distinction between *poiesis* (*poiein*, "to produce" in the sense of bringing into being) and *praxis* (*prattein*, "to do" in the sense of acting). As we shall see, central to *praxis* was the idea of the will that finds its immediate expression in an act, while, by contrast, central to *poiesis* was the experience of pro-duction into presence, the fact that something passed from nonbeing to being, from concealment into the full light of the work (Agamben 1999, 68–69).

We can see that in Agamben's definition of Aristotle's *praxis/poiesis*, the terms *praxis* and *poiesis* imply the juxtaposition of action and production and give attention to the very difference in the motivation of these activities. What concerns *poiesis*, for him, the creation of things is not a type of construction but rather a gesture of unveiling, opening up, bringing into presence, and thus,

bringing further, outside itself, beyond the limits of intelligibility. In short, it is a ‘mode of truth.’ In contrast to a poetic activity, the motivating force of *praxis* lies in itself: it is determined by will rather than by the relation with the outside. He defines it as a “voluntary process” or “an expression of will.” Like this, Agamben attributes very distinctive meanings to Aristotle’s *praxis* and *poiesis*, which are different, first and foremost, in motivation and must be in no way confused.

Hence, because of these differences, the Marxist preference to work over poetic life, which for Greeks went beyond the schema of *praxis* and *poiesis* and implied one’s submission to necessity, Agamben reads as a critical turning point from *poiesis* to *praxis*. That is, from the understanding of ‘pro-duction’ as a creation in the space of human freedom to the sense of ‘production’ that implies a motivation of *praxis*: a concrete productive activity coming from “an actualisation of will,” a necessity of “life’s biological doing” (Agamben 1999, 70). Accordingly, the reductive assimilation of *poiesis* and *praxis* here indicates the devaluation of *poiesis* in its ‘original’ sense but also suggests that what has been valued as *praxis*—as a principal force of life in Agamben’s sense has been turning into a narrowed form of production, a kind of ‘biological’ necessity. For Agamben, thus, the atrophy of *praxis* implies *praxis* becoming a deficient form of *poiesis* or production while eliminating the possibility of free creative space where the ‘full’ sense of work could unfold.

Looking at Agamben’s perception of the atrophy of *praxis* while simultaneously knowing Stengers’ and Guattari’s perspectives, it is difficult not to see that here Agamben’s disappointment concerns not as much the changed status of *praxis*, as it is the case with the changed status of *poiesis*. The problem of atrophy of *praxis* for Agamben seems to be primarily the problem of misinterpreting the status of pro-duction, including the artistic production. It is a ‘pro-duction,’ a special kind of space opened by the creation of truth that he seeks to defend. In Agamben’s interpretation, it is possible to see the attempt to refine the messy kind of *poiesis* so that it can retrieve its exceptional status. The alignment of the sphere of production with truth⁷³ implies the idea of ‘making’ as having a distinctive and pre-determined status, which lends itself to the classification of knowledge. This could be a case of what Stengers described as a “*consensus* situation,” where practices are

⁷³ Certainly, Agamben is one among the others making this alignment. His effort follows Martin Heidegger’s notion of the truth of art as an unveiling: ‘from concealment to presence.’ For more on this genealogical link, see, e.g., Eikelboom 2015 (esp. “Agamben: A Rhythmic Ontology of Art” (pp. 214–217).

defined by their allegedly shared goal and are subjected to criteria of ‘truth-telling’ that may falsely situate them and transcend their diversity.

This effort of ‘purification’ is evident in Agamben’s discussion of a sense of *praxis* in contemporary art. According to Agamben, in the very same manner as in the case of Marxist inversion, the efforts to “transcend aesthetics” and “to give a new status to artistic production” began with the blurring boundaries of the distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* (Agamben 1999, 71). It has been done with such a capacity that “even the most radical critiques of aesthetics have not questioned its founding principle, that is, the idea that art is the expression of the artist’s creative will” (Agamben 1999, 72). For him, the transformation of art’s understanding from *poiesis* to *praxis* has manifested itself by putting the artistic production into a metaphysical position as a field of aesthetics and treating this making as an expression of a will of genius, a “very peculiar *praxis*” or “a superstructure” (Agamben 1999, 71). However, paradoxically, regretting the loss of the status of artistic production, Agamben creates a case for metaphysical elevation himself and supports the notion of artistic production being an exceptional, disinterested, autonomous space of truth, separate from political, social, and other ‘impurities.’

The contrast between Agamben’s and Stengers’ positions on this issue could be again shown by Agamben’s interpretation of Deleuze’s “act of creation” discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike Stengers, who perceives Deleuze’s “act of creation” and “act of resistance” as a creation of territory—as political *praxis*, as betrayal and *form-making*, Agamben associates it with a “poietic act” instead. In his *Creation and Anarchy* (2017), referring to Thomas Aquinas’s distinction of *creare ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) and *facere de materia* (making from the material), God’s making and human making, Agamben has proposed to abandon the notion of creation because of its connection to divine creation and to use instead the term *poietic* in the sense of *poiein*, that is, to “pro-duce” (Agamben 2019b, 15). He has also suggested associating Deleuze’s ‘resistance’ in the “act of creation” with a way of freeing a “potential of life” that has been restrained and is arguably missing in contemporary art forms but was present in mechanic arts (Agamben 2019b, 14). Like this, Agamben implies a specific measure of “production” to the different types of contemporary art and diminishes the performative arts, which are not part of the creation so defined.

Thus, we can see that in Agamben’s and Stengers’ accounts of practices, Aristotle’s distinction of *poiesis* and *praxis* act as a point of divergence, where two different genealogical traditions of aesthetics part ways. Agamben’s interpretation, arguing against the transcendent notion of artistic production,

seems to be very close to that very line of thought, as it claims for the steady separation between *praxis* and *poiesis*, defining the latter as a mode of truth. Agamben cuts a sense of *praxis* to the actualisation of one's will and instead emphasises the production of truth as an actual task of practices (and for contemporary art practice particularly), which then implies the meaning of atrophy of *praxis* as the increasing lack of such task to be undertaken. Stengers and Guattari engage a different idea of the creation of practices whose potential lies, as we will see further, in Stengers' take on the relation between *praxis* and *poiesis* that is deliberately not separated and the specific meanings of these terms. But first, to see how these conceptual differences play out in practice, it can be helpful to take the example of one of the 20th-century art movements, situationism. Situationist practices have been a standard reference in Agamben's and Guattari's works, but they used them to prove quite different things.

3.4. Revisiting The Situationist Practices

Among some practical examples of the metaphysical elevation of art which made us forget "the original pro-ductive status of the work of art," Agamben, in his *The Man Without Content* (1970), gives as diverse movements and ideas as Novalis's notion of poetry as a "willful" use, Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of art as a "will to power," Antonin Artaud's "theatrical liberation of the will," and a "practical actualisation of the creative impulses" initiated by the situationists (Agamben 1999, 71–72). Guattari's relationship with modern and contemporary art practices could seem to be close to Agamben's approach, given the tendency to be described more one-sidedly, perceiving Guattari as a complete modernist and one of the biggest proponents of modern art practices *versus* postmodern ones (Zepke 2012; 2022). For instance, despite Guattari's links with some of the avant-garde practices, including situationism, Stephen Zepke has been putting a strong emphasis on Guattari's interest in early modern painting and artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Amedeo Modigliani, etc. (Zepke 2022, 606).⁷⁴ However, I suggest seeing situationist

⁷⁴ For more on Zepke's criticism of Bourriaud's interpretation, which aligns Guattari's proto-aesthetic paradigm to avant-garde traditions and relational art, see Zepke 2022, 603–6. In some earlier studies, e.g., Zepke 2012, Zepke writes of Guattari's preference for modern art practices and the total reluctance toward postmodernism and conceptual art (Zepke 2012, 226–27). The basis for this approach seems to be Guattari's idea of art as a block of sensations or the affective side of it, which is perceived as incompatible with the prevailing art movements of the time.

practices as a point of divergence between Agamben's and Guattari's interpretations that can help find Guattari's (and Stengers') take on practices relevant to considering contemporary art today.

Let us first have a brief look at Agamben's interpretation of Nietzsche's take on art. It deserves consideration as it forms the foundation for perceiving situationist practices and differs from the rather immanent approaches to Nietzsche. According to Agamben, Nietzsche's idea of the organism and body as being like works of art without an artist or spectator and, more generally, the world itself being "a work of art that gives birth to itself"⁷⁵ is clear evidence that Nietzsche perceives art as containing the "original metaphysical power" and thus, being "fundamental trait of universal becoming" (Agamben 1999, 93). Nietzsche's idea that art, as a self-generating force of becoming, is "the highest task of man, the truly metaphysical activity"⁷⁶ let Agamben claim that in Nietzsche's thought, this metaphysical take on art "attains the furthest point of its metaphysical itinerary" (Agamben 1999, 85) and fundamentally pre-conditions our perception of modern art and aesthetics. In Agamben's view, Nietzsche's take on art leads to the perception of art as an expression of the artist's creative will, in which art making then is by no means 'productive' and bringing into presence something new but only repeats itself endlessly.

Taking situationist practices as an example, Agamben argues that situationism adopts and embodies this Nietzschean conception of art; thus, "practical actualisation of the creative impulses" implies the actualisation of "will" in situationist practices. Agamben later furthers the interpretation of situationism in his *Creation and Anarchy* (2017). Again, the case of situationism appears as a radical actualisation of *praxis* in opposition to *poiesis* or 'work' in a work of art. Referring to Guy Debord's intention to simultaneously "abolish" and "realise" art as initiating a situationist movement⁷⁷, Agamben writes that,

Obviously what must be abolished is the work, but equally obvious is that the work of art must be abolished in the name of something that, in art itself, goes beyond the work and demands to be realized not in a work but in life (the Situationists accordingly intended to produce not works but situations) (Agamben 2019b, 3).

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 225 n. 419, as cited in Agamben 1999.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 31–32, as cited in Agamben 1999.

⁷⁷ There, Guy Debord differentiates situationist practices from surrealism and dadaism and suggests that "Surrealism wanted to realize art without abolishing it; Dadaism wanted to abolish it without realizing it; we want at the same time abolish it and realize it", as cited in Agamben 2019b, 3.

For Agamben, then, situationist practices are an example of practices that not only significantly lack the *poietic* character to deserve to be included in artistic production but also strongly contribute to the destruction of practices, as what they create is a matter of situations reaching beyond the realm of art.

Now, in more immanent Nietzsche's interpretations, namely, Gilles Deleuze's reading, this very same Nietzschean connection between the world and art is perceived from the ontological point of view. Deleuze claims that in contrast to the aesthetics of disinterestedness and spectatorship, Nietzsche requires an "aesthetics of the creation," the "aesthetics of Pygmalion"—art does not 'suspend' the will in this interpretation or become the will itself, as for Agamben, but 'stimulates' the will to power, 'excites' willing (Deleuze 2006, 102). The magnification induced by art instead of "negation of a real" implies a kind of deception and "a will to deceive," such as "selection, correction, redoubling and affirmation," and because of this, artists, by being knowledge seekers, are also "inventors of new possibilities of life" (Deleuze 2006, 103). In Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's take on art and aesthetics, artistic creation as a way of relating to the world simultaneously becomes the creation of subjectivity, and vice versa; making oneself is a continuous attempt at world-making. Deleuze's ontological reading, thus, suggests the Nietzschean notion of artistic *praxis* that ultimately transforms the idea of *poietic* representation, as appearing means not negating but instead changing or turning and curving away.

Deleuze's reading of the Nietzschean notion of artistic *praxis* and aesthetics of creation could be the basis for Guattari's take on situationist practices. Unlike, for instance, Jean-François Lyotard in his *Driftworks* (1984), Deleuze and Guattari are not so explicit about situationist influences.⁷⁸ However, it is possible to trace at least some of them. For instance, the *Theory of the Dérive* (1956) by Guy Debord seems close to the idea of artistic stimulus and transformation, enabled by various influences, laid out by Deleuze in his interpretation of Nietzsche. Debord starts his theory of the *dérive* with a definition of the *dérive* practice. He writes: "One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive* [literally: "drifting"], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll" (Debord 1958). The ideas of constructivist creation and awareness of the effects of one's playful creation connect well to

⁷⁸ For more on the possible connections between situationism and poststructuralist writing, including Deleuze and Guattari's work, see Plant 1992.

Guattari's sense of ecosophical logic, which also emphasises mutual co-creation and the importance of the awareness of the affective relationship-makings involved.⁷⁹

This connection can be furthered by looking again at Guattari's passage on drifting in *Three Ecologies* (1989). Guattari's ecosophical logic suggests the process of eventual intrusion that can make the creative process, but also one's subjectivity can be reaffirmed and territorialised or be transformed and re/de/territorialised. Similarly, Debord, in his *Theory of the Dérive*, writes of a *dérive* as a twofold movement, including both the process of "letting-go" and what he perceives as its crucial contradiction—"the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities" (Debord 1958). Guattari's ecosophical logic or Stengers' aesthetic adventures also seem to be embodied by another Debord's example of *dérives*, in which he describes them as possibly having both of two closely interconnected goals: "to study a terrain" or "to emotionally disorient oneself" (Debord 1958). Putting it in Guattari's and Stengers' terms: either creating relationships of *consensus* or *dissensus*; territorialising or re/de/territorialising; influencing the environment or being open to their influences. Thus, situationism aligns well with Guattari's ecosophical logic, which shows that this logic of *praxis* might also be relevant to many contemporary art practices aimed at constructing and enabling affective change.

