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How to Learn Something New? The Place of Scientific Practices at the University

Going back to the emergence of the university in the Middle Ages afforded us a slight shift in perspective: from the university as an institution to the university as a collective of studiers, technically engaging with textual materials. This chapter takes up the problem encountered at the end of the previous one, namely, is there a place for the sciences at the university? Central to this challenge is the question of how the production of *new* knowledge, different from the diplomatic balancing of opposing givens, characteristic of the scholastic practices, can find a place at the university.¹ Crucial, in this regard, will be to further the conception of the university as a bundle of practices holding together a collective of studiers, in order to include practices where the production of knowledge is at stake as well, or where, more precisely, the production of knowledge can be conceived as study, rather than science.

In that sense, the goal of this chapter is twofold. First, it aims to reflect on the place of practices of knowledge production within the university. If, indeed, we do not want to take the medieval university as a model for a future university, a decision which would authorize the ban of the sciences from the university, the question of how the sciences can find a place at the university, how the university might provide a habitat for them, becomes crucial, especially given the current dominance of STEM disciplines. Therefore, and secondly, this chapter aims to further develop the concept of study practice to include processes of knowledge production as well. Decisive in that regard will be the hypothesis on the convergence of the experimental and the diplomatic use of reason *within* study practices, since this might allow us to reconceptualize study as an intertwining of the university's educational, scientific, and societal tasks, at least on the level of its concrete practices.

Given the centrality of practices, Isabelle Stengers' "ecology of practices" is particularly pertinent. At the height of the Science Wars in the 1990s, the Belgian philosopher of science intervened in this conflict to complicate the

discussion and conceptualize the constructivist nature of scientific practices. A digression into Stengers' philosophy of scientific practices, including their relation to other-than-scientific practices wherein knowledge is being produced, provides additional inspiration for the further development of the concept of study practices, thereby helping in giving practices of knowledge production a place at the university. At the end of this chapter, the concept of study practices will be fleshed out even further by engaging with other contemporary theories of study. I start, however, by further situating Stengers' concept of scientific practice in the heated debates of the Science Wars, which instigated Stengers' thoughts about the sciences and knowledge production more in general.

It's Practices All the Way Down!

Claims made in the name of Science often pretend to be neutral, value-free, and objective. Precisely these characteristics of Science had become the focus of the debates during the Science Wars of the 1990s. Natural scientists adhering to the idea that their profession indeed leads to neutral, value-free, and objective knowledge quarreled with a deconstructivist readership that had organized itself since the 1970s in an array of new sub-disciplines such as social studies of sciences and science and technology studies. The latter's main critique was directed at the idea that science only investigates a world out there and objectively reports about it; in contrast, these critics upheld that science is through and through a political activity that not just represents a world out there, but actively contributes to its construction, including the different kinds of inequalities, exploitation, and exclusions that are integral to it.²

The natural scientists' fierce reactions to these allegations show, according to Stengers, how much they had been offended. Not only had they been accused of being politically biased, but the existence of the very beings that they aimed to investigate had also been discredited as being purely scientific fiction. Moreover, what the Science Wars exposed was the fact that thinking of Science in terms of an overarching, broadly defined domain that makes claims which are (approximately) neutral, value-free, and objective proved extremely unproductive in facilitating a dialogue between the sciences and their interpreters. Therefore, Stengers proposes not to think of Science in all too general terms, but rather to understand the claims made by scientists from the point of view of their concretely embedded *practices of knowledge production*.³

In doing so, Stengers dismisses the purely relativist accounts of scientific discovery without taking recourse to the kind of radically realist understanding that places “Science” in objective opposition to “the world out there.” Instead, she understands scientific claims in relation to the scientific practices, which in the first instance had made it possible for these claims to become acceptable to the scientific community. Putting heat to the amalgam of modern Science allowed Stengers to discern a myriad of distinct scientific practices, each with their own inventive and creative ways of producing knowledge, and each heavily dependent on specific practical possibilities and constraints.

