



Shame as a geophilosophical force

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Accepted: 28 April 2022 / Published online: 4 August 2022
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Abstract

In this article, I argue that Deleuze and Guattari’s famous trope about “an earth and a people that are lacking” in the Geophilosophy chapter of *What Is Philosophy?* must be examined through a specific assemblage: the necessity for shame—as a powerful, non-psychological, and nonhuman affect—to enter philosophy itself both to resist stupidity and to include all the disfranchised of classical Reason. I then turn to Isabelle Stengers’ work against stupidity to determine how this assemblage can help us give shape to new multispecies apparatuses in the face of the Anthropocene. As a conclusion, I show that, through such apparatuses, shame truly becomes a geophilosophical force.

Keywords Deleuze · Guattari · Stengers · Shame · Stupidity · Geophilosophy

At first glance, the Geophilosophy chapter of *What Is Philosophy?* seems to be a perfect fit to actualize Deleuze and Guattari’s thought in the face of the Anthropocene. The chapter begins by asserting that “Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 85). As Flaxman (2012) underlines, by shifting from an idea of thought as something a subject conceives of an object to a question of connection(s) between territory and the earth, “Geophilosophy consists in nothing less that the resolution to situate philosophy in relation to inhuman *gaia* as opposed to inhabited *kthon*—in other words, to make thinking a matter of the earth rather than a measure of the ground” (p. 81).

Nevertheless, the whole Geophilosophy chapter asks of its readers the considerable work of determining how exactly the “inhuman” earth is at play in the ways we negotiate the relationships between our territories and the earth—and, more specifically, what philosophers are supposed to do with this inhumanity both in their

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thinking of our current territories and in their necessary longing for an opening of philosophy to its “others.” The chapter is indeed structured around an analysis of how the past, present, and future forms of philosophy connect and help create new modes of existence between the earth, territories, and peoples who (try to) inhabit them. My focus in this article will be dedicated to the transition between the present and future forms of philosophy—a transition that is difficult to tackle as it entails now famous tropes about “an earth and a people that are lacking as the correlate of creation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 108). I, however, want to emphasize how comments about this transition toward the future form of philosophy, and the earth and the people that are lacking, often miss an important assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari’s argument¹: the necessity for shame to enter philosophy itself both to resist stupidity and to open it to all the disfranchised of classical Reason. In my view, only this assemblage of shame, stupidity, and the disfranchised of classical Reason can open the way to a true geophilosophical thought, where shame can, however strangely, become a geophilosophical force. Nevertheless, this assemblage faces a singular challenge in the Anthropocene epoch: if our too-human ways of inhabiting the earth lead to the intrusion of inhuman Gaia, can we live well within this deleterious form of inhumanity? Or is it possible—through a careful, actualized reading of Deleuze and Guattari—to promote an understanding of geophilosophy that would not be inhuman but more than human? This question underlies the arguments developed below.

This article is, thus, structured around that assemblage: First, I focus on the necessity of shame entering philosophy itself in order to allow it to open to new modes of geophilosophical thought; I then show how thinking geophilosophically requires us to make stupidity shameful at first in Deleuze’s thought and, then, in Stengers’ more politicized thought in the face of ecological disasters. I conclude by suggesting that shame—both philosophical and not—can be reversed to become a powerful tool making us able to engage the risky, entangled ways of life of a more than human world, rather than an inhuman one.

“It had to be a philosopher”: the necessity of shame for the future form of philosophy

Deleuze and Guattari never wrote much about the “Heidegger case” regarding the German philosopher’s involvement with Nazism. Actually, they only wrote one paragraph, in the “Geophilosophy” chapter of *What Is Philosophy?*, but this paragraph is central for understanding how shame can be a very important vector of transition between present and future forms of philosophy—and, beyond the singular case of Western philosophy, how shame could make us think before the inhumanity of *gaia*. Readers often focus on Deleuze and Guattari’s clear condemnation of Heidegger here:

¹ Marks (2003) and O’Donnell (2017) have nevertheless described some aspects of this assemblage.