3.5. The Emptied Fields of *Praxis*

As we have seen, Guattari's approach to situationist practices is not likely to align with Agamben's disappointment with performative practices. Stengers, as being engaged in the ontological line of aesthetics, would be clearly on Guattari's side in this debate. But how, then, is the atrophy of *praxis* to be defined from Stengers' perspective, reaching beyond contemporary art practices? Unlike Agamben, Stengers sees the problem of the atrophy of *praxis* elsewhere than in the state of the muddiness of Aristotelian *poiesis/praxis* distinction. She argues that the relationship between *praxis* and *poiesis* is very close and interconnected. As mentioned at the beginning of this

⁷⁹ The importance of awareness or what could be called a sense of ethical or ecological responsibility in situationist practices can be supported by Guy Debord's emphasis on the relative significance of chance in situationist practices. He claims that chance plays a role in these practices only because they are in their initial stages, and "psychogeographical observation" methodologies must still be developed further. For more, see Debord 1958.

chapter, Stengers continuously argues for the invention of a way of ‘practising,’ which would involve both “human affairs” (*praxis*) and the “production of things” (*poiesis*) (Stengers 2000, 163). Therefore, the change implied in the atrophy of *praxis*, in this case, is related neither to contamination nor to the purification of *praxis* and *poiesis* but to a close relationship between the two. Again, the framework of this problem is related not only to the treatment of the Aristotelian cut of *praxis* and *poiesis* but also to the very meanings attributed to *praxis* and *poiesis*. In her book *The Invention of Modern Science* (1993), Stengers writes:

In this singular link between authority and history, we can see the principal characteristic of the “politics” invented by sciences: the flaunted solidarity between what Aristotle distinguished as *praxis* whose virtue was *phronesis* or practical wisdom, and *poiesis*, whose virtue was *technē* or know-how. The Aristotelian distinction moved between the work of fabrication, having its end in a product, and human action, which is open and unlimited, because it concerns a field defined by the plurality—the rivalry, conflict and complementarity—of human beings living together (Stengers 2000, 94).

Here, Stengers’ explanation of Aristotelian distinction emphasises the different characteristics of *praxis* and *poiesis*, defined as the states primarily connected with Aristotle’s intellectual virtues. In contrast to Agamben’s notion of *praxis* as an “expression of will,” Stengers defines *praxis* as an activity that is open and closely embedded in plural matters and not enclosed in the movement of one’s will—especially the choice of an individual guided by vital instincts. It concerns the “ends of human life,” but the knowledge of how to manage states and households well and the capacity to act accordingly is gained by testing it in concrete situations with several actors. In other words, the motivating force of *praxis* is determined by the plurality of actors and the instability of specific conditions. Like art making, it is variable and not calculative. The making activity, however, is distinct by its concern with how to lead to specific ends, how something comes into being, and what sort of expertise is required to create desired change. In short, it is not so much a mode of truth as expressed in Agamben’s notion of *poiesis* but a question of apparatus of affective change-making.

Accordingly, from Stengers’ perspective, the atrophy of *praxis* means something other than the assimilation of *praxis* and *poiesis*, the former being turned into a narrowed form of production or the disappearance of its special status as a mode of truth. As we have seen, unlike Agamben, Stengers proposes to embrace the muddiness of the boundaries that separate ‘doings’

and ‘makings.’ Thus, from the perspective of Stengers’ ecology of practices, the atrophy of *praxis* can mean that otherwise open, and in a sense, the unlimited field of *praxis* has started to shrink and lose its plurality. The field that used to be defined by “rivalry, conflict and complementarity” is being perceived in terms of agreement, *consensus*, and mobilisation, to name a few, and it is managed by a narrow group of those in power. In other words, the problem of *praxis* is that it is gradually losing its plural and diverse character traditionally inherent to a human community. This kind of change applies to those working in politics or other fields of ‘doings’ but also acting and fabricating bits of knowledge elsewhere, in the areas typically attributed to the category of ‘makings,’ as both types are inherently interconnected.

From previously mentioned artistic to therapeutic and scientific practices, their practical qualities are often questioned by reducing their diversity and political becoming to pre-determined categories. Is this closeness particularly dangerous with *praxis* closely interconnected to *poiesis*, defined by *technē*? Quite the opposite, the atrophy of *praxis* in Stengers’ sense also seems to imply that *praxis* is deprived of its *poetic* character and *know-how*, that is, the notion of being a question of skill or quality, so neatly described by Aristotle. The slow improvement and cultivation of various apparatuses for knowledge-making in the modern age of technological progress are increasingly more challenging to sustain. This can be supported by taking the example of Stengers’ interest in the idea of an “art of influence” (Nathan and Stengers 2018, 124) used in the so-called ‘traditional’ therapeutic apparatuses that we will consider in more detail in the next chapter. By bringing up the case of traditional therapeutic apparatuses, Stengers highlights their ability to construct a singularity of a practice based on continuously anticipating the affective efficacy of their practices; thus, their specific *know-how* rather than more universally applied categories.

The emptied and superficially cultivated space of *praxis* is a kind of loss of practices that, according to Stengers, we cannot prevent by creating new categories of “truth.” Therefore, Stengers’ version of an atrophy of *praxis* and Guattari’s ecosophical logic that lies under Stengers’ project of ecology of practices can work as an alternative to the more prominent Agamben’s interpretation of the Aristotelian cut and its influence for the creation of practices today. The ecological perspective can support a positive take on performative practices or practices that lean towards a more *praxic* than the *poietic* side. Stengers’ approach suggests embracing the interconnectedness of *praxis* and *poiesis* in their respective values rather than prioritising one of these categories. Thus, while Agamben longs for the value of novelty within *poiesis*, Stengers invites reclaiming the sense of *practices* whose truth can be

defined by their specific political and ethico-aesthetical apparatus, including requirements and obligations to the surrounding practices and other kinds of protagonists. In further examining where the problem of the destruction of practices and the possibility of reinvention could come from, the role of Plato's philosophy of art should also be considered.

4. PLATO'S CRITIQUE AND THE REINVENTION OF PRACTICES

Witches are no longer burned, but witch hunters are still around, analysing the mechanisms of self-deception of which witches and their prosecutors were equally the victims, or, as true children of Plato, downgrading the art of the cook and praising that of the physician who derives the means to heal from intelligible principles.
(Stengers 2017, 394)

It is a Greek tradition more broadly than Aristotle's separation of *praxis/poiesis*, where the tendency to define, sort out and eliminate, and this way to ensure the stability of practices lies. Unlike Agamben, for whom the problem of the atrophy of *praxis* lies in the Marxist misinterpretation of Aristotle, Stengers sees the problem even more deeply—as the inability of Greeks, and of Plato in particular, to find other than definitive ways of dealing with the instability of knowledge production. Stengers' psychoanalytic case study shows once again that the destruction and possible reinvention of practices concerns the forms of affective relationship-making, which is the question of a 'reciprocal capture,' a 'territory,' but also of an 'affective mimesis' (Borch-Jacobsen) and an 'art of influence' (Nathan and Stengers). For Stengers, certain witchcraft practices, such as American neo-pagan witch Starhawk's practice, "tell[ing] the same tale as Guattari's *Three Ecologies*," (Stengers 2011b, 151) are more useful for the radical reinvention of practices than contemporary art practices. Rather than equating them, Stengers emphasises the political potential of neo-pagan witchcraft and thus allows us to understand the ecology of practices as both an ethico-aesthetic and a therapeutic project.

4.1. The Unresolved Question of Illusion-Makers

The Marxist notion of critique and its failure to sustain certain practices without merging or destroying them is a problem of not only Marxist critique but also critique more generally. We will see that Stengers traces this problem back to Plato, and thus, it becomes even more evident that it is linked with affectivity in knowledge-making. But before looking at the passages of Plato and the anxieties he expresses with sophists and the method they have used in their workings, let us see how Stengers defines the not-yet closed "sophist's

problem” (Stengers 2010, 1:29). At the beginning of her first part of *Cosmopolitics*, Stengers addresses the problem of the occidental intolerance for instability of knowledge-making and re-opens the question of our relationship with the sophists. She writes:

The question of our relationship to the sophists is not closed. Even more than the poet, who was also chased from the Platonic city but has since been reintegrated into an honorable civic category, the sophist, vector of lucidity or creator of illusion, doctor or soul thief, continues to trouble us (Stengers 2010, 1:28).

In this passage, referring to Jacques Derrida’s *Plato’s pharmacy* (1983), Stengers equates the figure of sophist denoted as the philosopher’s other with the *pharmakon*⁸⁰: like the ambiguous drug which can simultaneously act as a remedy or a poison, the problem of a sophist is that it cannot provide us with any guarantee, any clear justification of knowledge s/he creates, and thus, gives “no fixed point of reference that would allow us to recognise and understand its effects with some assurance” (Stengers 2010, 1:29). In other words, sophists are condemned not for any specific quality they possess but for the lack of that quality—i.e., “precisely the *instability* of the effects used to qualify them” (Stengers 2010, 1:29). The ambiguity of sophists’ practices is not a problem exclusive to Greek culture: many cultures recognise the instability of specific roles, practices, or drugs. According to Stengers, what seems unique is this culture’s intolerance of ambiguity and a certain kind of instability, which presents itself alongside the marginalisation of the sophists. She writes: “We require a fixed point, a foundation, a guarantee. We require a stable distinction between the beneficial medicament and the harmful drug, between sound pedagogy and suggestive influence, between reason and opinion” (Stengers 2010, 1:29).

As a result, according to Stengers, our critical tradition is based on the requirement for stability and the possibility of a devaluing classification of knowledge-making from which many modern and contemporary practices are born. Between the modern practices bursting out of this tradition, she

⁸⁰ Despite the reference to Derrida’s text, Stengers stresses that she disagrees with Derrida’s approach when “the multiplicity of *pharmaka* is subtly channelled toward the over-arching question of writing” (Stengers 2010, 1:265). The term ‘*pharmakon*’ initially appears in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus* (ca. 370 B.C.E.) to describe the effect of Socrates listening to Lysias’ speech from Phaedrus. In this context, it implies the notion of ‘charm,’ but it also has the meanings of ‘drug,’ ‘medicine,’ and ‘poison.’ (Plato 2002, 81).

mentions scientific, medical, political, technological, psychoanalytic, and pedagogical practices, which have unbundled just like “Platonic philosophy in its time, as disqualifying their other—charlatan, populist, ideologue, astrologer, magician, hypnotist, charismatic teacher” (Stengers 2010, 1:30).⁸¹ Plato’s idea of the truth as the expertise in the classification of knowledge, in this case, the clear separation between truth and fiction, the really real and the copy, is also prevalent when we talk about the status of poets and the evaluation of artistic work. After all, sophists, poets, magicians, healers, and other neglected knowledge makers mentioned above are linked by the method they use in their practices: *mimesis*. This separation exposes this agonistic relation between philosophy and aesthetics, between “the power of affect” (*pathos*) and “the rigour of thought” (*logos*) (Lawtoo 2017, 1133). Let us see how this troubling question of sophists, as Stengers delineates it, appears in different works of Plato, which are often simultaneously metaphysical, political, and aesthetical treatises: in the more well-known *The Republic* (ca. 375 B.C.E.) and *Sophist* (ca. 360 B.C.E.) for the context of this problem and in the lesser-known *Ion* (380 B.C.E.).

Plato articulates the problem at the very beginning of the X book of *Republic* (ca. 375 B.C.E.), in Socrates’ conversation with Glaucon, when discussing the effects of imitation, which are also described as “destructive influence” in contrast to the “knowledge of what it really is”:

‘Between ourselves—I’m sure you won’t denounce me to the writers of tragedy and all the other imitative poets—everything of that sort seems to me to be a destructive influence on the minds of those who hear it. Unless of course they have the antidote, the knowledge of what it really is.’

‘What do you have in mind when you say that?’

‘I’d better explain,’ I said, ‘though the affection and respect I have had for Homer since I was a child makes me very reluctant to say it. He seems to me to have been the original teacher and guide of all these wonderful tragedians of ours. All the same, no man is worth more than the truth. So as I say, I had better explain myself.’ (Plato, 2018, 595b-c).

⁸¹ In Stengers’ view, the model of establishing practices hasn’t changed much since Plato. Commenting on the state of contemporary practices, Stengers claims that our reliance on the power of critical deconstruction is so compulsively firm, “as if making the difference between what is entitled to “really” exist and what is not were our only safeguard against the monstrous grip of illusion” (Stengers 2018b, 100).

Here we see that the “problem of sophists” that, according to Stengers, have defined critical practices since Plato, is also the question of the affective influence of different practices, which are separated in this passage as belonging to different types of knowledge: the destructive kind of knowledge of poets and the really real understanding of those who knows the “truth.”