The practice of the experiment is exemplary. Defining the experimental invention as “the invention of the power to confer on things the power of conferring on the experimenter the power to speak in their name,”⁴ Stengers stresses the reciprocal capture between scientist and scientific fact as it comes into being during the actual experimental practice. Conceiving of the experiment as a generative assemblage involving scientists, machines, and particles makes her understand scientists and their facts as intimately entwined and thoroughly interdependent beings.

Given the emphasis on practices, Stengers’ perspective has strong affinities with a trend that emerged in social theory in the 1970s, which decided to focus more on practices than on broad, over-arching concepts such as the Economy, Politics, Religion, or Science for that matter. Instead of great schemes that should grant an absolute sense of stability to the always precarious relationships between buyers during a bargain, politicians during a negotiation, and believers during Holy Mass, social theorists started to focus on an ever-developing variety of diverging practices that gather different practitioners with different interests and ways of belonging around what is at stake during the particular practice. Indeed, it’s practices all the way down!⁵

In general terms, the stakes of such practice approaches are to step beyond either a totalizing or an individualistic view of social reality. Whereas the totalizing view assumes that society as a whole, functioning according to certain principles, determines social behavior (e.g., Marxism, structuralism), the individualistic view postulates that individual behavior is the only thing that truly exists and that society is merely a theoretical construct (e.g., rational choice theory, Chicago school of economics). As an alternative to either of these social ontologies, the concept of *practice* seemed to provide a viable middle way between the individual and society as a whole: “Practices are where the realms of sociality and individual mentality/activity are at once organized and linked. Both social order and individuality, in other words, result from practices.”⁶

Despite the diversity of practice theories, Theodor Schatzki argues that three main features characterize the concept of practice. The first is that a practice is “an organized constellation of different people’s activities.”⁷ This means that different people are involved and brought together by an activity that unfolds following a more or less organized structure. It is assumed that the people engaged in the activity know the tacit rules of the activity, which not only means that they know what to do and how to do it but also that they know how to go on with the activity despite unforeseen circumstances. As such, practices, according to Schatzki, are shared social situations in which the different participants have certain expectations about each other’s activities and act accordingly.

The second general feature is that essential characteristics of human life or social phenomena such as science, power, and social change must be understood as rooted in the organized activities of multiple people. A person’s behavior cannot, for instance, be understood outside of the context of the practice in which the person participates. From a methodological point of view, this implies that practice theorists will focus not so much on science, economics, or politics in general, but rather on specific scientific practices (e.g., conducting an experiment), on economic practices (e.g., negotiating a price), and on political practices (e.g., a debate in parliament).⁸

The last basic tenet of practice theory stresses that rule-following and knowing how to go on, particular to human activity, are implicit. This non-propositional, tacit knowledge is bodily or embodied. As such, practice theoretical accounts of social phenomena aim to challenge the modernist subject–object distinction or the mind–body split. Being involved in practices is indeed not so much about having a clear idea about what this means, but rather about being capable of performing the activities of the practice according to the expectations that circulate it.⁹

It is with respect to this concept of rule-following that Stengers’ ecology of practices sets itself apart from other practice theories most evidently. “Nothing is ‘done.’ Everything is to be negotiated, adjusted, aligned, and the term ‘practice’ refers to how these negotiations, adjustments, and alignments constrain and specify individual activities without determining them.”¹⁰ It is in the subtle difference between *constraining* on the one hand and *conditioning* on the other hand that Stengers finds a possibility to interpret and understand the hesitations of the scientists, the moments in which it is not so much a question of following a rule, or knowing how to go on, but of stumbling upon a problem that makes practitioners diverge, disagree, and possibly change the rules altogether to *create* ongoingness. It is also at that point that an opening is created to conceive of practices of knowledge production as practices of study.

Put differently, Stengers' scientists situate themselves in a practical field, not one, however, that conditions, structures, or dictates their behavior, but rather one that constrains their activities in light of what can or cannot be risked, and of the consequences their actions may involve. As such, every practice has a strong sense of open-endedness. In that sense, such study practices do not only produce new knowledge, they also take care of the consequences of the new knowledge, and try to grasp which role it plays and can play in a world in the making.