He wanted to rejoin the Greeks through the Germans, at the worst moment in their history: is there anything worse, said Nietzsche, than to find oneself facing a German when one was expecting a Greek? How could Heidegger's concepts not be intrinsically sullied by an abject reterritorialization? (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, pp. 108–109)

But the most interesting feature of Deleuze and Guattari's commentary resides in the context of the end of the Geophilosophy chapter; at the point where they mention Heidegger's involvement in Nazism, Deleuze and Guattari have been arguing for a few pages about the present form of philosophy. This present form, they say, is focusing on the State as the "good" territory for thought and for (abstract, always too abstract) human rights, and that focus shields the present form of philosophy from the possibilities that only genuine creation can entail. Their commentary about Heidegger must then be read in this full context:

The Heidegger affair has complicated matters: a great philosopher actually had to be reterritorialized on Nazism for the strangest commentaries to meet up, sometimes calling his philosophy into question and sometimes absolving it through such complicated and convoluted arguments that we are still in the dark. It is not always easy to be Heideggerian. It would be easier to understand a great painter or musician falling into shame in this way (but, precisely, they did not). *It had to be a philosopher, as if shame had to enter into philosophy itself.* (p. 108; my emphasis)

These lines come just before the first passage that I quoted above and indicate that the Heidegger case is far from concerning only Heidegger—as if the most abject reterritorialization of one the twentieth century's greatest philosophers could simply be cast aside, as if philosophy could just "continue" as if nothing significant happened here. No, it *had to be* a philosopher; shame *had to enter* into philosophy itself. The original, French version of the text is still clearer on this point, as the question about Heidegger's concepts being intrinsically sullied includes a parenthesis strangely omitted in the English translation: "How could (Heidegger's) concepts not be intrinsically sullied by an abject reterritorialization?" (Deleuze and Guattari 1991, p. 104). A parenthesis can be removed from a sentence without that sentence losing its main meaning; Deleuze and Guattari really intend to mean that *all* concepts in the present form of philosophy are in fact sullied by Heidegger's involvement into Nazism. The Heidegger case is only the paroxysm of the present form of philosophy shielding itself from all the intolerable oppression of forces of life characterizing our world. Modern philosophy conceals this oppression through concepts (such as human rights, the free market, or communication) disconnected from real experiences in our social democracies. Deleuze and Guattari write as much in the previous page of *What Is Philosophy?*:

Human rights say nothing about the immanent modes of existence of people provided with rights. Nor is it only in the extreme situations described by Primo Levi that we experience the shame of being human. We also experience it in insignificant conditions, before the meanness and vulgarity of



existence that haunts democracies, before the propagation of these modes of existence and of thought-for-the-market, and before the values, ideals, and opinions of our time. The ignominy of the possibilities of life that we are offered appears from within. We do not feel ourselves outside of our time but continue to undergo shameful compromises with it. *This feeling of shame is one of philosophy's most powerful motifs.* (pp. 107-8; my emphasis)

If Nazism, and its extermination camps, thus brought shame both into philosophy (through Heidegger's concepts) and into our contemporary modes of existence (as experienced in an extreme manner by Primo Levi), shame is not circumscribed to these extreme situations. It should arise each time we experience the lowness of our daily possibilities of life and, more significantly, it should arise each time a present form of philosophy justifies this lowness through concepts that Deleuze, in an interview about the so-called "New Philosophers," qualifies "as coarse as a hollow tooth" (Deleuze and Augst 1998, p. 37): "democracy," "consensus," "universal opinion," "the law," and the like.² But why should shame be one of philosophy's most powerful motifs?

First of all, it has to be noted that shame is a violence happening to our common ways of thinking and rationalizing; shame is not a rational concept—it is an affect, disorganizing both body and mind. Shame, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not a personal, psychological state of mind that would bring someone to feel trapped, excluded or silenced (see O'Donnell 2017, p. 7). For them, shame, as all affects, is opposed to any kind of affection. Affections are individual and lived according to human coordinates, while affects are non-personal, non-psychological. Affects are "nonhuman becomings of man" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 169) because they bring the affected in a zone of indetermination with the affecter, a zone where the distinctions between humans, animals, plants, molecules are totally blurred—see for instance how Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 109) write about "the agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf [that] remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other."

As an affect, shame is also a nonhuman becoming. In an essay about T. E. Lawrence, Deleuze even claims: "Shame enlarges the man" (Deleuze 1997, p. 121). Why would that be? To answer this question, I will first follow Aislin O'Donnell's (2017, pp. 7–11) line of argument, where she argues shame is the affect that arises when one is suddenly capable of *seeing* everything that is intolerable in our present condition, the shameful compromises we undergo with the ignominy of possibilities of life that are offered in our societies. Rereading *Cinema II*, where Deleuze (1989) states that our modern condition is characterized by a lack of belief in this world, an overabundance of clichés that prevent us from truly interacting with the world,

² While the quote from *What Is Philosophy?* probably refers partially to the French New Philosophers, it can also be understood as a criticism of Habermas' theory of rational consensus.



O'Donnell says we don't usually *see* the intolerable, as we rely on sensory-motor schemata that only seek to be efficient and erase what we don't want to see.