An even more comprehensive account of sophists and their relation to artists can be found in Plato’s dialogue *Sophist* (ca. 360 B.C.E.), in which Plato aligns the expertise of a sophist with that of an artist, claiming that both produce imitations to dupe the mindless ones, give a ‘seeming education’, but the sophist operates with words, i.e., ‘spoken images’ (Plato 2013, 234b1-b10). The sophists belong to the kind of ‘wonder-workers’, including artists and magicians who are said to possess not truth but a sort of belief-based knowledge (Plato 2013, 233c10). In contrast, a philosopher’s expertise is defined in very close but opposite relation to a sophist: the main power of a philosopher is the ability to remove those ‘beliefs.’ Philosophers specialise in separation or discrimination, including filtering, sifting, and removal. In terms of practices, for Plato, it is similar to the practice of a doctor or a healer, which is perceived as a practice of cleansing (Plato 2013, 226d10-227a5). Thus, in Plato’s classification of types of knowledge, sophists, like artists, are juxtaposed with philosophers and doctors, placing their practices against each other, the latter being the more important and distinguished by its cleansing qualities.⁸²

The characteristic example of Plato’s idea of what it entails to establish one’s field of inquiry or practice, and more precisely, the artistic practice, is directly explored in his short and often overlooked dialogue *Ion* (380 B.C.E.). We are aware of Plato’s condemnation of affective mimesis in *The Republic*. However, Plato’s critical take on the activity of rhapsodes in *Ion* can serve as an introduction to his concerns about the instability of knowledge-making and, at the same time, his requirements for a stable practice. As Nidesh Lawtoo claims, the figure of the rhapsode, “a public reciter of poetry specialised in Homer,” perfectly embodies the subject Plato does not welcome in his ideal state (Lawtoo 2013, 58). Lawtoo notices that the problem with a rhapsode is that he acts like a “kind of chameleon,” an “expert in camouflage,” and thus,

⁸² The description of philosophy as a cleansing practice, be it critical or aesthetic in the Kantian sense, can be linked to the notion of critique attended by Stengers and the requirement for submission. Making a judgement to eliminate false beliefs is like removing ‘evildoers’ from an otherwise healthy body or eradicating weeds in a beautiful garden, with pre-defined and fixed roles for each element.

enables the unpredictable affective consequences of mimetic impersonation (Lawtoo 2013, 58). These dangerous affective consequences that trouble Plato so much is not a problem of inaccuracies of mimetic representations of reality or lies, as it is the ethico-political question of a “mimetic confusion of identity” (Lawtoo 2013, 59). This Lawtoo’s insight allows us to see Plato’s worries with mimetic speech from the perspective of ethico-aesthetics of Stengers and Guattari, which are evidently linked with Plato’s awareness of the affective subjectivity changes.

I would also like to bring our attention to the stability requirement for one’s practice, which Plato advocates in the *Ion*. In assessing if the name of ‘art’ (*technē*) could be attributed to the activity of rhapsodes, Plato conveys two criteria for differentiating one’s activity as art. First, it must demonstrate a level of universality and be stable and predictable. One cannot call an activity art if it happens occasionally or applies only to one specific phenomenon from a group of similar phenomena. In the case of rhapsodes, both Ion and Socrates agree that “the art of poetry is surely one whole” like any other art such as painting or sculpture. Thus, if Ion would like to claim the ability “to speak about Homer with art and knowledge”, he should also have this ability to speak about all the other poets (Plato 1996, 532b-d). Second, as an art, it needs to have a particular object or skill which is not characteristic of other art—at least not in the same way, and which qualifies the rhapsode to be professional, i.e., to “consider and judge beyond the rest of men” (Plato 1996, 539d). As Ion claims to know everything and, at the same time, nothing concrete, Socrates concludes that he is possessed by the divine rather than having the artist’s skill (Plato 1996, 542a-b).

Plato’s characterisation of the rhapsodic practice, on the one hand, establishes the requirement of stability of practice as a kind of universality and measurability and, on the other, distinguishes between two types of activity: stable one and, thus, associated with skilfulness and the other, where the activity is contingent and guided by the divine. The latter conception of artistic creation later became the basis for Kantian aesthetics. There, the stability of artistic practice is perceived to be created not through consistent work but through the possibly recurring yet ultimately unpredictable expression of genius. Either way, this definition of Plato’s rhapsodic practice, like the poet’s practice in *The Republic* and *Sophist*, testifies to the critique’s main features: the attempt to master or control the indeterminacy of affective knowledge-making through pre-defined criteria and their hierarchy. In what follows, I suggest looking into how other critical and therapeutic practices have repeated Plato’s worries with affective knowledge-making, namely, how this problem

is expressed in Stengers' practical analyses of the beginning of Freud's creation of psychoanalysis.

4.2. Freud's Denunciation of Affective Mimesis

Plato's denunciation of "affective mimesis," or "suggestion", has been symptomatic throughout the modern history of numerous practices. Such a case, among other pre-Freudian inventions, has been Anton Mesmer's animal magnetism and the practice of hypnosis, as "an influence without adequate logical foundation," notoriously denounced by Sigmund Freud when beginning to construct his therapeutic method—psychoanalysis (Freud 1922, 37). In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922), Freud confronted the supporters of the theory of suggestion, such as Gabriel Tarde, Gustave Le Bon, and Hyppolite Bernheim, by claiming that their writing was repetitive and led to only one somewhat irrational argument, that is—"the magic word 'suggestion'" (Freud 1922, 34). As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen argues, Freud refused to employ the theory of suggestion to explain hypnotic suggestion and related phenomena, e.g., "mental contagion" in a crowd or the "sympathetic inducement of emotions." For Borch-Jacobsen, this means that Freud could not accept the notion of suggestion implicit in many different phenomena and relationships to others and operate by a "kind of physical reflex," i.e., "mimesis of others" (Borch-Jacobsen 1993, 41–42). Therefore, some practices, such as hypnosis, operating through the experiences of affective mimesis, had to undergo significant changes at the beginning of the 20th century and eventually disappeared from the modern cartography of practices.

Stengers, being well aware of this story of disappearance, has taken up the hypnosis question and Freud's case of denunciation, mainly in her earlier studies (e.g., 1990; 1994; 2002a) and in her collaborative work with the French psychiatrist León Chertok (e.g., 1988; 1992; 1999), in which she questions the self-defining and disqualifying premise of rational inquiry within the initial development of psychoanalytic practice. For instance, in their *Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason* (1989), Chertok and Stengers write that hypnosis, like the suggestion, troubles psychoanalytic reason because "it puts the "truth" in question" or, in other words, it "problematizes the possibility of constructing a theory on the basis of experiment or experience," as it is impure and uncontrollable par excellence (Chertok and Stengers 1992, xvi–xvii). In another analysis of therapeutic practices, to which we will come back later, *Doctors and Healers* (1995), dedicated to modern medicine and written together with the Egypt-origin French ethnopsychiatrist Tobie Nathan,

Stengers notices that her challenge for modern practices seems to be taken up by so-called ‘traditional’ therapeutic apparatuses when the healers address the singularity of their ideals and obstacles and justify their practices by an “art of influence” (Nathan and Stengers 2018, 124).

Nevertheless, Stengers claims there is a lack of knowledge of the phenomenon of suggestion and adequate tools for distinguishing its different forms in modern and contemporary practices. According to Stengers, it has been for a long time defined negatively as either producing ‘false witnesses’ or, more generally, related to violent behaviours and abuses of power (Stengers 1990, 86); thus, we use the term as it was used in the 17th century and cannot properly consider it: be it “music hall” hypnosis or the different types of ritually organised trance, the “murderous hypnosis” linked with influential leaders, or the “stupefied hypnosis” stimulated by the television and other (new) media technologies, and the different kinds of hypnosis involved “under experimental protocol” (Stengers 1990, 86), such as psychoanalysis and other therapeutic practices. Drawing from her more recent research, this list could be prolonged by the case of economic hypnosis induced by mobilisation for the economic growth Field (e.g., Stengers 2015) or the advancement of the knowledge (e.g., Stengers 2018a).

If taking just one case of such phenomena, Freud’s condemnation of suggestion or “affective mimesis” is a well-representative example of the modern destruction of practices defined in Stengers’ *Cosmopolitics I-II*, as he repeats Plato’s condemnation of affective mimesis. Freud, then, is one of the philosophers who can be assigned a pharmacist role, i.e., playing a role in Plato’s pharmacy. Like Plato, Freud attempts to master an affective relation by putting its definitions into clear-cut oppositions such as good and evil, copy and original, reason and opinion, truth and technique, etc. By constructing his practice around the pre-defined categories of reason and truth, Freud also claims the devaluing or disqualifying means of creating stability in one’s practice. As we have seen previously, for Stengers, it exemplifies a broader tendency of Greek thought to be unable to accept this kind of affective ambiguity of a *pharmakon* or simply the instability of the knowledge-making (Stengers 2010, 1:29). The notion of “affective mimesis” suggested here can be linked to the Aristotelian idea of catharsis, referring to the dramatic rather than the narrative or speculative understanding of imitation, or, as Borch-Jacobsen connects it, to Plato’s distinction between different registers of

storytelling—mimesis (or when the story is narrated by enacting a role) rather than *diegēsis* (or when a narrator tells the story).⁸³

Even though Stengers does not focus directly specifically on the method that the sophists and other “producers of imitations” use—i.e., that of affective mimesis, she raises the problem of the ways of dealing with the ‘threatening effects’ of affective mimesis. When considering Freud’s condemnation, Stengers invoke Borch-Jacobsen’s notion of “affective mimesis.” Coming from different traditions of thought, Stengers, Chertok and Borch-Jacobsen are concerned with mimetic efficacy and ways of stabilising the hardly repressible power of mimesis. As I have mentioned previously, the mimesis implied in Borch-Jacobsen’s affective mimesis is dramatic as it describes the process of enacting a role—telling a story by playing it out, acting it, and being an actor (*mimos*). This mimesis brings back our attention even to pre-Platonic times or when it was still a pre-philosophical concept. Since back then, as Nidesh Lawtoo claims, it has been tied to practices that are “more invested in a moving body than in a static image, more attentive to dramatic action than visual reproductions, more sensitive to spellbinding gestures than to visual resemblances” (Lawtoo 2022, 14).

Paradoxically, even though Freud refused to acknowledge the notion of affective mimesis, involved in various suggestive practices, he started to construct psychoanalysis by building upon Josef Breuer’s “cathartic method.” At the same time, he theorised it as a diegesis, as “the verbalisation” of a recollection” (Borch-Jacobsen 1993, 42). In his *Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect* (1992), Borch-Jacobsen notices the early paradox of Freud’s inclination to the ‘cathartic method’ and his analytic invention of ‘purgative narration’ based on dramatic and not narrative mimesis at the time. As Borch-Jacobsen explains, both Breuer and Freud denoted their patients’ narration as ‘cathartic’ because “these stories were, in fact, dramas that were played out, acted, mimed”, even though later this kind of narration has been explained as *diegēsis* (Borch-Jacobsen 1993, 45–46). Thus, for Borch-Jacobsen, the mimesis he refers to must be perceived as “a way of

⁸³ Borch-Jacobsen uses the dramatic notion of mimesis embedded in Aristotle’s concept of catharsis, which also appears in the concrete passage of the third book of Plato’s *Republic* (ca. 375 B.C.E.). Here, Plato distinguishes three modes of narrative expression in the story: *diegēsis*, *mimēsis*, and when both principles are combined (for instance, epic or lyric poetry). For a more detailed explanation of diegesis and mimesis in the different genres, see Plato 2018, 392c–98. What Plato distinguishes as the most purely imitative type of poetry and storytelling is tragedy and comedy Plato 2018, 394c.

telling” [façon de dire] and not a kind of imitation beyond language (Borch-Jacobsen 1987, 205). In this process of “disappearance of self,” typical to hypnosis and psychoanalysis but also trance practices more generally, a mimetic efficacy is induced by a collective affirmation of being other. As Borch-Jacobsen explains, it happens within the social communication of the message: “Truly you are no longer yourself, but that’s normal, so be your self, that is, another” (Borch-Jacobsen 1993, 109).

In the book, *A Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason* (1989), Chertok and Stengers rightly place Borch-Jacobsen’s notion of mimesis next to phenomenologist and writer Michel Henry’s take on affectivity and life. Like Borch-Jacobsen, Henry questions Freud’s and Jacques Lacan’s undervaluation of the role of affect and examines the contradictions of Freud’s thought regarding the notion of the unconscious, which was developed in connection to the ‘mystery of hypnosis.’ Chertok and Stengers take up a similar challenge in the sense that the subject of their work concerns the initial development of psychoanalysis and its disqualifying premise of rational inquiry to the pre-Freudian inventions, namely, Mesmer’s animal magnetism or mesmerism developed in the 18th century and the James Braid’s hypnosis practice which follows it. In the section dedicated to the work of Henry and Borch-Jacobsen, they write that despite the differences in their approaches, both thinkers perform “philosophical rehabilitation” of hypnosis while challenging the notion of the “subject of representation” (Chertok and Stengers 1992, 226).

Nevertheless, Borch-Jacobsen’s approach is marked as not “leaving representation” altogether but taking representation differently, “as an endless labyrinth without any “real” origin” (Chertok and Stengers 1992, 222). As they explain further:

But in fact the stakes are different in that [Mikkel] Borch-Jacobsen does not challenge the “subject of representation” in the name of an affect that is immanent in itself, but rather in the name of mimesis. Of Derridian ancestry, mimesis links all supposed self-identity of a subject to a play of identification, of roles, which are basically without origin (Chertok and Stengers 1992, 223).