Understanding practices of knowledge production along these lines, however, does not mean that simply "anything goes" or that every practice is like any other. Stengers argues that practices are recalcitrant and have their ways of defending their borders through inclusion and exclusion. Hence, what is required is to draw out the *specificity* of a practice. Convincingly, Stengers argues that what scientists find so insulting in the accusations from relativist philosophers and sociologists is their claim that scientific practices are purely *social* practices, meaning practices like any other. Moreover, it is precisely this "like any other" that makes it impossible to discern the particularities and peculiarities of various practices of knowledge production.¹¹

Stressing what makes a practice specific, and different from any other, therefore, also goes beyond looking for a shared identity of the practitioners of the same practice. Stengers defines a practice as a *technology of belonging*, which she strictly separates from a technology of identity. Whereas a technology of identity would allow to gather different practitioners via the shared, uniform norms and values (rules) that inhabit the core of the practice, a technology of belonging would gather different practitioners around this practice without a priori determining *how* they belong to it. It makes it possible to discern and validate divergences between different practitioners, such as the moments when the facts do not "speak for themselves" but require debate, when specific interpretations do not "go without saying," but make practitioners stumble and hesitate.¹² It is in those moments of hesitation, moreover, that practices of knowledge production can be understood not just as scientific discovery, but acquire the character of study.

For Stengers, a practice as a technology of belonging regards the specific holding together of scientists, instruments, materials, and ideas in the course of the practice. How these different constituents interact during the practice can never be determined by an already-existing rule—an idea that upsets scientists because it reduces their doings to a social practice "like any other." Instead, it is always something that still has to be performed, needs to be done, that requires to be negotiated, adjusted, aligned. Therefore, Stengers proposes to draw out the

specificity of a practice through investigating its requirements and obligations rather than by establishing its (social) rules and norms.

Requirements and Obligations

Scientific practices, and practices of knowledge production in general, are indeed not social practices “like any other,” just as political and religious practices are not social practices “like any other.” The question now will be how to grasp the specificity of practices of knowledge production and thereby refuse scientists the comfort of hiding themselves behind the massive identity of objective Science on the one hand, without insulting them with the objection that their practice is merely a social practice on the other hand. Interestingly, Stengers proposes to understand scientific practices in terms of how the practices themselves at once necessitate and constrain the processes of thinking practitioners engage in. Therefore, it is vital to understand practices not as guided by a set of rules or norms, which all too easily grants scientists the comfort of a rigid identity (and *ipso facto* exposes them to social-constructivist critique), but rather as constrained by *requirements and obligations*.¹³ It is this distinction between requirements and obligations, moreover, that ultimately will prove helpful in the analysis of study practices as well.

For instance, when scientists were confronted with the solar neutrino problem (the solar neutrino being a particle that only interacts weakly with matter, traversing the Earth as light traverses the air), they had to *assume* the existence of the neutrino, although it had not been detected yet. In that sense, the neutrino obligated scientists in the form of an open question that did not determine *how* the question could be resolved. Successive experimental achievements such as the Homestake mine experiment subsequently allowed scientists to detect solar neutrinos, but also posed new problems such as the discrepancy between the theoretically predicted and empirically detected amount of solar neutrinos. Put differently, setting up these experimental situations was a way to fulfill the requirements posed by the problem. The requirements did not determine the solution to the problem, but constrained how scientists could think about it.¹⁴

In short, whereas the requirements denote how a specific phenomenon demands to be researched (what it requires to become an object of scrutiny), the obligations refer to what makes the scientists hesitate while doing their research. In that sense, *requirements* are the specific things that have to be done by a scientist to render a particular phenomenon “researchable” (e.g., setting

up an experimental situation). In the case of the solar neutrino problem, scientists needed to design an extensive experimental setting, and different colleagues had to be mobilized to ensure that the right protocols were followed. The requirements a geologist has to fulfill are, for instance, different from the requirements that a physicist has to fulfill. While the physicist can bring the particle to the lab, it is, indeed, impossible for the geologist to bring the Earth's outcrop into the lab.¹⁵

Indeed, requirements do not merely refer to the practices for which they apply. This would again reduce requirements to self-referential norms, and scientific practices to social practices. The requirements do not so much emerge from what, for instance, colleagues, students, financiers, or the public require from the scientist, but rather from what the world requires, or more specifically, from that in which needs to be researched requires from the scientific practitioner in order for it to become responsive to the scientist's questions. The construction of an experimental apparatus, for example, is what the solar neutrino problem (and physics more in general) required in order to become responsive to the obligation of the neutrino, implying that the neutrino itself both afforded and demanded the construction of such an apparatus.¹⁶