At the beginning of *Cinema II*, Deleuze argues that Italian neorealism may be the first cinematographic movement that creates a cinema of *seers*, of characters submerged by a kind of non-psychological shame that makes them able to see the intolerable of our living conditions; the movies thus produce "pure optical and sound images" (Deleuze 1989, p. 2). O'Donnell (2017, p. 16) takes the example (also chosen by Deleuze in his Vincennes seminars) of Roberto Rossellini's *Europa 51*, a movie in which Rossellini asks what would happen to a figure like Francis of Assisi if he came back in our modern world. His main character, an upper-class mother (played by Ingrid Bergman) whose child dies of an apparent suicide after she neglects to pay attention to him in order to take care of her guests, undergoes a transformation and a radicalization during her grief: she meets and takes care of those in need and visits a factory where the loud sounds and horrible working conditions break her sensory-motor schemata. She becomes a *seer* (discussing the factory workers, she says: "I thought I saw doomed people" (Deleuze 1984)) and cannot be accepted in her upper-class environment again; she ends up being locked up in a mental institution, while the disfranchised she helped consider her a saint.

But only shame, as a nonhuman becoming, can cause such a breaking of our sensory-motor schemata, which usually shield us from the intolerable, and thus of becoming-other. As Deleuze states:

We see, and we more or less experience, a powerful organization of poverty and oppression. And we are precisely not without sensory-motor schemata for recognizing such things, for putting up with and approving of them and for behaving ourselves subsequently [...]. We have schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful. [...]

Deleuze goes on to identify reductive, sensory-motor images of overly intense things or events with clichés, which allow us to only perceive what we are interested in perceiving, for economical, ideological, or psychological reasons (1989, p. 20). Clichés, in other words, shield us from the unbearable, various forms of oppression. We can now guess why shame would "enlarge the man" —by breaking the reassuring circulation of clichés, by opening us up to what is intolerable in the powerful organization of oppression and poverty, and, in the very best-case scenario, by prompting us to revolt and create other possibilities of life. John Marks (2003) argues that, when our sensory-motor schemata are broken and we become seers of the intolerable, new pathways are traced in the brain and "a powerfully impersonal, indefinite, pre-individual mode of thinking" arises in "a very particular combination of politics and esthetics" (p. 117).

But it must be underlined that shame is not an abstract process and cannot be understood as a mere structure of thought and perception that would replace our sensory-motor approach to the world. Shame is physical; shame always implies a body in crisis. For Deleuze (1997), shame acts as a critical entity produced by the mind as it is repulsed by what the body endures while it cannot be separate from the body. The body becomes animal, becomes weak, and enters in a violent



collusion with the mind, which produces the effect of shame (Deleuze 1997, pp. 123–124; see also Probyn 2010, p. 80). In Lawrence’s case, shame is produced by a collusion of his own body and mind but, in Deleuze’s broader argument, shame can be felt regarding what other bodies are undergoing and what human bodies can inflict to other bodies (the first occurrence of shame in *What Is Philosophy* is about Primo Levi’s account of the Holocaust). Shame continues to be felt when one realizes what schemata we use in our everyday life, what schemata Modern thought has been using in order not to see those convulsed bodies.

I insist so much on the “convulsed,” bodily component of shame here because that point is crucial to understand how we can transition from the present form of philosophy to its future form. In *What Is Philosophy?*, just after having written that shame is one of philosophy’s most important motifs, Deleuze and Guattari continue:

We are not responsible for the victims but responsible before them. And there is no way to escape the ignoble but to play the part of the animal (to growl, burrow, snigger, distort ourselves): thought itself is sometimes closer to an animal that dies than to a living, even democratic, human being. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 108)

We are not to be confused with the persecutors, otherwise we would just be stuck in sheer terror as Marks (2003) argues, but shame places us in such a position *before* the victims that we must renounce Modernity’s idea of pure reason to think and create in this zone of indetermination between the affected and the affecter, this zone where bodies convulse, where the borders between humanity and animality are broken in such a way that a dying animal has far more dignity than democratic human beings with their concepts “as coarse as a hollow tooth” (Deleuze and August 1998, p. 37). Actually, Deleuze and Guattari write as much when they contrast Heidegger’s reterritorialization on the “wrong” people, earth, and blood with what they envision as the people of the future form of philosophy: “For the race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race—the very ones that Kant excluded from the paths of the new Critique.” (1994, p. 109).