Yet, Borch-Jacobsen’s mimesis challenges the perception of the rational and self-fulfilling modern subject precisely because of its affectivity. This affectivity is not denied when describing the similarities between transference, hypnosis, and other trance practices. As Chertok and Stengers explain, Borch-Jacobsen shows that these practices establish the same type of affects because they devise principally relational methods; hence, they can be perceived as

ways of mastering the “affective link to others.” For instance, in the case of the founding “break” of psychoanalysis to hypnosis, Borch-Jacobsen demonstrates how this repetition of the affective link is not “an exceptional state but is, rather, the very puzzle of the unconscious *as* relation to others” (Chertok and Stengers 1992, 223). According to Chertok and Stengers, as both methods are based on mimetic rather than diegetic speech, “a scene is “played,” a drama is acted, mimed, and not narrated to another as a memory or a story”, and thus, it is possible to claim that “transference does not make possible any more than hypnosis does” (Chertok and Stengers 1992, 223). Thus, following Borch-Jacobsen’s notion of affective mimesis, Stengers in collaboration with Chertok and separately⁸⁴ is concerned with the affectivity of relation-making in which repetitive role-playing is also involved.

Additionally, the Derridean genealogy of mimesis indicates that Borch-Jacobsen’s, Stengers’, and Chertok’s understanding of mimesis diverges well from the classical notion of mimetic desire by René Girard and the ethical take on mimesis where it is perceived, first, as a means directed to fulfilment and violence. In recognising the relational and affective nature of mimetic (or hypnotic) behaviour, they agree that the mimetic susceptibility to others is not the desire of possession or the desire that fulfils but rather the opposite; it gives no fulfilment. As Chertok and Stengers note, in Borch-Jacobsen’s understanding, hypnosis is not a kind of completion. Instead, it is “by its very definition, *transitory*, fugitive, evanescent. There is no ‘fulfilment in it.’” (Borch-Jacobsen 1987, 215 as cited in Léon Chertok and Stengers 1992, 224). This notion of mimesis entails a sense of instability of knowledge-making—the ambiguous movement of a *pharmakon* that sometimes can result in therapy and sometimes leads to sickness; also enfolded within Lawtoo’s

⁸⁴ Although Borch-Jacobsen’s notion of affective mimesis mainly presents a philosophical critique of the psychoanalytic method’s formation, Stengers returns to it later in *L’hypnose: entre magie et science* (2002). By taking Borch-Jacobsen’s parallel between an actor and a hypnotised person, she demonstrates how uneasy it is for scientific practices to accept the reciprocity and indeterminacy of the affective link to others. Here, Stengers uses Borch-Jacobsen’s notice that the only assured difference between an actor and a person under hypnosis is that an actor plays his role in front of spectators who know he is playing. In contrast, in the case of a hypnotised or hysterical person, he plays in front of the audience, which thinks that he does not know he is playing (Borch-Jacobsen 2002, 193 as cited in Stengers 2002a, 52). More about this refusal in connection to the scientific practices in a laboratory as a scene see Stengers, ‘Les leçons de l’histoire’, in *L’hypnose: entre magie et science*, pp. 49–69.

concept of “mimetic patho(-)logies”⁸⁵. Rather, it focuses on mimetic efficacy and expresses the notion of an affective link of knowledge-making. In what follows, let us discuss several ways of dealing with mimetic efficacy in more recent cases of therapeutic practices, showing what alternative and more positive approaches to affective mimesis could be established within contemporary practices.

4.3. The Positive Notion of Influence

As openly discerning the case of modern pathologies, Chertok and Stengers are also aware of the risk of becoming ‘Plato’s heirs’ while repeating Plato’s condemnation in a gesture of critique. Therefore, they are especially cautious about not performing another round of Plato’s condemnation towards psychoanalytic practice. No matter the fact if it is an effort to rehabilitate a practice of hypnosis or better understand a *modus operandi* of psychoanalysis, here the problem identified by Chertok and Stengers is the possibility of taking a distance and letting oneself be interested in the phenomena only as far as it confirms the pre-established argument: in this case, the corresponding similarity between Platonic and Freudian condemnation.⁸⁶ They seek to explain the founding “break” of psychoanalysis in other than a philosophical way—not in terms of ethics—as Freud’s way of fulfilling his desire for omnipotence, but as his interest in developing a more powerful scientific instrument or technique for therapeutic practices. In addition to analysing the modern perception of practice-making and the similarly divisive notion of rationality, which separates modern medicine from other practices, Stengers proposes the alternative idea of practice-making for therapeutic practices and practices more generally and, following Thobie Nathan, suggests focusing instead on a possibility of an ‘art of influence.’

⁸⁵ By “mimetic patho(-)logies”, Lawtoo describes a spiral exchange between *pathos* and *logos* which implies a risk of mimetic effects and affects that can be very infectious and violent or, on the contrary, allow for vitalising, communal participation (Lawtoo 2013, 7–8; 22). It defines well the direction and concerns of a recent interdisciplinary field of inquiry—*mimetic studies* suggested by Lawtoo, which focus on the mimetic efficacy and concrete effects of the contemporary manifestations of mimesis (for more, see Lawtoo 2022).

⁸⁶ More about the dangers of the ‘philosophers of *mimēsis*’ or ‘philosophical’ arguments in this regard, see Léon Chertok and Stengers 1992, 225–28. For instance, they argue that the method itself, characteristic of philosophical practice informed by Plato’s condemnation, is problematic as it does not avoid universalist tendencies.

First, let us examine what it means to construct a scientific practice in Stengers' and Chertok's analysis of Freud's creation of psychoanalysis. We already mentioned that Chertok and Stengers' proposal to read Freud's creation of psychoanalytic practice as an expression of curiosity for developing modern scientific technology suggests that the reason for his condemnation is technical. By inscribing Freud's creation into the long history of the development of scientific practices, including therapeutic practices, they also question the modern ways of establishing and sustaining a practice which could be traced back to Aristotle (in the sense of production, *poieîn*: 'bringing into being,' 'opening up,' 'unveiling the truth') or to Plato (in terms of stability and predictability). Nevertheless, separating the philosophical from technical or historical matters, Chertok and Stengers stress that this issue they are concerned with is "foreign to Plato as well as to theologians or philosophers" and explain it this way:

For Freud, the question of truth in its relations with suggestion was not ethical, but principally technical. In order for psychoanalysis to become a scientific technique capable of making research and therapy converge, it was necessary that the truthful decoding of the mechanisms of the unconscious have effects on the human psyche that were distinguishable from those of suggestion. Then and only then would psychoanalysis be distinct from ancient magical practices, and become a professional knowledge capable of taking its place with other scientific knowledge (Chertok and Stengers 1992, 273).

In this reasoning for Freud's creation, it is possible to detect at least two features of modern understanding of practice-making, analysed by Chertok and Stengers and reworked by Stengers in her further work. Freud's psychoanalytic practice serves as an example of a modern practice which tries to establish itself as a scientific practice by distinguishing itself from other 'magical' practices—most likely, the practices pushed back into the past or simply non-occidental practices and in terms of its very method, it needs to provide with "truthful decoding"—be stable and predictable. For Stengers, it is the first and more general separation of psychoanalytic practice, which is especially characteristic of sciences seeking to explain the origins of a human being (from medicine to pedagogy, psychology, and law practices), as they tend to base their narratives on the idea of human progress and difference (Stengers 1994a, 14–15).

Psychoanalysis is surely not an exception to this kind of human "arrogance," as Stengers puts it, and well represents the occidental tendency to see other practices in terms of a binary of "real realness" and "only illusion"

(Stengers 1994a, 21). In the case of Freud's early creation of psychoanalysis, a theme of rationality is used as a main point of reference to distinguish oneself from others, and the area of practice itself is defined by active progress and truth-seeking. But according to Stengers, there has been a more widely applied ambition to "give a rational explanation" to various kinds of trance practices; thus, not only the psychoanalysis but also the practice of hypnosis constructed itself in the name of truth or, more specifically, in the process of a will "to purify exorcisers' practices of their cultural and religious characteristics" (Stengers 1990, 90).

The second type of separation is claimed to appear within the very method of "purification" of psychoanalysis. In the case of psychoanalytic practice, it is in its usage of the experimental method and its construction of the specific "analytic setting" [protocole analytique]. Stengers and Chertok claim that hypnosis disappointed Freud because it complicated his aspiration to construct a therapeutic method based on experimental practice. When realising that hypnosis would not give him the power to build the conditions for such a practice, as it is impossible to determine its not only deceptive but also dangerous affects, Freud started to construct the analytic setting for the 'transference' in which the area of illusion would be purified, controlled and open for psychoanalyst's deciphering (Chertok and Stengers 1999, 21). According to them, this technical reasoning for the need for "purification" implies the broader problem: the modern establishment of a firm distinction between an 'ancient craft' and a 'modern technique' privileging the latter's construction. Thus, they write, "Freud, following [Antoine] Lavoisier's ideal, wanted to create a universal technique that would transform therapy from an art into a profession—a method that everyone, not only the gifted therapist, could apply" (Chertok and Stengers 1988, 646). Their analysis of Freud's methodology shows that while responding to the technical challenge of modern science, Freud must have been constructing a stable and predictable practice—no matter the circumstances and singularity of each relationship, and it needed to be quickly and widely reproducible.

The question of another understanding of *technē*, a practice, and how to establish the ways of dealing with all too dangerous effects of affective mimesis otherwise reappears in Stengers' and Nathan's work of therapeutic practices (esp. *Doctors and Healers* (1995)). In addition to analysing the modern perception of practice-making and the similarly divisive notion of rationality, which separates modern medicine from other practices, Stengers proposes the alternative idea of practice-making for therapeutic practices and practices more generally. As in the case of Plato's take on the mimetic

impersonation and devaluation of rhapsodes' creative activity, the understanding of mimesis and the take on the very activity of knowledge-making itself are connected. Hence, the technical or practical challenge for practices identified by Stengers becomes a tool for thinking about the notion of technics of mimesis, which suggests that the phenomenon of mimesis is not purely affective, irrational, or unconscious, as the notion of hypnosis or suggestion entails, but is a political question of *technē*, or as Stengers, following Nathan, puts it—an 'art of influence.'

Before unfolding the notion of an 'art of influence' within so-called 'traditional' therapeutic practices, let us return to the more recent developments of psychoanalytic practice, which, unlike Freud's beginnings, expresses a more flexible stabilisation of influence and construction of the singularity of a practice. In *L'hypnose: blessure narcissique* (1999), Chertok and Stengers discuss the long-term development of psychoanalysis, which failed the test of experimental practices since its cure was "neither predictable, nor reliable, nor complete" and eventually had to reflect its singularity. They distinguish a few such developments that can better characterise the notion of a singularity of a practice. First, even at the time of the last stages of Freud's work, he had to narrow the range of illnesses which his analytic method could treat,—ending up treating only neurosis and excluding patients with "borderline cases" such as cases of psychosis (Chertok and Stengers 1999, 37). It means that very soon after its creation, the psychoanalytic practice had to compromise and accept the fact that far from every patient could attend a transference relationship; thus, if it wanted to expand the range of illnesses it treats, it also needed to transform the way it works with an affective link to others.

Chertok and Stengers notice that this transformation of psychoanalysis happened after Freud died and when the notion of empathy in psychoanalytic treatment was introduced. Then, the 'affective link' itself became the question of curation. Additionally, the role of a therapist changed into being less about 'elucidating' and 'interpreting' and more about 'repairing,' 'nourishing,' and 'resuming' the process of development since it started to be defective (Chertok and Stengers 1999, 38–39). Thus, the singularity of a practice proposed by Chertok and Stengers in the case of psychoanalysis implies that the stability required by a more flexible stabilisation of a practice can be achieved by a broader range of means (including the ones caused by the therapist's affective involvement) and by a more specified scope of the intended change in a particular situation. The evolving understanding of psychoanalytic practice as a singular practice expresses the more flexible ways of stabilising the mimetic

efficacy of knowledge-making. Here, a practice that acknowledges its singularity acts not in the name of truth or some universal value⁸⁷, thus, not as an act of ‘elucidating’ and ‘unveiling the truth’ but it is instead an activity of ‘bending,’ ‘giving shape,’ ‘giving form to reality.’

Similarly, a method of practice operating in practical terms gains its stability not by claiming its access to rationality, such as a kind of “truthful decoding”, but by cultivating that stability via continuous acts of shaping affective links with others; therefore, by relying on specific experience and skill. Drawing on Nathan’s notion of influence, Stengers takes the example of practitioners of traditional therapeutic practices whose activity implies a practical kind of rationality for practices. She asks if, “wouldn’t we have something to learn from those healers, whose common characteristic is that they are not haunted by the ideal of a Royal Way endowed with the capacity to disqualify others, but rather by having cultivated what one could call, following Nathan, an art of influence” (Nathan and Stengers 2018, 122). According to Stengers, unlike in the case of devising a modern technique which requires making a clear difference between ‘fact’ and ‘artifact,’ constructing technique implies an effort to enable transformation. The tools used by a ‘technician’ of this kind involve different acts of cultivation, resembling sensible dosing: ‘disposing of,’ ‘selecting,’ ‘convening,’ and ‘stabilising’ (Stengers 2002a, 135).