This means that the paradoxical mode of existence of the neutrino (predicted but not proven) facilitated setting up an experiment that could demonstrate the existence of a particle which had been a necessary unknown of theoretical models, and that the particle actively lent itself to such an experimental achievement. In contrast to social or intersubjective rules, requirements refer to what the world requires to become an object of scientific inquiry. This entails that they refer to what the scientific practitioners are obligated by, the obligations.¹⁷

Contrary to the requirements, *obligations* do not mobilize scientists; they do not grant stability, but rather make scientists hesitate. Because scientists are obligated toward what they inquire, they are not easily compelled to endorse the theories that their colleagues have fabricated concerning their object of study, unless they have recruited reliable witnesses. What seems to be at stake for Stengers is not only to address scientists by identifying them with what is required of them, but also, more importantly, to address them as being obligated via their practice. To address scientists in this way means to wager on the possibility that they will not shelter behind the identity the requirements risk to provide once they get *institutionalized* in disciplines and methodologies.¹⁸

Consequently, scientists must not just be addressed as individuals who follow the rules that govern their practice and make it "good science," but rather as people for whom something is at stake in this scientific practice, and as being

obligated by what makes them hesitate, *before being* mobilized by the particular scientific requirements:

An obligation, indeed, does not identify, because it leaves open the question of how it should be fulfilled or what would betray it. It is not intended to gather around the same mode of judgment, and it can divide. Moreover, the question of what practitioners are obligated by is never general. It is always about what such a situation, such a proposal obligates to.¹⁹

In other words, whereas requirements grant stability to a scientific practice and make practitioners converge around what they research (in the sense that they prescribe what protocols or procedures have to be fulfilled in order to pass the test particular to a specific scientific practice), obligations make practitioners diverge.

Intrigued by the neutrino, scientists formulated hypotheses, devised experimental apparatuses, and performed calculations to substantiate theoretical arguments in order to cautiously focus on the problem which the neutrino posed to them. The obligation, hence, makes it impossible to claim to know where practitioners are inclined to hesitate. In other words, it could be argued that whereas obligations denote *what* is being thought about in the course of a scientific practice, requirements denote *how* practitioners are required to think.

It is essential to underscore that requirements and obligations are intimately entwined, in a reciprocal capture, which means that the obligation that a phenomenon poses comes with requirements as to how this phenomenon can be approached. The requirements can only be articulated in relation to the obligation of a particular object of scientific inquiry (e.g., the neutrino, the Earth's outcrop). Conversely, the obligations can only gain relevance within a practice of knowledge production for which the obligation matters, and that incites practitioners to become responsive to what this obligation requires (e.g., constructing an experimental apparatus, erecting a field laboratory). Dissolving the amalgam of modern science and conceptualizing scientific practices in terms of their requirements and obligations thus enables understanding the immanent divergences of practices of knowledge production.

Understanding a practice, any practice, in terms of its requirements and obligations, makes it impossible to maintain the sharp distinction between science and non-science, a distinction that has led to the normative discrediting of so many knowledge practices as being "unscientific." Instead of a sharp border between science and non-science, Stengers' conception of practice opens up a landscape of immanently diverging practices of knowledge production whose

scientific merits can never be judged upfront or in absolute terms, but only by getting to understand what its practitioners adhere to, and how a specific obligation requires them to do as they do.²⁰

Learning Something New, Learning Anew

The previous sections introduced the stakes of Stengers' ecology of practices, namely to rethink the relation between science and non-science in a way that does not unduly relativize the work of scientists on the one hand, but that also respects the value of other-than-scientific practices on the other hand. The wager of Stengers is to create a possibility of peace, a civilized debate between practitioners as belonging to their respective, irreducibly different practices, each with their own requirements and obligations, when war (e.g., insulting, debunking) is more probable.