If the future form of philosophy has to engender “an earth and a people that are lacking as the correlate of creation,” that earth has nothing to do with a ground for (Modern) Reason and with human, too human peoples. When Deleuze and Guattari write about the “irremediably minor race” summoned by philosophy, they allude back to the growling, burrowing, sniggering, distorting animals hidden by the well-meaning ideas of a dignified Self:

Artaud said: to write *for* the illiterate – to speak for the aphasic, to think for the acephalous. But what does “for” mean? It is not “for their benefit,” or yet “in their place.” It is “before.” It is a question of becoming. The thinker is not acephalic, aphasic, or illiterate, but becomes so. He becomes Indian, and never stops becoming so – perhaps “so that” the Indian who is himself Indian becomes something else and tears himself away from his own agony. We think and write for animals themselves. We become animal so that the animal also



becomes something else. The agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 109; original emphasis)³

The lexical and literary choices they operate here—dying animals, madness, confusion, convulsion—need to be underlined: they choose Artaud over Kant; they choose the acephalic, the aphasic, or the illiterate; they choose the dying animal over the living, human, social-democrat. Only once shame has broken the reassuring circulation of clichés can we begin to think with the excluded of the new Critique rather than as independent producers of shallow ideas. When I write “thinking with,” I am alluding to the double-becoming Deleuze and Guattari defend here (“The philosopher must become non philosopher so that non-philosophy becomes the earth and people of philosophy” (p. 109)). Philosophers that want to engage with the future form of philosophy do not think in the place of the excluded of modern reason that shame kept hidden—they think *before* them. Are we able to claim our thoughts before the oppressed, physically before them? The only creative path opened by shame in the face of the present is to accept undergoing a becoming with oppressed forms of life, be they human or not: in any case the faith of humans and nonhumans is strongly connected in the age of the Anthropocene, which does not mean we should ignore the specificities of each form of oppression. Undergoing this becoming means entering a gray zone of exchange, a zone of indetermination where philosophy must become with what it is not. Non-philosophy is what philosophy needs to stay a living practice that can endure shame and the impurity of our current living conditions without being satisfied and replete with simply staying shameful.

Deleuze and Stengers on the shameful stupidity of our present time

If, as I argue, shame as a non-personal affect is pivotal in order to transition from the present to the future form of philosophy, it must then be situated historically. Shame has always been an affect but takes on a new function when the ignominy of our present living conditions is at stake. It is therefore not by chance that the importance of shame as a way of breaking our tolerance toward the powerful organization of poverty and oppression is situated in the aftermath of World War II both in *Cinema II* (with Italian neorealism) and in the Geophilosophy chapter of *What is Philosophy?* (with the Heidegger case).

The fact that shame can have a different form and function according to its epoch makes it resonate with another concept developed by Deleuze earlier in his writing: stupidity (*la bêtise*, in French). To put it bluntly, shame, in the present form of philosophy, should be what arises in the face of the stupidity not only of our times,

³ I choose to keep the term “Indian” to refer to Native Americans as it reflects the original French text (*Indien*).



but of our current modes of thought. Deleuze first develops his concept of stupidity when he writes about Nietzsche, and it is no coincidence that the “Geophilosophy” chapter is haunted by Nietzsche’s thought from the beginning to the end.⁴ The connection between shame and stupidity is already established in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, first published in 1962, where Deleuze (2006, p. 106) writes that philosophy “is useful for harming stupidity, for turning stupidity into something shameful.” A little bit further, in a reinforcement of the idea suggested above that philosophy must turn stupidity into something shameful each time specifically in connection to its present, Deleuze (2006, p. 107) writes: “Stupidity and baseness are always those of our own time, of our contemporaries, our stupidity and baseness.”

Stupidity is, thus, something we must examine further to understand how, articulated with the shame it should provoke, it can be a vector of transition from the present to the future form of philosophy. As Isabelle Stengers underlines, when Deleuze writes about stupidity, it has nothing to do with stupor or any kind of sleepiness: stupidity is something active, actively harmful (Stengers 2009, p. 34).⁵ Stupidity is what the modern, dogmatic image of thought⁶ fought so hard not to see: by claiming that the worst thing that could happen to a thinker would be to make an error (claiming that $2 + 2 = 5$, for instance), this dogmatic image of thought renders itself unable to fight stupidity as an active baseness that can be made of truths or errors but nevertheless celebrates “the reign of petty values or the power of an established order” (Deleuze 2006, p. 105). As Deleuze argues, the main problem with such a dogmatic image of thought that does not see stupidity is that it makes itself a reflection, a redundancy of the shameful stupidity of the institutions of its time, without saddening anyone, which he contrasts with the true power or purpose of philosophy: “Philosophy does not serve the State or the Church, who have other concerns. It serves no established power. The use of philosophy is to sadden. A philosophy that saddens no one, that annoys no one, is not a philosophy” (Deleuze 2006, p. 106).