The affectivity of mimesis is then perceived as a subject of political manipulation and transformative relation-making, which is neither purely rational nor irrational but depends on collective expert knowledge. As Stengers claims, it is important to differentiate ‘influence’ from ‘suggestion,’ ‘imagination,’ and ‘placebo effect’ because the later terms tend to naturalise the affects of mimesis, implying “an ingredient held to be ‘natural,’ ‘psychological,’ ‘found everywhere’ and not a technical thought likely to bring specific teaching to the art of curing” (Nathan and Stengers 2018, 122–23). Thus, redefining practice-making also helps find ways to acknowledge and learn with rather than suppress the mimetic efficacy. As we have seen, Stengers claims an idea of the art of an affective link as a basis for the construction of the singularity of a practice. Stengers’ analyses of the later stages of the development of the psychoanalytic practice and so-called ‘traditional’ therapeutic practices exemplify the possibility of more positive

⁸⁷ Being self-reflective as a practice, in Stengers’ terms, means acknowledging the singularity of its specific requirements and obligations. For more about the practical re-definition of self in relation to therapeutic practices, see Stengers, ‘A Practical Challenge’ in *Doctors and Healers*.

approaches to the affective influence of mimesis. It shows that from the perspective of the ecology of practices, the transformation and potential reinvention of practices are fundamentally tied to affective relationship-making.

For Stengers, the similar character as traditional therapeutic practices also certain witchcraft practices express. The phenomena of witchcraft in Stengers' texts are described as a practical art or art of practice *par excellence*. By drawing on the American neo-pagan witch's Starhawk understanding of magic, she emphasises the practical relation of doing magic as 'bending', 'giving shape' or 'giving form to reality,' which is inscribed in the very definition of the term "witch" (*wic* deriving from an Anglo-Saxon root and meaning *to bend*) (Stengers 2002a, 165). Furthermore, part of 'witchcraft' refers to a 'craft,' an activity of artisan techniques requiring specific experience and skill (Stengers 2002a, 165). Again, affective relationship-making becomes an open and somewhat positive question of a collective process of shaping reality and enabling change. As Chertok and Stengers have put it, instead of being afraid of suggestion, one may perceive it as a possibility of sharing: "thinking and living together" (Chertok and Stengers 1999, 52).

4.4. Refrains and The Political Power of Words

As it was mentioned previously, it is in American neo-pagan witchcraft that Stengers sees the most potential for political action and reinvention of practices. Contrary to Guattari's approach, in this respect, it is not equitable but preferable to contemporary art practices. But why? What exactly could be learnt from them? Since Starhawk's story "tell[s] the same tale as Guattari's *Three Ecologies*" (Stengers 2011b, 151), and it is the story that is also being relayed in Stengers' notion of "reclaiming," which is a part of the ecology of practices, I suggest answering this question by looking at where these practices resonate with each other. It is possible to differentiate at least two points where that becomes the case. First, their political efficacy lies in that, more than any other practice, it takes meticulously seriously "the power of words, gestures, and theories" (Stengers 2008, 52). It can be linked to Stengers' attention to the idea of refrains coming from Deleuze and Guattari, which likewise works in Guattari's (de)territorialisation of *praxis* and Starhawk's collective assemblages. The second reason why it would be better to use witchcraft seems to be the radical inventiveness or 'artificiality' in Guattari's sense of these practices. They are less prone to the 'tendencies' of professionalism because they are not afraid of being just "invented," "made up," and linked to concrete communities in specific places.

First, let us see how the embodied form of text, or a refrain, plays a role in creating or forming politics. For Deleuze and Guattari, refrains convey the powerful dynamism of social fields, those closely entangled knots of territories where movements of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation take place (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 68). In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari suggest a few classifications and functions that refrains can have. The concept of refrains names the processes of territory making, first, that is *vibratory*—happening by sonorous means or when it is “dominated” by sound; however, more generally, a refrain is “any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 376). Thus, refrains can be optical, gestural, motor, and many other forms⁸⁸. Considering its significance for the formation of political action, it is important to note that, as Guattari alone describes it, a refrain is a kind of sensory affect that is a “site of a work” or a site of “a potential *praxis*” (Guattari 1996b, 166). Thus, when seeking, marking, and opening new possibilities of a territory, refrains act as more than simple sonic or other forms of creations—they embody creative or *made* sites of *praxis*.

In Stengers’ thought, refrains have political power even more explicitly; they are suggested as a tool to identify and perceive but also to resist and escape “the capture of modern territory.” Describing her conceptual proposal of “fabrication,” she mentions that it is the invitation to experiment with refrains, “both modern and familiar ones, to make perceptible not only the way territorial forces act but also what it may take to escape capture” (Stengers 2008, 39). What is implied here by a “modern territory” is the territory contaminated and saturated with refrains, repeated phrases, and sayings which simultaneously can summon and drain one’s energy to act. For instance, Stengers mentions the refrain that dominates “modern territory,” framed as “they believed/we know” (Stengers 2008, 41). Such a saying, which has become a claim and one’s common belief, is politically dangerous because it creates the separation between ‘them’ and ‘us.’ Additionally, it implies separation and hierarchisation of knowledge when what is a ‘belief’ appears

⁸⁸ Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari give multiple explications of refrains. For example, they propose a kind of grouping in which refrains relate to territory in different ways, such as 1) seek, mark, and assemble a territory; 2) territorialise and assume a special function (such as in the case of a child’s, lover’s or professional refrain); 3) mark new assemblages when they pass from one kind to another; 4) collect or gather forces at the territory or outside of it (especially, in the case of confrontation and departure) (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 380).

as a secondary type of knowledge in contrast to what is to be ‘known,’ which concerns not only knowledge as such but also associated individuals and practices around them.

However, Stengers does not propose ultimately ploughing up the discursive and, at the same time, embodied territory of modernity we live in. Instead, while reacting to Guattari’s cry of even “the words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity” being under a threat of extinction, she suggests creating refrains that would, at times, translate how territorial forces operate but, in other instances, they would imply routes of escaping and inventing new possibilities of action. For example, in a few of her writings (2008; 2017), Stengers uses the neo-pagan witch Starhawk’s saying, “the smoke of the burned witches still hangs in our nostrils”⁸⁹ to indicate the political challenge it entails. According to Stengers, Starhawk’s refrain may activate one’s memory and imagination to recall the situations in which the smoke was felt and possibly reshape how one thinks, frames, and addresses questions (Stengers 2008, 49). Therefore, Stengers’ notion of refrain involves an even stronger sense of inventiveness and political efficacy. The modern territory consists of refrains; thus, by reinventing them, one can change the very fabric of it.

As mentioned previously, unlike Guattari, who often uses artistic examples to discuss the inventive potential of human practices and Deleuze, who connects human struggle with art making, Stengers is less quick to notice and privilege artistic practices over other approaches in this sense. She questions the possibility that creating “new perceptual and affective habits” is challenging for artistic practices alone (Stengers 2005b, 162). Moreover, Stengers argues that in *What is Philosophy?* (1991), when Deleuze and Guattari differentiated art from the other two creative pursuits, philosophy and science, they did not explicitly favour artistic practices. Therefore, she pays more attention to the weaknesses and the price for survival of contemporary art practices rather than the ethico-aesthetico-political potential they entail and claims that,

“[w]e should not forget that the very possibility of associating science, art, and philosophy to creation first testifies for a depopulated world. These are practices that are now in danger of lacking resistance to the present, of being appropriated, but they are also the surviving ones, the ones which were

⁸⁹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark. Magic, Sex & Politics*, p. 219, as cited in Stengers 2008.

tolerated or domesticated, “encasted” while so many others were destroyed by what we call “modernization” (Stengers 2005b, 162).

Stengers then proposes to consider instead the “experiential or experimental art” of the neo-pagan witches, such as witch and political activist Starhawk’s practice, which is much less consensual (for instance, considering cultural trends) and is political *par excellence*. The political *escapism* and *form-making* they produce qualify them to be taken as influential political figures. Thus, it is not a coincidence that at the end of her essay, in which she redefines the role of diplomacy in future politics, *We Are Divided* (2020), Stengers also speaks of a figure of a healer. There, she suggests that perhaps as new political figures, we should invent healers “who address those who believe themselves the ramparts of public order and teach them to appreciate new inventions and to understand that what is done without their help is not necessarily done against them” (Stengers 2020b). Like this, Stengers assigns a new political role to the figure of a healer and sees them to be beneficial precisely because of their non-adaptability and capacity to use all kinds of verbal and non-verbal languages.

As we have seen, one reason why Stengers refers to witches, healers and doctors, and this way furthers the concept of refrains proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, is that she seeks to reclaim the power of words and vernacular languages while learning about discursive from some of the non-modern therapeutic practices.⁹⁰ For Stengers, it is crucial that the neo-pagan witches and other kinds of non-modern healers take seriously “the power of words and gestures, and theories” in a way that they care about their efficacy and the possibilities these formulas of words create in the process of putting them together and a long time afterwards (Stengers 2008, 52; 2003, 318). This is why, using the example of Yoruba therapeutic practices, Stengers claims that the Yoruba *Babalawo*, the healer who holds at their disposal the knowledge of the language codes and idioms spread throughout the culture, is “a true artist”,—the creator of abstractions which intervenes and transverses the time (Stengers 2011a, 2:327). Thus, Stengers prefers contemporary witches over artists because of their political resistance, expressed first in the ungraspability and richness of their languages.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, Guattari’s response to art critic Olivier Zahm, in which he is compelled to defend the notion of “aesthetic refrain” as not being discursive but rather being as “the outbreak of non-discursive at the heart of discursive” (Guattari and Zahm 2011, 47).

4.5. Starhawk's Assemblages and The Radical Reinvention of Practices

Another reason why Stengers prefers American neo-pagan witchcraft over contemporary art practices for the political efficacy and reinvention of practices seems to be its radically 'artificial' character as a practice. For instance, Starhawk's practice was invented in the true sense of the word as a feminist spiritual practice by experimenting with different religions, ideas, rituals, and community gatherings⁹¹ and is linked to a concept often used concerning this reference, namely the idea of magic coming out from a "collective assemblage" [agencement collectif]. It means that magic, like those 'artificial' assemblages of Guattari that I mentioned previously, does not presuppose ownership but is empowered, as Stengers writes, by and with the presence of others, including human and non-human beings and things. And if that process of empowerment involves creating symbols, they are not made to transcend but to "think-in-things" [penser-en-choses] (Stengers 2003, 331).

Stengers also stresses the importance of taking "the power of words, gestures, and theories" seriously by mentioning them as part of broader collective or communal assemblages. She writes, "They [American neo-pagan witches] know well that magic is not a matter of supernatural power, that the efficacy, or force, of words, cannot be separated from the artificiality of assemblages, especially from the rituals whose empowering virtues they experience" (Stengers 2008, 52). This artificiality of American neo-pagan witches' assemblages is like Guattari's theatrical subjectivity-makings in which 'artificiality' implies embodied and affective relation-making between heterogeneous elements. The collective assemblage of witches can also be linked to Stengers' understanding of an assemblage of therapy as a territory, which, like magical empowerment, is not meant to be owned (just like married people do not belong to a matchmaker) and which involves not two but many heterogeneous elements, among them—words, gestures, and theories.

Starhawk's practice can be a worthy example of the ecology of practices because it corresponds to Stengers' and Guattari's idea of radical reinvention practices, which concerns changes in personal and collective subjectivities.

⁹¹ In 1979, Starhawk and Diane Baker established the organisation of "Reclaiming Witchcraft", founded in the context of the previously initiated *Reclaiming Collective* (1978-1997). This initiative combined the Goddess movement and political activism and was created out of searching for new ways of practising spirituality and feminist emancipatory politics simultaneously. For more on how their practice was invented and reinvented since the 1970s, e.g. Grossman, n.d.

The common characteristic of their respective approaches is simultaneously individual and collective becoming through knowledge-making, also at the core of ontological or ecological aesthetics. As far as I have encountered, Stengers does not discuss Starhawk's or other witches' practices in detail. However, especially in her later works, she draws on Starhawk's idea of 'reclaiming' to suggest the conceptual tools of 'reclaiming' and 'relaying.' It seems that these tools have a similar aim or are simply another name for her previous proposition of resingularisation of practices by redefining their requirements and obligations, as it carries on Guattari's new aesthetic paradigm and the potential of what he calls "collective assemblages of enunciation." Furthermore, in this double-step proposition of reclaiming and relaying, there is again the sense of bending and shape-making—the sense close to the notion of (de)territorialisation and the idea of practice as a curation or cultivation of affective relationships with the surrounding world(s).

To get a sense of reclaiming, I propose briefly looking at how Starhawk describes the practice of reclaiming in her book *Dreaming the Dark* (1982). My attention was first captured by the sub-chapter "Reclaiming personal power: Magic as will," in which Starhawk writes of the story of one of the community members' Joy's becoming and her personal transformation, but reclaiming concerns the becomings of groups and more societal changes as well. Curiously, reclaiming seems to be a psychotherapeutic practice, while Starhawk, also trained in psychotherapy, gives us a sense of Joy's healing story and her experience of trance sessions. It starts with individual transformation but then expands to the community structures and is reciprocally enabled by them. She writes:

Reclaiming our personal power is a healing journey, but not an easy one. For the human psyche forms itself from the relationships one has with other people, things, and institutions. It is a mirror of culture. The relationships we have mostly known and the institutions of our culture are based on power-over. So our inner landscapes are those of the stories of estrangement, and they are peopled by creatures that dominate or must be dominated. To free ourselves, to recover our power-from-within, the power to feel, to heal, to love, to create, to shape our futures, to change our social structures, we may have to do battle with our own thought-forms. We may have to change the inner territory as well as the outer, confront the forms of authority that we carry within (Starhawk 1988, 46–47).

