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"Them" and "Us": What Brings
Us Together, What Divides Us

Clémence de Montgolfier
(The Big Conversation Space)

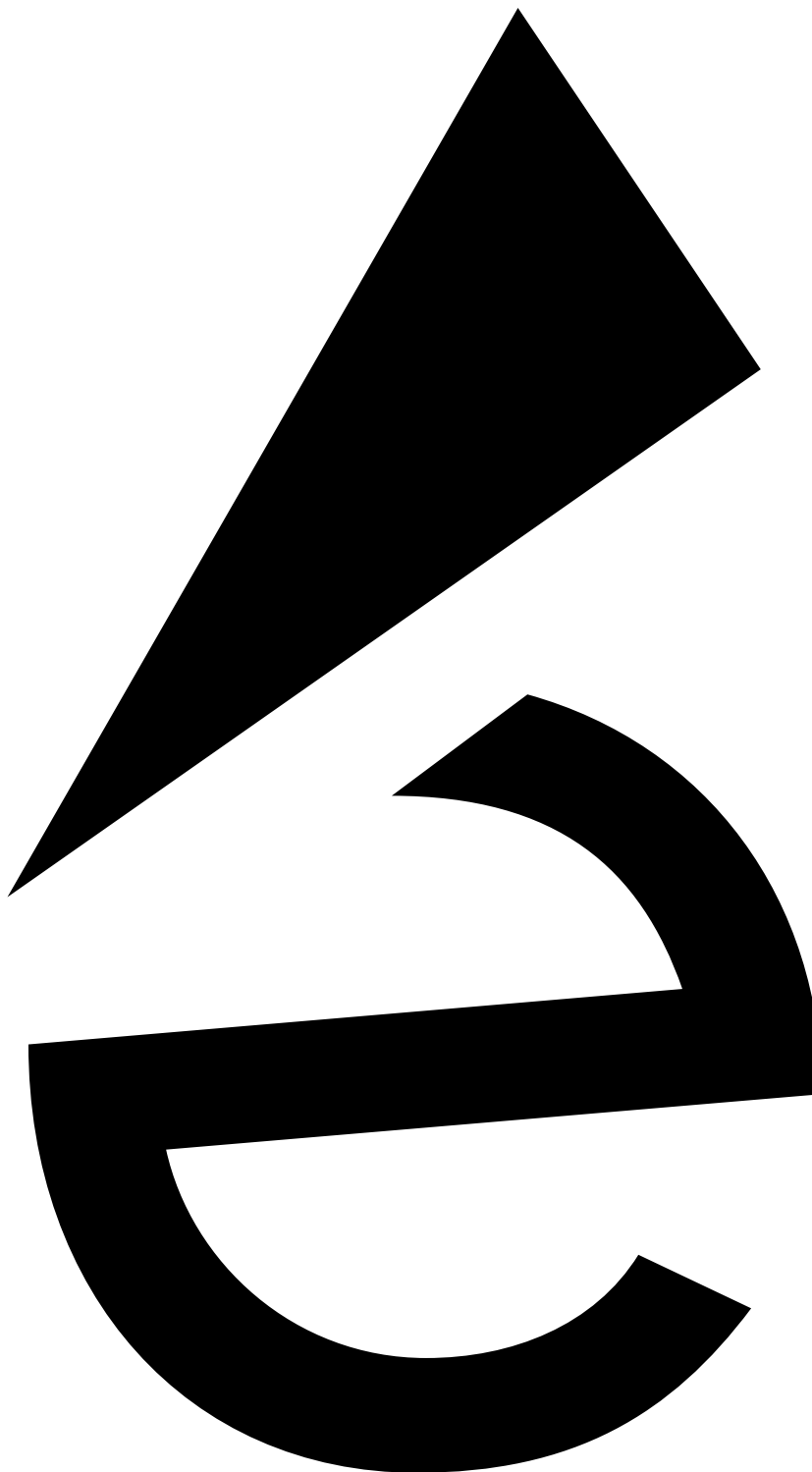
15.06—22.06.19

Opening
Saturday, June 15th at 3 pm

Free entrance. Free Paris-
Brétigny shuttle is available
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de France, 75013 Paris
(the Bibliothèque François
Mitterrand metro stop).