More precisely, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes stupidity as having two main traits. First of all, stupidity is an incapacity to distinguish between what is important—what matters, what adds value to the world a thought is producing—and what is not. All philosophy teachers, Deleuze claims, know pretty well that “errors” are not what make a student’s homework bad:

Rather, what is more frequently found – and worse – are nonsensical sentences, remarks without interest or importance, banalities mistaken for profundities, ordinary ‘points’ confused with singular points, badly posed or distorted problems – all heavy with dangers, yet the fate of us all. (Deleuze 1994, p. 153)

By confusing what is important and what is not, thought becomes unable to sadden anyone and any institution, and thus becomes unable to barely see the stupidity of its

⁴ Nietzsche is mentioned (or alluded to) on almost every page of the chapter. One can see for instance Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 102) where the authors write that “Nietzsche founded geophilosophy.”

⁵ Neither does *la bêtise*, in French, have anything to do with bestiality, although the French *une bête* refers to an animal.

⁶ About Deleuze’s concept of the modern, dogmatic image of thought, see Deleuze (1994, pp. 129–167).



time, proud as it is to be conform to the dogmatic image of thought. Secondly, stupidity, in *Difference and Repetition*, is characterized as a cruel operation of reduction: it arises from a universal “I” which only contemplates concepts (and affects) without being able to connect them to the forces of life, without being able to see what is important in various forms of wills to live:

All determinations become bad and cruel when they are grasped only by a thought which invents and contemplates them, flayed and separated from their living form [...]. Everything becomes violence on this passive ground. Everything becomes attack on this digestive ground. (Deleuze 1994, p. 152)

Stupidity is heavy with dangers indeed, as it both flattens the singular points of importance—where the world could bifurcate—and separates us from any kind of lived experience, in a merry-go-round of abstractions so disconnected from the oppressed forms of life that they cannot even see their own cruelty. Most importantly, as Derrida notes, the intricacy of stupidity and the thought of an “I” implies that no philosopher, and no human, is protected from stupidity: “‘I,’ ‘myself,’ as philosopher, theorist or not, always run the risk of having to attribute to myself the *bêtise* I’m talking about or that, dogmatically, *bêtement*, I think I recognize in others” (2009, p. 157).⁷

If we follow Deleuze and Guattari’s line of argument in *What Is Philosophy?*, this is exactly the trap Heidegger fell into when the core of his thought got involved with Nazism. Heidegger did not fail to recognize the stupidity of his time but the way in which he tried to fight it—through a reterritorialization on an idealized, past form of thought (the ancient Greeks’ conception of Truth) —captured philosophy in a longing for what was fatally lost: the original experience of Being. This capture being connected to an infamous politics, philosophy can only find itself stuck in a properly stupid alternative: either a prophetic (both poetic and theological), reactionary celebration of the “original” Truth, or an overly easy protection from this prophetic tendency by way of a lazy, bourgeois exaltation of the present as it is (social democracy and its formal human rights).

In both cases, if we accept this alternative as such, we can only become stupid as philosophy can no longer be conceived of as a creation of concepts resisting our present toward future forms of thought, future forms of becoming rather than an idealized past. Heidegger’s special kind of stupidity resides in this powerful capture that makes philosophy unable to actually do what it is meant to do: fight the stupidity of its time. As Deleuze writes, thinking actively, thinking in front of shame, is resisting our own time, our present condition: “This is why philosophy has an essential relation to time: it is always against its time, critique of the present world.” (Deleuze 2006, p. 107).

⁷ Derrida goes on to show that, by making *bêtise* a purely human problem that animals cannot encounter as it is connected to the thought of a free being and to a critique of the Law, Deleuze reintroduces a kind of human exceptionalism (see Derrida 2009, pp. 178–183). While I choose to go beyond this exceptionalism with Stengers in the frame of this article, a similar though not identical endeavor could be undertaken through a discussion between Deleuze and Derrida.



We now have a quite solid understanding of how and why shame *had to enter philosophy* with the Heidegger case, both as an affect that makes us see the intolerable and as an untimely cry before the stupidity Modern thought tolerated for too long. In itself, this articulation of shame, stupidity, and resistance to the present explains how any philosophy with a modicum of dignity can only turn toward a future form that is geophilosophical, made of an earth and a people that were excluded from the boundaries of Modern thought. This articulation is already political—it puts into motion a (geo)politics of thought, but to better understand the geophilosophical aspect of everything that was written until now, we need to turn to the thought of someone who, as Didier Debaise argues, has strongly politicized Deleuze’s crusade against stupidity: Isabelle Stengers. In his article “The Minoritarian Powers of Thought. Thinking Beyond Stupidity with Isabelle Stengers,” Debaise (2018, pp. 17–18) suggests that what unifies the polymorphous work of Stengers as well as its defense of minoritarian practices is a conception of philosophy as a fight against stupidity. Obviously, as Debaise states, this fight is inherited from Deleuze, but not without Stengers inflicting a certain twist: Stengers, he writes, makes the fight against stupidity an always situated *political gesture*. By tracking stupidity at each turn in which Modern thought has disqualified collective practices and knowledges in order to celebrate false problems disconnected from experience, Stengers has further politicized the question of our present stupidity raised by Deleuze, asking what pragmatic consequences arise when knowledge has become a machine of disqualification (see Debaise 2018, p. 24).