As we can see, in the reclaiming practice, the inner and the outer becoming is claimed to be happening simultaneously when making and unmaking

‘thought-forms,’—shaping the relationship with oneself and the community. Starhawk mentions that her role in Joy’s psychotherapeutic journey has been to be present for her as embodying that community. Likewise, as a close connection between personal and societal becoming exists, the community and its relationships can be poisoning or enabling. As Starhawk puts it, it is the community that “causes unbearable pain to people, that ultimately needs to be healed”; thus, it is the community that is a healer (Starhawk 1988, 61). The process of shaping, which happens here, thus, is also double. Joy actively shapes not only her subjectivity but also societal subjectivity more generally. According to Starhawk, in this case, the therapist’s role is less of an active shaping process than in other, more regular hypnotic techniques.

Unlike other therapeutic ‘influences,’ reclaiming seems to imply the critical importance of relationships with close communities for the efficacy of healing. This kind of support, claims Starhawk, cannot be given by professionals and be emerging from a professionalised practice—another type of separation to be healed from, as “it is still, ultimately, within a community of friends, lovers, family, co-workers, that [one] find intimacy and meaning” (Starhawk 1988, 61). Reclaiming is thus a (de)territorialising form of therapeutic practice, indicating the urgent need for both personal and societal change, which is to be done and experimented with first from the side of the individual within relationships with their closest surrounding worlds. Unlike, for instance, contemporary art practices, this type of witchcraft seems to suffer less from various ‘professionalism-like’ tendencies of sameness and neutrality, as it is tightly related to concrete communities in particular places. This extension of the reclaiming concept, thus, can bring the Stengers’ project closer to the notion of therapeutic *praxis* and give it a therapeutic character.

Finally, as we have seen, Stengers’ conception of the ecology of practices as a critical response and proposal stretches out to Plato’s critique and the typically unresolved issues with different kinds of illusion-makers, including witches and poets. Stengers’ analyses of the various therapeutic practices (from hypnosis and Freud’s early and later psychoanalysis to traditional therapeutic practices and Starhawk’s witchcraft) through the technical lens of inventing a practice can be understood as connecting cases showing that the destruction and potential reinvention of practices necessarily involve forms of affective relationship-making. Starhawk’s spiritual and political invention of ‘reclaiming’ practice “tells the same tale as Guattari’s *Three Ecologies*” because both narratives require creating discursive and yet non-discursive forms of *praxis* at the same time, articulating our modern territories and landscapes. Additionally, they both remind us that therapeutic change can be

ethico-aesthetic and political simultaneously and happen individually and collectively. In other words, their stories remind us that the challenge of reinvention of practices is an endeavour in ecology as much as in art and politics.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to manifest the conceptual significance of Isabelle Stengers' 'ecology of practices' in addressing contemporary challenges in aesthetic, ethical, political, and environmental territories. More particularly, I claimed that the multiple links between the concept of ecology of practices and Félix Guattari's ecosophy can establish a philosophical framework that allows us to perceive Stengers' thought as a critical response to the aesthetic, ethical, political and environmental issues of modernity, realised through the process of the reinvention of practices. This thesis has been supported in several ways.

First, by introducing Stengers' concept of the ecology of practices, which emphasises practices' invention through the relationships of 'reciprocal capture,' I have shown that Stengers offers the relational understanding of a practice that extends beyond the conventional *consensus/dissensus* binary. The conceptual analysis of Stengers' ecology of practices helped us to outline three primary categories of critical or ethico-aesthetic environments, each characterised by a distinct form of relationship-making. Critical practices thus can be marked by *dissensual* or negative judgment-making at one end of the spectrum, while a seemingly neutral submission dominates the *consensual* or positive end. Practices dominated by the third, reciprocal relationship-making, resist defining or being defined by pre-determined values such as benefit or harm, inviting more interdependent ways of establishing interests, concerns, links, or attachments. The Gaia story proposed by Stengers for the reinvention of practices has served as an example of a critical concept requiring the third intermediary kind of relationship-making—forging a *political consensus*. This process involves acknowledging the need to take the initiative and exercising agency in shaping one's critical stance regarding that initiative; thus, both *consensual* and *dissensual* activities simultaneously. As such, Stengers' conception of the ecology of practices can be aligned with other compositionist and new materialist ways of rethinking critique, such as diffractive theory, seeking alternatives to (post-)Marxist approaches.

Second, by examining the links between Stengers' ecology of practices and Guattari's aesthetic paradigm, I have suggested that Stengers' reading helps to see the affirmative side of Guattari's project of the reinvention of practices and, thus, be more relevant for discussing ecology and ethics in contemporary art practices. As we have seen, Stengers and Guattari share a scepticism toward Freudo-Marxist perspectives as lacking political strength, and both offer a commitment to exploring alternatives. They emphasise the relational nature of creating practices, offering dual pathways—potentially *consensual* or *dissensual*, termed by Guattari as territorialising or deterritorialising.

Stengers' and Mony Elkaim's emphasis on the possibly double route of 'aesthetic adventures' has helped to interpret Guattari's invitation to cultivate *dissensus* as an affirmative endeavour: supporting the need for the political gesture of resistance while equally aiming at co-creating and recreating values. Additionally, linking Stengers' idea of reciprocal relationship-making and Guattari's aesthetics of territory has let us see the affective side of Guattari's perception of contemporary art practices and released the concept of the resingularisation practices tied to either a *dissensual* or *consensual* activity. Nevertheless, Stengers' and Guattari's approaches differ in their preferred figures for the reinvention of practices. Stengers suggests the figure of a diplomat as potentially having a better capacity to navigate uncharted paths without entirely relinquishing their territorial sites.

Third, I have claimed that the ecological proposals for practices in Stengers' and Guattari's accounts invite a reevaluation of the modern problem of the atrophy of *praxis* and can be read as positive alternatives to the more predominant strand of Giorgio Agamben's aesthetics. The common thread among these interpretations is their reliance on Aristotle's distinction of *praxis/poiesis* while at the same time seeking alternative narratives to the Marxist-Kantian version of *praxis*. However, Aristotle's distinction of *praxis/poiesis* also functions as a point of divergence between these approaches. By closely examining Agamben's and Stengers' interpretations of *praxis/poiesis* distinction, it is evident that differing perspectives arise due to their varied evaluation of the very status of their separation and interpretation of the meanings ascribed to *praxis* and *poiesis*. Agamben argues for the firm separation between *praxis* and *poiesis*, defining the latter as a mode of truth. Consequently, he sees the problem in our inability to keep the exceptional status of *poiesis* as the actual task of practice, especially in contemporary art such as situationism. Stengers, on the other hand, invites us to embrace its interconnectedness and claims that the loss of practices lies in the politically emptied and superficially cultivated spaces, which cannot be resolved by inventing new categories of truth but require the diversity of values and ways of enabling change.

Last, we have seen that unlike Agamben, who relates the atrophy of *praxis* to a Marxist misinterpretation of Aristotle, Stengers sees a deeper issue: the Greeks, especially Plato, struggled to find flexible approaches to the instability of knowledge-making. By analysing Stengers' case studies of various therapeutic practices (from hypnosis and psychoanalysis to traditional therapeutic practices and Starhawk's witchcraft), it has been evident that the destruction and reinvention of practices must involve forms of affective relationship-making, whether that is a question of an 'affective mimesis'

(Borch-Jacobsen) or an ‘art of influence’ (Nathan and Stengers). Finally, drawing on Starhawk’s collective practice of ‘reclaiming’ has helped us see that Stengers’ political inclination towards witchcraft, as opposed to contemporary art practices, is based on the idea that the more significant potential for political action and reinvention of practices lies in those practices that are taking seriously the affectivity of language and are not hesitant to embrace their inventiveness or ‘artificiality’ and sense of belonging simultaneously. These features make Starhawk’s and Guattari’s political and therapeutical projects congenial, leading Stengers to claim that Starhawk, like Guattari, “tell the same tale.” But a similar tale is also told by Stengers’ critical project of the ecology of practices, encouraging vulnerability and the potential for a more transformative self-reinvention.

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SANTRAUKA

Problemos aktualumas. Šį tyrimą motyvuoja neoliberalios šiuolaikinio meno sferos neatsargumas ekologinės krizės atžvilgiu, kurį išvelgti skatina meno kritiko ir istoriko T. J. Demos pastebėjimai apie dar 2012 m. vykusią dOCUMENTA(13) parodą. Svarstant apie praktikų etines galimybes, disertacijoje klausiama, kokią reikšmę sprendžiant įvairius šiandieninius etinius, estetinius, politinius ir aplinkodairinius iššūkius, galėtų turėti belgų mokslo filosofės Isabelle Stengers „praktikų ekologijos“ konceptualusis projektas. Jis siūlo sujungti tai, ką, anot Stengers, Platono valstybė atskyrė – „žmogiškuosius reikalus (*praxis*) ir daiktų organizavimą-gamybą (*technē*)“ (Stengers 2000, 163). Stengers perspektyva kviečia permąstyti vyraujančią kritinių praktikų sampratą, perkeliant dėmesį nuo etikos prie ekologijos: nuo individualių meninių praktikų etikos klausimo prie tarpusavio priklausomybe paremtų santykių kūrimo ekologijos. Tokia praktikų ekologijos ir jų perkūrimo būtinybės koncepcija sietina su Félixo Guattari „naujosios estetinės paradigmos“ idėja. Stengers interpretacija kelia iššūkį įprastesnėms Guattari etinės-estetikos sampratoms šiuolaikinio meno teorijoje, linkusioms ją sieti arba su moderniuoju *disensusu* arba su instituciniu *konsensusu*, reliacine estetika ir dalyvaujamojo meno formomis. Stengers ir Guattari ekologiniai projektai, ieškantys trečiosios, *politinio konsensuso* galimybės, leidžia praktikų perkūrimo projektą matyti pirmiausiai kaip afektyvaus pokyčio klausimą; taigi, neišvengiamai užduodantį greta kylančius pažeidžiamumo ir atsakomybės klausimus.

Tyrimo tikslas. Šioje disertacijoje siekiama atskleisti konceptualią Stengers idėjos „praktikų ekologija“ reikšmę sprendžiant šiuolaikines problemas estetinėse, etinėse, politinėse ir aplinkodairinėse srityse.

Tikslui pasiekti keliami šie **uždaviniai**:

- 1) Atlikti konceptualią praktikų ekologijos analizę, atsekti jos vaidmenį ir funkciją Stengers filosofiniame diskurse ir įvertinti jos vietą kitų kompozicionizmo ir naujojo materializmo mąstymo krypčių lauke.
- 2) Išnagrinėti Stengers praktikų ekologijos ir Guattari estetinės paradigmos koncepcijų sąsajas, rasti pagrindinius jų ryšio taškus ir kontekstualizuoti jas kitų susijusių idėjų, tokių kaip „politinės galios trūkumas“, „vertybių kūrimas“ ir „estetiniai nuotykių“ lauke.
- 3) Palyginti keletą Aristotelio *praxis* ir *poiēsis* skirties interpretacijų, parodyti Stengers ir Guattari požiūrių ypatumus Agambeno *praxis* nuvertėjimo sampratos atžvilgiu ir išskirti Stengers ir Guattari interpretacijas kaip pozityvias performatyvių praktikų plėtojimo alternatyvas.

- 4) Interpretuoti skirtingas praktikos išradimo formas kaip atsaką į Platono afektyvios mimezės problemą Stengers terapinių praktikų analizėse (nuo hipnozės ir Freudų psichoanalizės iki tradicinių terapinių praktikų ir Starhawk raganavimo).

Tyrimo tezė: *Praktikų ekologijos konceptualizacija santykyje su Guattari ekosofija suteikia filosofinį pagrindą, kuris leidžia apibrėžti Stengers mąstymo kryptį kaip kritinį atsaką į estetinius, etinius, politinius ir aplinkodairinius modernybės iššūkius, įgyvendinamą per praktikų perkūrimo procesą.*

Tezė įrodoma keturiais etapais. Pirmiausia, pristatant Stengers praktikų ekologijos koncepciją, besiremiančią praktikų perkūrimo kaip „abipusės pagavos“ (*reciprocal capture*) santykių kūrimo idėja, parodoma, kad Stengers pasiūlo reliacinę praktikos singuliarumo reikšmę, peržengiančią tipišką *konsensuso/disensuso* binarinės poros sampratą. Tada susiejant Stengers praktikų ekologiją ir Guattari teritorinę estetiką, aptariama, kaip Stengers perkuria ir toliau plėtoja Guattari projektą. Ši sąsaja produktyvi dar ir tuo, kad Stengers perskaitymas leidžia suvokti Guattari estetiką kaip afektyvių santykių kūrimo projektą, todėl ji tampa aktuali ir šiuolaikinio meno lauke, svarstant pažeidžiamumo ir atsakomybės klausimus. Tolesniame žingsnyje, sugretinant du Aristotelio *praxis/poiesis* perskaitymus, Stengers ir Agambeno „*praxis* atrofijos“ sampratas, teigiama, kad Stengers interpretacija sukuria konceptualias sąlygas pozityviau pažvelgti į reliacinės meninės kūrybos idėją. Galiausiai, atkreipiant dėmesį į giliau įsišaknijusią Platono afektyvios mimezės diskvalifikavimo problemą ir aptariant Stengers terapinių praktikų tyrimus, pasiūloma praktikos perkūrimo idėja – kaip potencialiai drąsi afektyvių santykių kūrybos užduotis šiuolaikinėms praktikoms.