Not only does the understanding of practice in terms of its requirements and obligations open up such a space for debate, but it also lays the groundwork for an analytical approach to investigate other practices of knowledge production as well, and not just the practices sanctioned by the name of Science. In that sense, the distinction Stengers draws between requirements and obligations could come to matter to the analysis of practices of study as well. Stengers has demonstrated the potential of this distinction by comparing how believers belong to the Virgin during their pilgrimage to how scientists belong to the neutrino during the experiment. Both the Virgin and the neutrino are not actually present; rather, it is their virtual presence—as beings believed in but not proven—that sets an assemblage of pilgrimage, respectively, experimentation, in motion.²¹

The virtual presence of the Virgin and the neutrino poses an obligation that makes practitioners hesitate before these phenomena, and it is due to the feeling of being obligated to that which makes them think and feel, in and through hesitation, that practitioners try to meet the requirements of this obligation. Whereas in the case of the scientist, the obligation posed by the neutrino requires assembling an experimental apparatus, discussing with colleagues, and establishing a research program, the obligation coming from the Virgin requires the believer to pray, to go on a pilgrimage, and to make oneself receptive to the presence of the divine being.²²

In that sense, not only in scientific practices, but in all other practices, requirements and obligations exist in these kinds of mutual couplings in which the requirements are ways of responding to the obligation being posed. This

obligation can be felt most strongly when being fully part of the practice and its own ways of meeting the requirements. As such, the obligation does not exist *before* the requirements that have to be met; nor do the requirements bring an obligation into existence. Both emerge at the same time, and articulation of the requirements goes hand in hand with articulation of the obligation. And practices, then, are the very name of this process of reciprocal articulation.

The question now is, given the diversity of scientific practices, each with their own requirements and obligations, situated within a broader field of other practices, each also with their own requirements and obligations, how is it possible to discern a practice as “scientific.” Answering this question will further the exploration of the place of the sciences, understood on the level of practices, within the university. Moreover, it will help to shed light on the relation between “purely” scientific practices and study practices, understood as an intensification of scientific practices due to the cross-fertilization of an experimental and diplomatic use of reason.

Interestingly, when reflecting on what keeps different scientific practices together and makes them intelligible as scientific, Stengers does not refer to a collective identity, constituted by a set of theoretical premises or methodological rules, shared by all scientific practices. Instead, she suggests that what makes scientific practices converge, despite their variety, is a particular question. Stengers claims that the central question that matters to all scientific practices, irrespective of their many differences, is the question of *how to learn something new?*²³

It is to this question that every scientific practice has an answer, although the various answers that can be given may differ significantly. Whereas the physicist would perhaps respond that learning something new demands the installation of an experimental apparatus that makes the phenomenon of interest an object of investigation, the historian may answer that it requires spending sufficient time in the archive to read old sources patiently, and the psychologist might refer to the questionnaire or the survey as a means to learn something new.

Stengers argues that the efficacy of the question of how to learn something new is twofold. On the one hand, the question cannot unite scientific practices without making them diverge: in their attempt to respond to this question, it will soon become clear that even though this question concerns every scientific practice, they will all respond to it differently. Since scientific practices are engaged in different discussions, make use of different methods, and raise different standards concerning their work, they cannot answer the question of how to learn something new—although this question is pertinent to all of

them—unequivocally.²⁴ On the other hand, this question excludes the practices for which this question does not matter. Hence, juridical, medical, or therapeutic practices are kept out of the firing line, instead of being denounced and devalued as merely non-scientific.²⁵ In short, the question of how to learn something new makes scientific practices converge (the question matters to the entire range of scientific practices), while at the same time making them diverge (the question matters to them differently as they will respond differently).

Raising this question to unearth the meaning of the concept of *scientific practice* sets a double operation in motion that dissolves the amalgam of modern science, and discredits its idea of a rationality secluded from the hopes, fears, dreams, and doubts of the everyday world. The generic question “*how to learn something new?*” unbinds the sciences from the consensual justifications that identify them with an approach that is rational “in general,” as opposed to the particularistic irrationality of opinion and common sense. Instead, it permits inquiring the specificity of scientific practices as they diverge from one another, including the specific rationality particular to every scientific practice.