Indeed, Stengers does not see stupidity as a psychosocial trait but as an epochal way some people are “seized” in such a way that they become invested by a mission, a responsibility that will not tolerate anything escaping or challenging our present condition:

[Stupidity] is quite active, even entrepreneurial, as were Bouvard and Pécuchet. It refers to the rather horrifying experience you can have, for instance, when talking to so-called ‘neoliberal’ economists, when they turn a blind eye to any argument implying that the market may well be incapable of repairing the destruction it causes. (Stengers 2009, p. 34)

Stengers (2009, p. 34) goes on to connect stupidity and professionalization—the training of experts, of professionals: “We are now used to the professionals’ arrogant *bêtise*, condemning without paying any attention to what their judgment destroys.” Consequently Stengers, with her insistence to resist stupidity in the always situated manners it disqualifies minoritarian practices (be they scientific, political, academic, activist, and so on), can help us understand how the assemblage of shame, resistance to stupidity, and the invention of a future form of philosophy, opened to the excluded of Modern reason, could be reactivated in a new geophilosophical way.

Stengers’ political fight against stupidity is now deeply rooted in the ecological challenge raised by what she calls the “intrusion of Gaia” (Stengers 2015). While stupidity keeps its professional, specialized arrogance in catastrophic times, it now more specifically affects “the ones who know” (majoritarian politicians or economists) against “the ones who believe” (climate activists, for instance), making of the ones who know “the inheritors-rentiers of the Enlightenment, those who continue



the noble combat against illusions but who—and this makes for a difference that matters—have abandoned its sense of adventure for that of a mission that made them pedagogues” (Stengers 2015, p. 121). The ones who know, Stengers argues, know that *something* is wrong with the current way capitalism is exhausting the earth but *still* cannot change the system (or else, they seem to think, anything irrational, non-specialized, could happen). This leads them to an active stupidity (a refusal to let oneself be touched by a situation and, even worse, to let anyone *else* be touched by a situation) that erases other possible futures, without any shame, but with the certitude to be a good “pedagogue” protecting the ones who believe against their own irrationality, against a phantasmatic “formidable and formless mass of illusions that only ask to profit from this situation in order to rush on stage.” (Stengers 2015, pp. 124–125).

In Stengers’ work, stupidity is indeed, as Debaise underlines, an active “war machine” that erases minoritarian practices refusing to submit to the “it must be so” of auto-inthronized, specialized pedagogues. In her recent book, Stengers (2020) acknowledges the fast pace of the invasion of this shameless stupidity in our modes of thought. In a passage which has some very Deleuzian tones, Stengers underlines how real (minoritarian) creativity has become scarce because of our present stupidity, and how it should make us shameful:

But the apparatuses we know the best are the ones that, everywhere and with impunity, prevent, or rather try to prevent, the manifestations of life; the ones that aim the eradication of the dynamics of metamorphosis in order to make “the individual” prevail – the individual gifted with its own reasons, evaluable according to its own competences, acted by consumption offers that make it serve economic growth. Feeling the ontological violence of apparatuses that make individuals of ourselves is refusing the logics of scarcity that judges as “normal” the fact that some – the ones who still feel, think and imagine at least a little bit – are escaping our common logics; it is knowing that those ones are not the chosen ones, but survivors – half- but not totally-anesthetized. (Stengers 2020, pp. 174–175; my translation)

In other words, not only does our focus on “individuals” and their “*own* reasons” make us collectively stupid; it also makes us blind to the other peoples, the other critters, the other connections, and the other potentialities of life existing beyond stupidity—when shame makes us realize that we were not able to see what really matters, what actually is shaping the future form of thought and philosophy. According to Stengers (2020, p. 15), resisting those individualistic apparatuses in order not to become totally anesthetized requires a profoundly ecological mode of thought, which refuses the modern, radical separation between specialization and what she calls “common sense” (that cry that says “I know, but still [there is more to this than what narrowed specialization tells us]”).