Metodika. Šio tyrimo metodologinį sumanymą nulėmė tarpdisciplininis požiūris. Kitaip nei Guattari etinių-estetinių-politinių paradigmu sampratos atveju, vertinant Stengers praktikų ekologijos koncepciją, mažiau tikimasi jos aptarimo ir siejimo su modernaus ir šiuolaikinio meno praktikomis. Taip yra bent dėl kelių priežasčių. Pirma, būtina pripažinti, kad pragmatinis praktikų ekologijos sampratos pagrindimas kyla iš mokslinių praktikų, būtent – iš fizikos (Stengers 2005a), ir pirmiausia praktikų ekologija buvo sumanyta spręsti atsakomybės ir atskaitomybės trūkumą mokslinėse bendruomenėse. Aptardama būtinybę fizikams imtis išradingesnio požiūrio į savo praktikų pagrįstumą, Stengers remiasi savo patirtimi dirbant su Nobelio premijos laureatu, fizikinės chemijos mokslininku Ilja Prigoginu. O išsamios psichoanalizės, šiuolaikinės medicinos ir susijusių praktikų veikimo analizės paremtos ilgalaikiu bendradarbiavimu su įvairiais psichoterapeutais, tokiais kaip León Chertok, Mony Elkaïm ir Tobie Nathan. Šiuo atžvilgiu Stengers vengia minėti menines praktikas ir yra linkusi teikti pirmenybę mokslinei arba

kai kuriais atvejais ir spiritualistinei veiklai. Taigi turint galvoje, kad mokslinės ir meninės praktikos neretai atsiduria priešingose pozicijose, kodėl apskritai reikėtų imtis spręsti šio atotrūkio problemą?

Siūlau bent du motyvus. Pirma, Vakarų modernaus ir šiuolaikinio meno kanone meninės praktikos kaip ir mokslinės yra linkusios save apibrėžti per autonomijos ir nepriklausomybės sąvokas. Meninių praktikų autonomijos idėja yra tapusi beveik sinonimiška vienaskaitoje vartojamam moderniajam „meno“ apibrėžimui. Pastebėjimas, kad modernioji estetika yra kaip „atvirkštinė monetos pusė Stengers aptartam *modernaus mokslo išradimui*“ (Sehgal 2018, 112) lygiai taip pat gali būti taikomas ir „meno“ idėjai, nes modernioji meno vienaskaitoje vartoseną gali būti suvokiama kaip atvirkštinė monetos pusė „mokslo“ termino vartojimui. Kita idėja, grindžianti Vakarų modernaus ir šiuolaikinio meno kanoną – tai „pažangos“ sąvoka, taip pat neatsiejama ir nuo modernaus mokslo. Kaip ir mokslo išradimai, šiuolaikinio meno judėjimai siekia keisti ir plėsti žinojimus, bent iš dalies maitinančius šiandieninę žinių ekonomiką. Taigi abi moderniosios praktikos rūšys kenčia nuo derinimosi prie „progreso“ sampratos ar kitų panašių modernių idėjų, ir todėl privalo įrodinėti savo autonomiškumą. Praktikų ekologija čia gali būti naudinga tuo, kad ji leidžia atkreipti dėmesį į dažnai naudojamus žalingus apsaugos mechanizmus ir siūlo kartu ieškoti kitokių būdų stiprinti praktikų autonomiškumo ir saugumo suvokimą.

Teigiant glaudų Stengers ir Guattari mąstymo ryšį, praktikų ekologija buvo traktuojama kaip koncepcija, besiremianti ir toliau reikšmingai plėtojanti Guattari ekologinį praktikų perkūrimo pasiūlymą – pradedant terapinėmis, baigiant meninėmis ir urbanistinėmis praktikomis (Guattari 1995, 135). Suvokiant Stengers kaip atidžią Guattari skaitytoją, buvo galima parodyti šių autorių pasiūlymų giminystę ir atkreipti dėmesį į kitokį Guattari etinių-estetinių-politinių paradigimų skaitymą, aktualizuojantį Guattari koncepciją šiuolaikinio meno teorijoje. Stengers interpretacija leidžia pamatyti, kad Guattari projekto ekopolitinė intencija nėra nei išimtinai antagonistinė, nei *konsensuali* (Bourriaud prasme – reliacinė), kylanti iš „mikro“ institucinės aplinkos. Įvedus ontologiškai afektyvių ir tarpusavyje priklausomų arba „politinio konsensuso“ idėją įvairiausių rūšių politiniuose tapsmuose, atsiveria galimybė svarstyti šiuolaikinio meno praktikų etinį aspektą svarstyti kaip esmingai susijusį su ontologiniu. Turint galvoje didesnę Stengers dėmesį Guattari aktyvizmui ir politinei filosofijai nei psichoanalitiniams darbams (Guattari 1995; 2000), šie argumentai daugiausiai grindžiami Stengers politinėmis idėjomis arba, kaip ji pati tai apibrėžia – tekstais, skirtais „įjungti mąstymą, o ne aptarti filosofiją“ (Stengers, Davis, and Turpin 2013, 172).

Tarp jų daugiausiai yra naujesni darbai, kuriuose ankstyvesnis praktiškų ekologijos pasiūlymas praplečiamas reikšmingomis konceptualiomis figūromis, tokiomis kaip „Gaja“ (pvz., Pignarre and Stengers 2011; Stengers and Despret 2014; Stengers 2015; 2018).

Siekiant išskleisti ir pagilinti *praxis* sampratą santykyje su *poiēsis*, šiame darbe buvo pasitelkta Agambeno Aristotelio *praxis/poiēsis* skirties interpretacija ir kritika (1999; 2019b). Tikslui įgyvendinti taikomi lyginamasis ir interpretacinis tekstų metodai, papildyti atitinkamų meninių praktiškų atvejų studijomis. Agambeno Aristotelio *praxis/poiēsis* skirties analizė performatyvių meno praktiškų kontekste reikšminga bent dėl dviejų priežasčių. Pirmą, Agambeno, panašiai kaip ir Stengers, *praxis/poiēsis* versija priklauso nedideliame „šiuolaikinės veiksmo filosofijos“ atveju, kurie, užuot rėmęsi marksistine-kantiškąja versija, atsigręžia būtent į Aristotelio *praxis/poiēsis* skirtį. Kitaip tariant, Agambeno požiūris artimas Stengers perspektyvai tuo, kad abiem (post)marksistinė prieiga atrodo nepakankama. Antra, prieštaringo Agambeno požiūrio analizė buvo naudinga, nes ji leido persvarstyti praktiškų nykimo ir perkūrimo idėją iš estetikos studijų pusės, siekiančios sugrąžinti *poiēsis* reikšmę į mąstymą apie praktikas. Stengers Aristotelio *praxis/poiēsis* skirties interpretacija (2000; 2006) galėjo suteikti šiai diskusijai naują perspektyvą. Ji numano panašų, bet kartu skirtingą ir plačiau taikomą tikslą – susigrąžinti praktiškų reikšmę, o taip pat ir su *poiēsis* susijusią *know-how* svarbą, nesumenkinant *praxis* ir performatyvių praktiškų reikšmės.

Tačiau praktiškų „susigrąžinimas“ (*reclaiming*) yra kur kas sudėtingesnė užduotis nei vien tik marksistinės *praxis* sampratos problemos sprendimas ar jos politinių-revoliucinių siekių permąstymas. Stengers vartojamas „susigrąžinimo“ terminas, pasiskolintas iš amerikiečių neopagonių raganos Starhawk kolektyvinės praktikos, atveda mus prie Platono nelygiaverčių veiklų padalijimo, kurį savo *Kosmopolitikos* veikalo pradžioje Stengers apibūdina kaip „sofisto problemą“ (Stengers 2010, 1:28–29). Remiantis Stengers Platono afektyvios mimezės diskvalifikavimo ir jos pasireiškimo įvairiose terapinėse praktikose analize (nuo hipnozės ir Freudso psichoanalizės iki tradicinių terapinių praktiškų ir Starhawk raganavimo), disertacijoje įvardinama afektyvumo problema, susiejanti įvairias Platono aptariamąsias praktikas: nuo filosofijos ir medicinos iki retorikos, raganavimo, menų ir kitų „iliuzijų kūrimo“ veiklų. Šioje dalyje analizuojami pirminiai šaltiniai aprėpia mažiau žinomus Stengers tekstus (Stengers 1992; 2002a), žinomesnius jos bendradarbiavimo su psichoterapeutais Chertok ir Nathan rezultatus (pvz., (e.g., Chertok and Stengers 1992; 1999; Nathan and Stengers 2018), ir kai kuriuos dažniau Stengers darbuose naudojamus Nathan ir Starhawk šaltinius (Nathan and Hounkpatin 1998; Starhawk 1988). Galiausiai, apsvarsčius

Stengers atsisakymą privilegijuoti menines praktikas ir pasiūlymą atkreipti dėmesį į Starhawk raganavimo praktikos išradingumą (Stengers 2005b, 162), atsirado galimybė pastebėti šių praktikų skirtumus, o ne jas sutapatinti.

Darbo naujumas ir reikšmė. Persvarstant praktikos pažadą ir jo ekologinių reikšmių galimybes šiuolaikinėse praktikose, šiuo tyrimu siekiama pasiūlyti konceptualų pagrindą, kuris galėtų pagrįsti „praktikos“ reikšmės supratimą ir naudojimą šiandien. Stengers „praktikų ekologijos“ perspektyvos įtraukimas kalbant apie šiuolaikinio meno praktikas gali būti naudingas dėl daugelio priežasčių. Pirma, Stengers ekologijos samprata kviečia tyrinėti įvairių abipusiškai įgalinančių ar, priešingai, žlugdančių santykių tarp praktikų, praktikomis užsiimančiųjų ir daugybės kitų būtybių dinamiką. Ekologijos klausimo sprendimas galėtų tapti alternatyva dažnai ignoruojamam šiuolaikinio meno praktikų etikos klausimui. Antra, šiuo darbu siekiama klausti apie Guattari „naujosios estetišės paradigmos“ ateities galimybes, jei Guattari interpretacija šiuolaikinių meno praktikų lauke būtų kuriama iš Stengers perspektyvos. Kokią kitokią „estafetę“ (*relay*) būtų buvę galima sukurti? Interpretuojant iš Stengers perspektyvos, Guattari praktikų samprata ir jų perkūrimas tampa sietinas su afekto logika, kas gali leisti perkelti dėmesį nuo įprastesnio praktikos suvokimo, akcentuojančio politinio pokyčio ir įvairių „revoliucijų“ galimybes, prie afektinės transformacijos reikšmės, kurią sukelia galimos santykių kūrimo formos ir jų variacijos. Galiausiai, darbe parodoma, jog politinės vertės atžvilgiu šiuolaikinio meno praktikos neprivalo būti laikomos labiau privilegijuotomis ar reikšmingesnėmis, nei, pavyzdžiui, šiuolaikinės raganavimo ar įvairios terapinės praktikos, ir tai gali paskatinti pažeidžiamumo bei radikalesnės savikūros galimybių įsisąmoninimą.

Dėl savo tarpdisciplininio pobūdžio, šis tyrimas taip pat siekia būti aktualus besiformuojančiam Stengers filosofijos studijų laukui. Tiksliau tariant, jis tikisi būti atsaku į labiau praktinių Stengers mąstymo tyrimų poreikį, kurie svarstyty Stengers sąsajas su mąstymo kryptimis, išsiskiriančiomis dėmesiu estetikos sričiai ir reikšmingu estetinio žodyno plėtojimu. Kaip teigia Melanie Sehgal, be Guattari „naujosios estetišės paradigmos“, tokios idėjų kryptys apima Étienne'o Sourriau skirtingų „egzistencijos būdų“ (*modes of existence*) sampratą, Johno Dewey „meno kaip patirties“ (*art as experience*) suvokimą ir Alfredo North'o Whiteheado „Grynojo jausmo kritiką“ (*Critique of Pure Feeling*) (Sehgal 2018, 112–13). Vienoje iš nedaugelio (jei ne vienintelėje) Stengers santykio su moderniąja estetika ir skirtingais estetiniais žodynais analizėje, palikdama daug erdvės būsiniams tyrimams, Sehgal pasiūlo toliau šią tyrimo kryptį plėtoti tarpdisciplininio požiūriu. Kitaip nei Sehgal prieiga, iš esmės besiremianti

Whiteheado gamtos išsišakojimo (*bifurcation of nature*) idėja ir moderniuoju meno ir mokslo binariniu atskyrimu (Sehgal 2018, 124), šiame tyrime tikrinama meno ir mokslo bendrumo galimybė, neapsiribojant estetinių savybių egzistavimu, kuris paprastai siejamas su meninėmis praktikomis. Taigi disertacijos aktualumas susijęs su mintimi, kad svarbu „likti bėdoje“ (*stay with the trouble*), t. y., labiau adaptyvaus šiuolaikinio meno praktikų tęstinės moderniosios istorijos pobūdžio galimybė ir tolesnių pasiūlymų atvertis, kuriais Stengers ekologijos idėja šiose praktikose gali būti reikšminga.