Placing the question of how to learn something new centrally within the discussion about the meaning of scientific practices raises a problem when considering the early history of the university, as recounted in the previous chapter. Did the university not come into being as an assemblage of studiers reading ancient texts relying on a diplomatic use of reason to create the possibilities for peace between different conflicting authorities? Were they, to that extent, not more interested in harmonizing or stabilizing history than in *making* history, bringing something new into being, learning something new?

At this point, it becomes possible, if not necessary, to complicate the historical development of the sciences and reflect on what it might mean to do scientific work at a university. Indeed, the habitat in which scientific practices take place might not so much transform the nature of scientific practice itself, as it does transform the meaning scientific practices have for those outside or at the border of this habitat, namely society or the world at large. That is why the tendency to practice sciences outside the university—for instance in private laboratories owned by companies—is so worrisome, since it allows for immediately commodifying the new that has been learned during scientific practice into a marketable good, instead of first raising the question of what its meaning or use *could* be apart from its exchange value.

Consequently, practices of knowledge production at the university might not primarily converge around the question of *how to learn something new?*—a question that matters to scientific practices outside of the university as well;

within the university, this question namely gets complicated by another one: *how to learn anew?* That is: how to transform the relationships we entertain with the world we inhabit and the new that has been learned in a thoughtful and inventive way?²⁶

In that sense, the university can be considered as the knot between two lines of thinking—the cumulative effort of two uses of reason. First, there is the diplomatic use of reason, already present in the medieval university, aimed at the harmonization of history and knowledge through a diplomatic intervention that creates the possibility for peace between conflicting authorities. Secondly, there is the experimental use of reason that, having emerged mostly on the outside (e.g., Galileo, Boyle), only gradually acquired its place as part of the university. The experimental use of reason is not so much interested in stabilizing history as in bringing something new into the world. The university can therefore be understood as the place where scientific invention employing experiment takes place on the one hand, yet also where the question of what the *meaning* of this invention could be for the world outside can be raised on the other hand.

From that point of view, it seems that by practicing science at a university, science potentially acquires the character of study. As such, study is not merely aimed at the creation of new scientific knowledge but primarily denotes a hesitant relation toward what is new, opening the question of what its place can be in the world, or how the event of an experimental achievement can be inherited. In that sense, study is the point of convergence between the three classical tasks of the university that are usually understood as separate, namely research, teaching, and service to society. In the course of practices of study, not only is something new discovered, but also a collective of studiers gathers around it to devote due attention to it, investigate it together, and speculate about its possible consequences for the world.

By reclaiming practices of study as a starting point to think about the university, I wish to omit an all-too-easy nostalgic plea for a return to the Middle Ages, where the university did not have to concern itself with scientific discovery yet and was of no interest to private investors, the state, or the industry on the one hand, and an all-too-quick acceptance of the current capitalization of the university due to the commodification of scientific knowledge on the other hand. Instead, I suggest to give the sciences a place at the university within the broader framework of study, because this provides the possibility to think about scientific practices (driven by the question of how to learn something new?) as being thoroughly educational as well and implicated in societal issues and concerns, which raise the question of how to learn anew?

Practices of Study

Conceptualizing the university from the point of view of its practices of study is not such a strange idea. Already in the Middle Ages, the notion of *studium* was used to denote the specificity of the university. When the emperor or the pope sanctioned medieval universities, they bestowed the name *universitas studii*. This name denoted, more than the usual denomination of *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, the activity of this association, namely study.²⁷ In the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the Latin verb *studēre*, from which the noun *studium* derives, means not only studying, learning, or pursuing knowledge, but also being attached to or being in favor of. As such, the concept denotes an affective and a cognitive activity, constituted by the relation between studier and study material.

In recent years, the concept of study has acquired renewed attention in the field of educational philosophy and theory, as well as elsewhere. The literature on the concept of study is marked by a few telling contrasts, interpretation of which will shed more light on the notion's different facets. At the same time, having outlined my understanding of study in relation to Stengers' account of (scientific) practices, the notion has in fact already been drawn toward a more precise meaning that concretely situates it on the coordinates outlined by the four fields of tension, which will now be discussed.