This ecological mode of thought implies to imagine different apparatuses—apparatuses that can include the ones “excluded from the paths of the new Critique,” as Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 109) write. The aim is to invent always moving, negotiable assemblages—refuting the consensus imposed by experts in order to make new zones of indetermination exist, without refuting the contributions of



science but without letting them be the only modes of subjectivation and socialization. These new assemblages of what unites us—the common—can help us envision what those zones of indistinction would look like. Stengers (2020, pp. 171–173) calls them “generative apparatuses” that direct democracy activists learn from autochthonous practices—apparatuses (such as palaver) where different people from different backgrounds and with different aims learn the art of hesitating together, of answering without emitting a counter-point, of crafting answers to moving questions in such a way that those answers were not always already prepared but are “obtained” as the fruits of an intensive engagement. Those multiple (and always to be reinvented and re-situated) generative apparatuses—or “arts of hesitation”—are what may be the only actions against “the devastating effects that keep going on in the name of economic growth” (Stengers 2020, p. 69; my translation).

One can easily grasp why Stengers’ generative apparatuses are engaged in an active fight against shameful stupidity and its firm clinging to immutability. For those generative practices to have only a chance to succeed, at least two conditions must be reunited: a) they require that we cease to think of ourselves as autonomous, self-enclosed “individuals,” and b) they, thus, imply multispecies modes of affecting and of being affected. Those two conditions are deeply connected. Firstly, Stengers (2020, p. 166) suggests we think of those generative apparatuses as operating with “an ontology in middle voice”—that ancient Greek voice that is neither active nor passive but designates the fact that “we are being acted.” According to Stengers, an ontology in middle voice characterizes the contact zone “that changes its subject, every subject, that makes an ‘ontological choreography possible,’ defying any attribution of responsibility to an author” (2020, p. 166; my translation).⁸ Although the middle voice is difficult to describe in the frame of Latin grammatical schemata, it engages us into a meeting zone where we let ourselves be acted, where we cease trying to master the beings and the things that make us act. The middle voice is the voice allowing us to be “concerned” by a problem, touched, and affected by it—so much so that the subject, or the “people,” in Deleuze and Guattari’s vocabulary, engendered by the collective reappropriation of the problem can once again only be something “obtained” through a creative process, and not something already there and simply waiting for being discovered. Stengers’ ontology in middle voice can then act as a mean to reject the overly normative human categories brought forth by the Anthropocene in favor of an other-than-human way of thinking, and of making livable worlds persist.

In the context of the ecological emergency characterizing our times, the renunciation to the ideal of the autonomous subject has indeed as a correlate the obligation to assemble this ontology in middle voice with all the excluded of the new Critique, nonhumans included. Generative practices can only be multispecific if we want to be able to, in Deleuze’s (1997, p. 3) terms, “liberate life wherever it is imprisoned.” In the ruins of capitalism that are already our reality and that will continue to be, whether as the remains of a past time, or as the only horizon Modern States have to

⁸ When writing about an ontology in middle voice, Stengers deeply engages with Bruno Latour’s work in the field of Actor-network theory.



offer, developing a geophilosophy, developing generative apparatuses, require an art of composition in which we, humans, are only a small part of a broader, and risky territory:

Living in the ruins means learning the art of attention in a world that does not conform anymore to the roles our habits confer to it; a world where nothing is entitled or self-evident. [...] The art of attention is an art of the middle voice, a tentacular art because we have to let ourselves being touched, we have to give to what touches us the power to make us feel and think – and all of that always “here,” never in disconnection to the situation. [...] We have to care for entangled strings, to care for the figures those strings compose and recompose; we have to care for the way those figures make a situation hold. Learning to live in the ruins is learning to make “common sense” exist in the middle of a tentacular milieu where no meaning, no convention, is acquired once and for all. This “common sense,” this sense of a common situation as problematic, does not then designate humans alone, but the totality that takes part to this life in the ruins.⁹ (Stengers 2020, p. 192; my translation)

Conclusion: the infectious joy of inhabiting a more than human world

If stupidity is always specifically shaped by its time, then the task to make it shameful must be thought anew by every philosophy so that it makes itself able to be touched by the specific baseness of its time. When Heidegger made shame enter philosophy, when he sullied philosophical concepts, it engaged philosophers outside the paths of the Modern Critique in a nonhuman geophilosophy always involved in the process of creating a new people (rational and not, human and not) for new territories on a new earth. It is worth repeating once again that what is at stake here is absolutely not ‘finding’ peoples and territories that would be preexisting, waiting to be discovered: we shift from the obsession with identifying the underlying ground that justifies designating who is suffering or oppressed to opening our eyes to the intolerable cruelty and injustice that is being perpetrated—to stand before all of those who are affected and suffering. Engaging oneself in future form of philosophy, once shame has made the present one intolerable, is letting oneself be touched by the myriad of real but virtual possibilities of life that our clichés, our apparatuses of power—our very own stupidity—have made invisible. In this age of global, ecological crisis, those virtual possibilities of life that constitute “the lacking people” can only be found in human and nonhuman entanglements defining territories where life can still grow (see Tsing 2015). The generative apparatuses this new kind of geophilosophy needs could be inspired by the ways some actual peoples have managed to keep on living at a subtle level escaping the Modern concepts “as coarse as a hollow