Tyrimų apžvalga. Iki šiol labai nedaug tyrimų mėgino sieti praktikos problemą šiuolaikinio meno teorijoje ir Stengers praktikų ekologijos koncepciją. Arčiausiai šio sumanymo būtų Sehgal straipsnis „Aesthetic Concerns, Philosophical Fabulations: The Importance of a ‘New Aesthetic Paradigm’“ (2018). Jis yra specialaus „SubStance“ žurnalo numerio „Isabelle Stengers and the Dramatization of Philosophy“ dalis (sud. M. Savransky). Šis numeris yra vienas iš nedaugelio ir vienas reikšmingiausių darbų, skirtų Stengers filosofijai. Nubrėždama galimas sąsajas tarp Stengers praktikų ekologijos ir įvairių moderniojoje kontinentinėje estetikoje naudojamų žodžių, Sehgal pastebėjo, kad „praktikų ekologijos“ koncepcija yra iš esmės priešinga „moderniajai estetikai“. Anot Sehgal, ekologo figūros idėja labai skiriasi nuo esteto idėjos, dar kitaip žinomo kaip turinčio „suverenią“ vertinimo ir atrankos galią (Sehgal 2018, 123). Ekologijos atveju tokia galia nesuteikiama, todėl reikšmių kūrimo klausimas yra atsakomybės objektas, glaudžiai susijęs su aplinkos reikalavimais. Šiame tyrime remiamasi Sehgal ekologijos interpretacija ir siekiama ją pagilinti. Taigi klausinama, ką reikštų atsieti šiuolaikinio meno praktikas nuo moderniosios estetikos tradicijos ir mąstyti apie jas ekologijos bei kruopštaus abipusiai sąlygojamų santykių vertinimo terminais.

Mėginant lokalizuoti praktikų perkūrimo idėją Stengers ir jos kolegos Bruno Latouro mąstyme, ypač pasitarnavo Philippe'o Pignarre'o studija *Latour-Stengers: An Entangled Flight* (2023). Kaip Stengers darbų bendraautorius (2011) ir ilgametis jų redaktorius, šiame darbe Pignarre'as pasirinko labai sistemingą ir chronologinį požiūrį, parodantį, kad šalia anglakalbei auditorijai geriau žinomų Stengers tyrimų, skirtų Whitehead'o filosofijai, ne mažiau svarbus yra Stengers susidomėjimas psichoanalizės lūžiu ir bandymas „de-epistemologizuoti“ mokslines praktikas, kartu įsitraukiant į jų praktinių pokyčių istoriją. Pignarre taip pat yra pripažinęs Guattari veikalo *Three Ecologies* (1989) svarbą Stengers supratimui apie kapitalistinę praktikų naikinimą ir galimą jų perkūrimą (Pignarre 2023, 115). Guattari dėmesys trapiam įvairių praktikų būklei grindžia Stengers praktikų

ekologijos projekto kaip politinio, etinio ir estetinio pasiūlymo sampratą. Šios Pignarre'o daromos konceptualios sąsajos yra naudingos, kadangi jos motyvuoja tolimesnį tyrimą. Disertacijoje minėtos sąsajos patvirtinamos ir papildomos siūlant, kad praktikų naikinimo problemos priežastis Stengers mąstyme galima aptikti esant dar giliau, už (post)marksistinio nusivylimo *praxis* atrofija ribų – kaip Platono nerimo dėl sofistų klausimą.

Išvados. Šiuo tyrimu siekta atskleisti Isabelle Stengers „praktikų ekologijos“ konceptualią reikšmę sprendžiant šiuolaikinius estetinius, etinius, politinius ir aplinkodairinius iššūkius. Tiksliau, tyrime teigiama, kad daugialypės sąsajos tarp praktikų ekologijos koncepcijos ir Félix'o Guattari ekosofijos gali padėti sukurti filosofinį pagrindą, leidžiantį suvokti Stengers' mąstymo kryptį kaip kritinį atsaką į estetiškas, etines, politines ir aplinkodairines modernybės problemas, įgyvendinamas per praktikų perkūrimo procesą. Ši tezė buvo įrodoma keliais būdais.

Pirmiausiai, pristatant Stengers praktikų ekologijos koncepciją, kurioje pabrėžiamas praktikų perkūrimas per „abipusės pagavos“ santykius, buvo parodyta, kad Stengers ieško naujos „praktikos“ sampratos ir siūlo reliacinį praktikos supratimą, neapsiribojantį įprastu binariniu politinio veikimo apibrėžimu kaip išimtinai *konsensuso* arba *disensuso* santykių forma. Konceptuali Stengers praktikų ekologijos analizė padėjo išskirti tris pagrindines kritinės arba etinės-estetinės aplinkos kategorijas, kurių kiekvienai būdinga skirtinga santykių kūrimo forma. Taigi kritinės praktikos gali pasižymėti nesutarimu (*disensusu*) ar neigiamų vertinimų darymu grįstais santykiais vienoje spektro dalyje, o kitoje, sutikimu (*konsensusu*) ar pozityviais vertinimais grįstų santykių spektro dalyje, vyrauja iš pažiūros neutralus paklusnumas. Tuo tarpu praktikos, kuriose dominuoja trečiasis, abipusių santykių kūrimas, priešinasi apibrėžti arba būti apibrėžtomis pagal iš anksto nustatytas vertybes, pavyzdžiui, naudą ar žalą, skatindamos kurti interesus, rūpesčius, ryšius ar prisirišimo santykius, labiau paremtus abipuse priklausomybe (*interdependence*) grįstais būdais. Stengers pasiūlytas Gajos pasakojimas čia pasitarnavo kaip tokio kritinio koncepto pavyzdys, skirto praktikų perkūrimo idėjai įgyvendinti, kuris reikalauja iš praktikų kurti trečiąjį, tarpinį, santykių kūrimo būdą – formuoti *politinį konsensuą*. Šis procesas apima ir suvokimą, kad būtina imtis iniciatyvos, ir aktyvų veikimą, kad nebūtų prarasta kritinė pozicija tos iniciatyvos atžvilgiu. Kitaip tariant, vienu metu vyksta ir *konsensuali*, ir *disensuali* veikla. Dėl šių priežasčių Stengers praktikų ekologijos samprata dera su kitais šiuolaikiniais kompozicionizmo ir naujojo materializmo idėjomis grįstais kritikos permąstymo būdais, pavyzdžiui, difrakcine teorija, taip pat ieškančiais alternatyvų (po)marksistiniams praktikų apibrėžimams.

Antra, nagrinėjant Stengers praktikų ekologijos ir Guattari estetišios paradigmos sąsajas, buvo pastebėta, kad Stengers perskaitymas padeda išvystyti pozityviają Guattari praktikų perkūrimo projekto pusę, ir todėl yra parankesnis svarstant ekologijos ir etikos klausimus šiuolaikinio meno praktikose. Kaip matėme, Stengers ir Guattari sieja skeptiškas požiūris į freudo-marksistines perspektyvas – kaip stokojančias politinės jėgos, ir abiem rūpi surasti joms alternatyvą. Pasiūlydami dvejopus kelius – potencialiai *konsensualius* arba *disensualius*, Guattari dar vadinamus teritorizuojančiais arba deteritorizuojančiais, jie pabrėžia reliacinę praktikų kūrimo pobūdį. Stengers ir Mony Elkaïm' pabrėžiamas galimas dvejopas „estetinių nuotykių“ kelias padėjo interpretuoti Guattari kvietimą puoselėti nesutarimą (*disensusq*) kaip teigiamą pastangą: pastangą, palaikančią politinio pasipriešinimo gesto poreikį ir tuo pačiu metu siekiančią kartu kurti ir perkurti vertybes. Be to, susiejus Stengers abipusio santykių kūrimo idėją ir Guattari teritorinę estetiką, buvo galima išvystyti afektyviają Guattari šiuolaikinio meno praktikų suvokimo pusę ir atsieti praktikų resinguliarizacijos idėją nuo išimtinai *disensualios* arba *konsensualios* veiklos sampratų. Visgi Stengers ir Guattari požiūriai skiriasi tuo, kad jie teikia pirmenybę skirtingoms figūroms, padedančioms aktualizuoti praktikų perkūrimą. Stengers išplečia deteritorizuojančių figūrų lauką ir suabejoja menininko(-ės) kaip pagrindinės figūros turinčios šią funkciją vaidmeniu. Ji pasiūlo diplomatą kaip potencialiai pranašesnę figūrą, kuri(-s) turi gebėjimą drąsiau leisti dar nepramintais takais, tuo pačiu visiškai neatsisakydama(-as) ir savo teritorinės priklausomybės.

Trečia, šiame tyrime buvo teigiama, kad Stengers ir Guattari ekologiniai praktikų perkūrimo pasiūlymai skatina iš naujo įvertinti moderniąją *praxis* atrofijos problemą ir gali būti suvokiami kaip pozityvios alternatyvos vyraujančiai Giorgio Agambeno estetikos kryptčiai. Šias interpretacijas vienija tai, kad jos remiasi Aristotelio *praxis/poiesis* skirtimi, ir tuo pačiu metu ieško kitokių pasakojimo būdų marksistinei-kantiškajai praktikos sampratos versijai. Visgi Aristotelio *praxis/poiesis* skirtis taip pat veikia ir kaip šių požiūrių skiriamoji riba. Atidžiau išnagrinėjus Agambeno ir Stengers *praxis/poiesis* atskyrimo interpretacijas, akivaizdu, kad skirtingi požiūriai kyla dėl nevienodo pačios skirties statuso traktavimo ir visiškai skirtingo *praxis* ir *poiesis* terminų reikšmių interpretavimo. Agambenas teigia, kad turėtų būti aiški skirtis tarp *praxis* ir *poiesis*, pastarąją apibrėždamas kaip tiesos būdą. Todėl praktikų nykimo problemą jis išvystgia mūsų nesugebėjime išlaikyti išskirtinį *poiesis* kaip tikrosios praktikos užduoties statusą – ypač pasireiškiantį šiuolaikiniame mene, pavyzdžiui, situacionizmo praktikose. Tuo tarpu Stengers kviečia pastebėti *praxis/poiesis* susietumą, ir teigia, kad

praktikų nykimo problema glūdi politiškai ištuštėjusiose ir paviršutiniškai puoselėjamosiose erdvėse. Tai yra problema, kurios neįmanoma išspręsti išrandant naujas tiesos kategorijas, bet jos sprendimas reikalauja vertybių ir būdų įgalinti pokytį įvairovės.

Galiausiai matėme, kad kitaip nei Agambenas, kuris *praxis* atrofijos problemą sieja su klaidinga (post)marksistine Aristotelio interpretacija, Stengers tai mato kaip gilesnę graikų filosofijos problemą: graikams, ypač Platonui, sunkiai sekėsi rasti lankstesnį požiūrį į žinojimo kūrimo nestabilumą. Atlikus Stengers įvairių terapinių praktikų atvejų tyrimų analizę (nuo hipnozės ir psichoanalizės iki tradicinių terapinių praktikų ir Starhawk's raganavimo), paaiškėjo, kad praktikų naikinimo ir perkūrimo idėjos siūlo afektyvaus santykio kūrimo formas – nepaisant to, ar tai būtų „afektyvios mimizės“ (*affective mimesis*) (Borch-Jacobsen), ar „poveikio meno“ (*art of influence*) (Nathan ir Stengers) klausimas. Pagaliau remiantis Starhawk kolektyvinės „susigrąžinimo“ praktikos idėja, pamatėme, kad Stengers politinis polinkis pavyzdžiu imti raganavimą, o ne šiuolaikinio meno praktikas, grindžiamas idėja, jog svarbesnis politinio veikimo ir praktikų perkūrimo potencialas slypi tose praktikose, kurios vertina kalbos afektyvumą ir nebijo pabrėžti savo praktikų išradingumo arba „dirbtinumo“ (*artificiality*) bei teritorinės priklausomybės. Dėl šių priežasčių Starhawk ir Guattari politiniai ir terapiniai projektai yra giminingi; taigi todėl ir Stengers' teigia, kad Starhawk, kaip ir Guattari, „pasakoja tą pačią istoriją“ (*tell the same tale*) (Stengers 2011b, 151). Bet panašią istoriją taip pat pasakoja ir Stengers kritinis praktikų ekologijos projektas, skatinantis pažeidžiamumą ir labiau transformuojančios savikūros bei perkūros galimybes.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF
DISSERTATION

1. Rybačiauskaitė, Karolina. 2022. 'Towards a Diffractive Mimesis: Karen Barad's and Isabelle Stengers' Re-Turnings'. *Journal of Posthumanism* 2 (2): 139–50. <https://doi.org/10.33182/joph.v2i2.1943>.
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