A first tension concerns the *subject of study*. In other words, it concerns the question of who is studying. Is study an activity performed on behalf of an individual subject seeking the isolation of the library or the archive, or is it a thoroughly collective event in which different people come together around a matter of concern? In this regard, Masschelein interestingly contrasts the iconography of Saint Jerome, absorbed in the text while seeking the seclusion of his cell with how Saint Thomas is depicted, namely as engaged in discussion with a public while reading from a book. Both are figures of study; however, both embody a different kind of study, namely individual versus collective.²⁸ The first image of study can, for instance, be found in Lewis' Agambenian account of study in which he understands it as a process of withdrawal from the world and its particular demands. One could think of those moments when one gets lost in the library, loses track of time, and no longer knows which aims to pursue or which demands to meet, and when, in the end, one devotes time and attention to something that one has encountered almost serendipitously while working in the archive.²⁹

In contrast, the second image proposes an idea of study as a public and collective activity, in which different people come together to discuss something. The center of discussion can be virtually anything—a virus, a river, a divinity, a text—as long as it has been made present during a lecture or other educational gathering, and thus turned into an object of study.³⁰ However, it can also be that the collective of studiers discuss their position as studiers, given specific social and historical conditions. Study, in that sense, means the analysis of these conditions and how they normalize exclusions such as racism or sexism.³¹ It is, at last, also this image of study as performed by a collective that can be found in Ford's account of communist study that is understood as a “commonness against,” a particular mode of gathering in order to contest capitalist economy, and to create a way of living together from the bottom up.³²

A second tension has to do with the *logic of study*, or more precisely, the relation between means and ends. Whereas some argue that study is an intentional activity aimed at, for instance, the inquiry and critique of social and political structures,³³ or the democratization of the very conditions in which one studies in view of an anti-racist decolonial future,³⁴ others conceive of study rather as a process that one gets caught up in almost incidentally, and that only succeeds when it uproots previously conceived plans or intentions. It is in this regard, for instance, that Lewis' conceptualization of the dialectic between learning and studying can be understood. He argues that study can be considered as the profanation of learning: as the acquisition of knowledge increasingly becomes a pure means, detached from all intentions or aims initially held, learners transform into a studiers.³⁵ What is disclosed in the act of studying, Lewis argues, is the educability of the studiers themselves:

Study becomes a kind of pure means without end. The result is an experience of *educability* without end. Here educability is not placed in the service of any aim outside itself. It is not made into a mean for an end. Nor is it merely an end in itself. Rather, it suspends the means-end logic altogether, producing a pure experience of the self as educable—as a ‘whatever’ being freed to be otherwise than.³⁶

In this account, studying denotes the moment when the initial intentions, aims, and purposes of learning are suspended because the presence of something encountered in the archive or the library requires attention and interrupts the process of learning, which transforms the learner into a studier while affording an experience of educability itself (instead of the experience of attaining a goal, meeting a demand).

Here a third tension comes into view, namely how different authors consider the relation between study and the world in which it intervenes, or in other words, the *politics of study*. A first line of thought, already hinted at, conceives of study as a strong antagonistic force that contests the political status quo via scrutiny. Dyke and Meyerhoff refer to the Experimental College of the Twin Cities, which was organized together with other studiers in order to resist the racist biases of the American system of higher education and engage a multitude of interested people in alternative modes of study, outside and against this system.³⁷ Less extreme is the conception of study as emergentist politics, a way of enacting new ways of living and being together from the bottom-up, firmly embedded within the sociality of study itself. Harney and Moten point to those moments when people take issue with something and, starting from their discussion about the issue, develop new ways of relating and interacting, which in itself already enacts an alternative vision of the political. In these contexts, study is understood as a radical praxis that provides the possibility for a new sense of collectivity to come into being in relation to a specific political concern (e.g., racism, exclusion, poverty, marginalization).³⁸

The following two lines of thinking see the relation between study and the political somewhat different and claim that it is crucial that study is not understood immediately as part of or engaged in political processes, be it *against* the existing world, or *for* another world. Masschelein and Simons, for instance, argue that although the political question of how to live together is inevitably present during the lecture, it is only present as secondary in relation to that about which the question is raised (e.g., a microbe, a mountain, a machine). As such, the discussion during a lecture or a seminar differs from a purely political discussion (understood as an exchange of statements informed by political ideologies), because something is made to interfere within the process and suspends the political conversation in order to make an educational encounter with a particular thing possible.³⁹