⁹ The pattern of capitalist ruins is borrowed from Tsing (2015), while the questions of string figures and tentacular milieus come from Haraway (2015).



tooth” —or, as Latour puts it, the “new” earth we so desperately try to inhabit has never ceased to exist for peoples who have managed to “always live *below* the Moderns, which has made them able to maintain—in a thousand of ways—their vernacular ways of existing by resisting as well as they could entrepreneurial initiatives of development” (Latour 2021, p. 134; my translation).

Throughout this article, I have been focusing on shame and stupidity as they are inherent to the present form of philosophy, and more specifically to Modern, Western philosophy. But the specific forms of shame and stupidity we have encountered never cease to meet with other, non-philosophical ones. There are, of course, as Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge, our daily, shameful compromises with the state of current affairs—when we turn away from misery, when we consciously act in a way that goes against the principles we claim to hold dear. In the same vein, there is the shame we feel in sharing our humanity with stupid people unfortunately dominating the social and mediatic space—people of the kind who dare to claim that the lives of weaker or elderly people can be put in danger during a pandemic if it allows the privileged ones to care about their business as usual.

But there is another, specific kind of shame Deleuze and Guattari do not write much about: the shame victims have been taught to feel because of their status, because they are “subalterns” or have always been disparaged. I would like to end this article with how our present situation—a world characterized at the same time by various insurrections against systemic oppression and by the ravages of a pandemic caused by ecological destructions—could be the occasion to refuse and reverse the paralyzing shame felt by the victims. In a performance-talk given in October 2020, the French, feminist writer Virginie Despentes stated: “What I am interested in today is not my shame anymore, nor my culpability, my rage, or my interiorized cops. What I am interested in today is becoming able to say ‘everything is possible,’ beginning with the best—and it is a matter of desiring something else” (Despentes 2020; my translation). If Despentes becomes able to refuse to be shameful, because she “cannot do anything useful with that kind of shame,” it is because the morbid contagion of the coronavirus made her realize that everything is contagious, including our best strengths, and that no individual or State borders can resist those contagions:

What the pandemic makes visible as a contagious process needs to be turned into a healing process. Each time you dare to do what you deem good to do, I am infected by your freedom. Each time I dare to say what I have to say, my freedom infects you. We believed those stories of borders, we trusted those fables of “every man for himself,” of “to each his own,” that fable saying that things are as they are and that this is the only, immutable reality. [...] I am not a territory of purity or of radicalism; I am not on the good side of things; nothing is separating me from the shit I’m surrounded by except for the will to believe that this world is a mushy matter. What is true today can disappear tomorrow but I am fed up with believing in borders that I have no use for, with trusting those borders as if they were traced by the hand of God while they are just randomly scribbled by stupid people; and I am fed up with believing in those useless stuff. [...] We already experience different modes of life in bod-



ies we are not ashamed of anymore. We change our lives, we change our discourses, we modify space with our sole presence – and the joy we derive from this makes us collective, revolutionary bodies. (Despentes 2020; my translation)

By experiencing that no one is an individual defined by an enclosed territory, by experiencing the risky joy of infecting and being infected by others in mushy entanglements, by making of this experience a liberation from shame, Despentes could very well be giving us part of the way to think anew what the lacking people of the future form of philosophy could be. That lacking people is not made of individuals hiding their baseness behind hollow concepts—it is a people made of entanglements and, we can add with Stengers, Haraway, and Tsing, of multispecies entanglements. When philosophy takes the risk, sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, of being affected by non-philosophy—as it is the case with Despentes’ soulful performance-talk—it can learn again how letting itself be touched by shame to see stupidity and the ravages of our individualistic and dualistic apparatuses. Being touched in that way is becoming with a more than human world. In that way, shame truly becomes a geophilosophical force.

Acknowledgements This article benefited from questions and suggestions by Didier Debaise, Noé Gross, Pierre Montebello, Janae Sholtz, and Isabelle Stengers. My English was improved by Chantal Alexandre, Janae Sholtz, and Charles T. Wolfe. This text would not be the same had it not been inspired by how stupidity and cowardice enraged my father.

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