Press file [1–12]

"«Them» and «Us»: What
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in partnership with the
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"Them" and "Us": What Brings Us Together, What Divides Us, by Clémence de Montgolfier (The Big Conversation Space)

In October 2018, I began meeting with groups and individuals interested in participating in "Eux" et "nous" ("Them" and "Us"), a project devised for various audiences in the Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération region around CAC Brétigny. The project was part of a desire to reiterate the question of "what speaking means"¹ that originally took shape within The Big Conversation Space² collective, at a time when both emancipating and hate speech are proliferating. For each person the title touched on specific daily concerns, i.e., for a maternal assistance group, interactions between adults and children; for a first- and second-year class in preschool, learning about life with others; for children between nine and thirteen, discrimination, harassment, and their place in a family that is sometimes reconstituted or fragmented; for high school students in their last year before obtaining their diploma, how to find their place in a complex world. Conceived in two phases and based on conversation as an artistic process, the project took shape first as discussion groups fueled by question cards co-written with teachers and participants within each structure. The great question of the feeling of belonging and separation, of what constitutes "us" in contrast with "them," was divided between six non-exhaustive themes, six domains of life in which that question makes itself felt. These consisted of family, relations with others and emotions, masculinity and femininity, geographies and territories, social life and finally political life. As in group therapy, each person can speak up without being interrupted or judged and "say what they want" about subjects that can sometimes be divisive or sensitive. It is important to take care and allow participants to speak, but also to respect their silences. As in the principle of psychoanalysis, listening means allowing Other the chance to hear themselves formulating their ideas and say them aloud, like a performative action³. This discursive mode gradually made it possible to enter another type of relationship between students and teachers, young people and activity leaders, the artist and collaborating audiences. It is less vertical and occasionally allows those taking part to step out of their usual role for a time. There is no correct or incorrect response here, and participants aren't looking to convince Other, but rather to understand their point of view, namely "where they are speaking from".

At the end of these discussion groups, the participants turned to imagining – each in keeping with their age and the context of the workshop – a collaborative media of their choosing that would be representative of the group. A video, for instance, in which flags displaying assertions and other phrases are read aloud; an internet-based radio where the experiences of each participant are told; a blog in which questions and words are put into images; a newspaper documenting creative activities done in groups. At the same time, working closely with the graphic designer François Dézafit and the programmer Sacha Béraud led to the design of an online platform, like a global collective media, bringing together, comparing, and archiving all the projects. The creation of a media became the site for thinking about self-representation and the representation of the group. A lived experiment and process are transmitted by the group to other audiences. The media, as

"that which creates a link between us and the world,"⁴ can now become sites for thinking oneself and others as being equally complex and multiple.

The recreation of this collective creation project now on view at CAC Brétigny shows within the exhibition venue the different media that were produced with the participants (like a launch heralding their publication and being made available to the public), including a newspaper, videos, sound pieces, and a blog. The propagation of these materials that are addressed to others outside the group has let each participant to wonder what one wants to transmit about oneself in a collective space, and what after all in individual experience partakes of what is in common. The objects, documents, and props that served as mediators in the proposed art experiment (question cards, a children's book, flags produced by pupils) bear witness to the process while at the same time inviting visitors to take them up in turn and reactivate them. The postcards, flyers, and posters from the media which were produced and are made available to visitors, who are invited to help themselves, are part of the effort to spread a collective reflection.

The political context keenly resonated with the exchanges throughout this project, between 2018 and 2019, showing a feeling of urgency to raise anew the possibility of forming, even temporarily, an inclusive "us." The questions from the start of the project launched discussions on the personal lives of one and all, and on the more structural problems of society. They demonstrated that "the personal is political," as a number of feminist activists⁵ chanted around 1970. Which reminds me of something Edward Said wrote about alterity, "The greatest goal is in fact to become someone else. To transform from a unitarian identity to an identity that includes the other without suppressing the difference."⁶ The very artistic process of the project attempted to put this principle into practice, i.e., work together, make decisions collectively, accept letting others act, incorporate everyone's ideas, participate according to one's own capacities. Work with some people we have never met, for some of whom speaking or communicating is not easy, for some of whom French is not a given but rather a language acquired with will power and hard work, and some of whom preferred to express themselves in other languages. Far from claiming to have resolved the question of what brings us together and what keeps us apart, a question that vigorously and sometimes even violently drives our societies, in this project group experiments and attempts were undertaken in order to leave it some space in our midst.

Notes

1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire : L'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982.

2 The Big Conversation Space is a Franco-American art collective that has been active since 2010. It is made up of Niki Korth and Clémence de Montgolfier.

3 According to John Austin, a performative act is an act that is performed by speech. See John Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (1955/1962).

4 See Daniel Bounoux, *Sciences de l'information et de la communication*, Paris, Larousse, 1993.

5 The exact origin of the saying is not known, but it served as the title of a 1969 feminist essay by Carol Hanisch, *The Personal Is Political*.

6 Edward Said on his book *Orientalism* (1978), in a televised interview from 1998.

The exhibition "«Them»" and "«Us»": What Brings Us Together, What Divides Us" feature initiatives carried out locally by Clémence de Montgolfier with various groups of children, teens and adults. This residency is part of the Local Artistic Education Contract that Coeur d'Essonne Agglomération has implemented with the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs of Île-de-France and the Academy of Versailles, in partnership with the Department of Essonne.