Additionally, Ford is hesitant to intermingle study and politics too easily or too quickly. Although he is convinced that there is a radicality to study, a specific political efficaciousness associated with its “commonness against,” he does not claim that study is political from the beginning onwards. Rather, he argues that study offers “an occasion for politics.”⁴⁰ In that sense, both are not entirely unrelated. Instead, it is the case that studying, without perhaps any singular political aim in mind, might create the possibility for political action. Thus, while this conception safeguards the autonomy of study—of not being predefined by any political goals—at the same time, a sense of political efficacy

remains, albeit in the second instance. In other words, by offering an occasion for politics, study can be understood as complicating or delaying the political process itself.

A fourth and last tension concerns the *place and time of study*. In general, three positions can be discerned. A first, perhaps more traditional, position is taken by those who situate study within the educational arrangements of the institution of the university. Typically, this is, for instance, the lecture hall as a place of collective, public study and the profanation of a poem, a painting, a particle, or the library where the studiers get lost among the sources and books, and forget about the initial questions that brought them there in the first place.⁴¹ A second position is taken by those who situate study radically *outside* of the university, for instance, on the streets in the course of an Occupy Wall Street-protest,⁴² the Baltimore Rebellion,⁴³ or the Barricades Project.⁴⁴ This position, generally, runs parallel to positions that draw a strong connection between study on the one hand, and political action, on the other hand.

A third position concerns the processes of study that take place in or around the university, but not as part of an official curriculum. Harney and Moten write about these moments when inside, but despite the university, study takes place in what they call the undercommons, the unofficial and unrecognized sites of study, where it shows itself as an intellectual sociality, to be encountered on campus and beyond. They write about the studiers

committed to black study in the university's undercommon rooms. [...] They study in the university and the university forces them under, relegates them to the state of those without interests, without credit, without debt that bears interest, that earns credits. [...] They're building something in there, something down there. Mutual debt, debt unpayable, debt unbounded, debt unconsolidated, debt to each other in a study group, to others in a nurses' room, to others in a barber shop, to others in a squat, a dump, a woods, a bed, an embrace.⁴⁵

Combining a Stengersian practice-theoretical point of view with a conception of study practices as those practices where the question of how to learn something new and the question of how to learn anew, and where the experimental and the diplomatic use of reason get intertwined, allows now for situating the concept of study practices in terms of the tensions outlined above. First, it is clear that from the perspective of practices, study is a thoroughly collective event that brings together an amalgam of human and other-than-human actors (e.g., objects, instruments). Although studiers can sometimes work alone (e.g., preparatory reading for a lecture, editing minutes after a meeting), this experience can only

be adequately understood within the framework of a broader study practice that includes other studiers as well. Secondly, since study practices take place within a more or less organized setting, they are frequently initiated with a more or less clear purpose in mind, or at least have a driving question or issue. To that extent, there is some kind of intentionality at work. However, importantly—and more interesting—is the fact that practices of study, although often initiated intentionally, lead to moments of indeterminacy where the means of study overshoot the ends, and alternative futures become conceivable, where something strongly insists upon the studiers, requires their attention, and poses an obligation that makes them hesitate and think.

Thirdly, rather than being a critical force that seeks to deconstruct or denounce, study practices have a more speculative approach due to their ability to rekindle thought about contemporary issues by making something present (e.g., a virus, a text, a painting). This can drastically alter the terms and conditions of discussion, and, in that sense, open up different possibilities (rather than closing down via critical deconstruction and denunciation). Lastly, though study practices are closely associated with the university, they are not limited to the institution of the university. Outside of the university, remarkable practices of study come into being, from the point of which it is possible to question the university and the research–teaching–service nexus radically. One such practice is the experimental university Campus in Camps that aimed to study the camp and the lives of its inhabitants while seeking to make other futures possible. The next figure, therefore, concerns the particular case of this radical study practice in order to develop further and concretize what it means to study.

Part Two

Campus in Camps: An Experimental University in a Palestinian Refugee Camp