With the Relais Assistantes Maternelles of Cheptainville, the kindergarten Eugénie Cotton of Brétigny-sur-Orge, the Accueil de loisirs Mik'Ados of Brétigny-sur-Orge, the Collège Blaise Pascal of Villemoisson-sur-Orge and the High School Léonard de Vinci of Saint-Michel-sur-Orge.

Artistics collaborators: Sacha Béraud and François Dézafit

Biography

Clémence de Montgolfier (b. 1987) lives and works in Paris. After graduating with an MFA from the Fine Arts School of Angers, France, she becomes a Doctor of Philosophy in media studies at the Sorbonne-Nouvelle University (Paris III) in 2017. Her research investigates the representation of the worlds of contemporary art on television. Now an artist, researcher and teacher, she was a member of the performance group *Speech and What Archives* between 2009 and 2013, initiated by artists *A Constructed World*. Since 2010, she co-created the project *The Big Conversation Space* with Niki Korth (b.1987, lives and works in San Francisco), where together they interrogate the circulation of discourse within the frame of its contemporary technologies of production and reproduction, and its uncertain future. They create conversations, performances, publications, games, documents and video broadcasts or media platforms that seek to create and question relations between individuals, artists and audiences alike. She has published articles in scientific journals and books and participated in a number of lectures, residencies and exhibitions in France and internationally, including most recently in 2018 a residency at *Triangle France*, Marseille, and exhibitions *TALK SHOW Festival*, La Panacée, Montpellier; *le Salon de Montrouge*, Paris; *Beloved Equation*, Ateljé Matts Liederman, Stockholm.

Image



Card game "Them" and "Us": What Brings Us Together, What Divides Us, Clémence de Montgolfier. 2018-2019.

Book launch of *Co-Creation*

Co-Creation is a multifaceted publication that is part of a research initiative into co-creation and socially engaged art practices. Begun in 2013, this long-term initiative has been the work of Céline Poulin (the director of CAC Brétigny) and Marie Preston (artist and teacher-researcher at Université Paris 8), along with Stéphanie Airaud (the director of public outreach and cultural initiatives at MAC VAL). The publication took shape in part around a three-day symposium at MAC VAL and CAC Brétigny, a master's seminar in Contemporary Art Media Design of Université Paris 8 at Villa Vassilieff, and finally an exhibition at CAC Brétigny.

A new theoretical advance and not simply the proceedings of a symposium, *Co-Creation* has allowed us to bring together and get out to the public, in France and abroad, the contributions this research project has inspired. No comparable reference work existed in France before the present publication. This book allows us to pursue a dialogue with all those who are contributing internationally to such reflections. It records the development of collective work that is helping to connect French and international universities, art centres, museums, art schools, etc. Different questions raised by co-creation practices and dealt with in earlier iterations are returned to or are treated in greater depth as new ones emerge. What, for example, is the heritage of popular education in co-creation practices? Who is speaking when more than one is in fact speaking? What is at stake in terms of power and statuses in a group that is working together? What kind of private connections and what kind of relationship to daily reality does that involve? What interactions exist between alternative educational methods and co-creation practices? What methodologies of evaluation, aesthetic or not, are possible?

Made up of theoretical and/or personal texts by philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, artists, and art historians, along with several interviews, this edition is organised around five essential cross-disciplinary themes, namely, conversation, the collective, education, vulnerability, and evaluation.

Editorial direction: Céline Poulin and Marie Preston, with Stéphanie Airaud

Texts: Stéphanie Airaud, Andrea Ancira, Marnie Badham, Virginie Bobin, Caroline Darroux, François Deck, Marie Fraser, Véronique Goudinoux, Núria Güell, Adelita Husni-Bey, Florence Jou, Grant H. Kester, Camille Louis, Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat, Maude Mandart, Christian Maurel, Céline Poulin, Marie Preston, Myriam Suchet, Katia Schneller, and Mathilde Villeneuve.

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Image



Co-Création, dir. Céline Poulin and Marie Preston, with the participation of Stéphanie Airaud. Editions Empire and CAC Brétigny, 2019. Photo: Editions Empire.

Presentation of the on-site artworks of Géraldine Longueville and Sean Raspet

Géraldine Longueville, *Amères*, 2019.

Glass bottle, label printed front and back, hydroalcoholic maceration: chinchona bark, willow leaf, the flowering crown of a yarrow plant, burdock root, Scotch pine bud, hibiscus flower, leaf and flower of the marsh mallow, flower of the common mallow, vanilla bean. Live plants gathered between September 2017 and July 2018 in the streets, wastelands, and natural sites of Brétigny-Sur-Orge. The chinchona comes from Ecuador and the vanilla from Réunion. CAC Brétigny production.

At the invitation of CAC Brétigny, Géraldine Longueville came up with a drink that translates a situation into a taste and is capable of transmitting expertise and knowledge that are bound up with the economic and botanical contexts in which the art center is implanted. To elaborate her cocktail of art and knowhow, she gathered different plants over the course of two years; the plants come from various sites and are linked by their bitter taste, a characteristic of many uncultivated plants from the Île-de-France region and American exotics. *Amères* (Bitters) is a drinkable summary of these different political and territorial identities. The label, jointly designed with the graphic designers Charles Mazé and Coline Sunier, contains the story of its composition, use, and effects.

Géraldine Longueville works on the sensorial transmission of political, medicinal, and botanical information mostly by creating drinks. It is how she tackles knowledge about plants and our environment and land, and transmits – both orally and through direct experience, i.e., visitors are invited to try her concoctions – knowledge and knowhow that have been forgotten. In 2014, she founded a collective production studio in art and gastronomy called Black Garlic, which has put together dinners at a number of venues, notably La Galerie, Centre d'art de Noisy-le-Sec in 2016-17 and CAC Vilnius in 2015. As part of her research in beverages and drinks, their use and the power of transmitting them, Longueville has realized a number of performances involving drinks and poems, including *Soil Sand Seed* at the Parc Saint Léger Art Center, Pougues-les-eaux, and *Herbes Vagues* at 40mcube, Rennes, in 2018; *A State of Water* at Bétonsalon, Paris, and *Three States of Water* at PAKT Amsterdam, in 2017; *Les eaux – médiation* at CAC Brétigny in 2016-17; and *The Companion*, for the Liverpool Biennial in 2014. Géraldine Longueville regularly works with groups to varying extents in which she sings and/or prepares different potions, including with Benjamin Seror and his group *Benjamin Seror and the Masks*; with Styrmir Orn Gudmundson on his medicinal rap album *What Am I doing With My Life?*; with Myriam Lefkowitz as part of *La Piscine*; and with David Bernstein and Jurgis Paskevicius under the name *Jugedamos*.

Sean Raspet, *Fragrance CAC Brétigny*, 2019.
Perfume dispenser and perfumes. CAC Brétigny production.

The CAC Brétigny exhibition galleries are discreetly permeated with a scent, the *Fragrance CAC Brétigny*. Following a series of olfactory tests carried out with the staff of CAC Brétigny, the fragrance you smell was designed by Sean Raspet, an artist-chemist who has specialized in constructing synthetic scents. Attempting to play on the attraction a fragrance generates the way certain shops, hotels, and large companies do to affirm the spirit of their brand, *Fragrance CAC Brétigny* plays a part in visitors' experience of the venue and aims to critically think about the need certain spaces have to be rendered desirable. The fragrance contributes to the art center's specific identity, one that is not necessarily visual then, even if the artist had indeed worked from the form of the molecules as much as the olfactory reaction to the scent.

Sean Raspet was born in 1981 in Washington, D.C. (US). He mainly works on the structure of molecules and the way the basic elements of matter are organized. Intimately bound up with circulation through the living organism's metabolism, molecules look to the artist like an art material, never offering a finished form since they are caught up in a continuous process of matter and energy. As his pieces take shape, the chemical structures inevitably run into economic and social structures. Patents, formulas, and scientific and industrial projects with others are all part of the presentation of his work. Sean Raspet's output extends the limits of the artworld, ranging across the borders between disciplines in the fields of science and finance. He works in the research and development department of Soylent and is a cofounder of Nonfood, a company specialized in algae-based food products. His work has been shown notably in New York, Berlin, Paris, Stockholm, San Francisco, Hong Kong, and Beijing. Sean Raspet is represented by the New Galerie, Paris.

General informations

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Free admission, from Tuesday to Saturday, 2 pm–6 pm.

Reception and visit for groups from Monday to Friday from 9:30 am to 6 pm.

By RER C from Paris (30 minutes):

Every 15 minutes, trains BALI, DEBA, DEBO, ELBA to Dourdan and Saint-Martin d'Étampes, the Brétigny stop.

From Brétigny station, follow the direction of Espace Jules Verne, take boulevard de la République, continue on Pl. Chevrier, take slightly to the right on rue Danielle Casanova, and at the rotary take the first exit to rue Henri Douard.

By car:

From Paris: A6 toward Lyon, exit Viry-Châtillon, Fleury-Mérogis, then Brétigny Centre.

From Evry: Francilienne toward Versailles, exit 39B, toward Brétigny.

From Versailles: Francilienne toward Evry, exit Brétigny centre.

For car-sharing, join the group [BLABLACAC\(B\)](#) on Facebook.

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