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*For a Pragmatics of the Useless,
or The Value of the Infrathin*

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ABSTRACT

Marjorie Perloff summarises Marcel Duchamp's conception of the infrathin as being 'the most minute of intervals, or the slightest of differences'. Working through this conception, and taking Duchamp at his word that the infrathin cannot be defined as such—'One can only give examples of it'—this paper explores how the infrathin comes to expression and asks what a politics of the infrathin might look like. Key to the exploration is the question of how else value can be defined and how this rethinking of the concept of value might compose with the concept of a pragmatics of the useless.

KEY WORDS

*Infrathin, Marcel Duchamp,
Alfred North Whitehead,
speculative pragmatics, value,
artfulness, politics, time*

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A POLITICS OF THE INFRATHIN, IN PREAMBLE

Nothing can prepare us for the infrathin. Nothing can frame it, or direct it. Nothing can give it value in advance. This should be taken at its word: the infrathin is always a qualifier before it is a noun. 'Infrathin: one must never make it a noun.' (Marcel Duchamp in Davila, 2010, p. 29) A pragmatics of the useless begins here, in the abeyance of the substantive. A politics of the infrathin—the way the work's work eludes us, escapes us, the way it delays the affirmation of its tenuous apparition, the way it touches us, in the lag—cannot say in advance how it will unfold, or what it will do. A politics of the infrathin, as Alfred North Whitehead might say, can only ever negativelyprehend the framings that set it in motion. It can only have known in retrospect what made it come to appearance (or disappearance) just this way. A few directions in the sand:

- The German *übersehen* [over-seeing] seems as important as the unseeing at the heart of the imperceptible called for by the infrathin. *Übersehen*, however, does not just mean to over-see. It also means to miss, to overlook. This rift between seeing and looking is important, and it is here that the infrathin will reveal its potential as that which is always more-than. What is not seen within the seeable is more-than appearance. This is what is at stake in a politics of the infrathin.
- It is not a question of finding something hidden, but of making operative a tendency that includes the minor gestures of the more-than.

The conditions for the making-operative of a politics of the infrathin depend each time on a new ecology of orientations.

- A politics of the infrathin produces intensities through subtraction. Be interested in what makes these intensities, barely perceived, operative in their singularity. More-than is not always more.
- The infrathin is not simply the difference, it is what makes the difference.

A politics of the infrathin: a quest, in registers more-than-human, for the most minor of variations. A commitment to the creation of modes of existence that practice a pragmatics of the useless. A care for ecologies of practice that value the effects of what can but barely be perceived, if it can be perceived at all.

1. 'THE MOST MINUTE OF INTERVALS'

Duchamp's infrathin is summarised by Marjorie Perloff as 'the most minute of intervals, or the slightest of differences' (Perloff, 2002, p. 102). Yet the concept, Duchamp suggests, cannot be properly defined—'one can only give examples of it' (Duchamp in Perloff, 2002, p. 101). These examples, from his notes, include:

The warmth of a seat (which has just been left) is infra-thin (#4)...
 Subway gates—The people / who go through at the very last moment / Infra thin—(9 recto)
 Velvet trousers—/ their whistling sound (in walking) by/ brushing of the 2 legs is an / infra

thin separation signaled /by sound. (it is *not* an infra thin sound) (#9 verso)...

Difference between *the contact* / of water and *that of*/ molten lead for ex, /or of cream. / with the walls of its / own container moved around the liquid this difference between two contacts is infra thin. (#14)

(Duchamp in Perloff, 2002, p.101, original emphasis).

Duchamp's notes are attempts at touching what remains elusive. A quality in the between, an interval that cannot quite be articulated. It's not the seat that is at stake, or even the warmth in the 'warmth of a seat (which has just been left)', but what is left behind. Not the seat but a quality of left-ness. Not the velvet trousers or even the legs in 'their whistling sound (in walking) by', but the way the rubbing creates a quality of a whistling. Not the substances exactly in 'the difference between *the contact* / of water and *that of*/ molten lead' but the quality of their interrelation.

The infrathin: the potentiation of a relational field that includes what cannot quite be articulated, but nonetheless can be felt. Infrathin: the this-ness, the haecceity of an experience that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts.

2. THE EXEMPLARY

In the absence of a definition, what is foregrounded is the singularity of experience, and the specificity of the example. The infrathin cannot be generalized across experience: it is what makes experience singularly what it is, *here, now*. Between the event

and the account of its retelling, an infrathin resides that will never quite be captured. 'While trying to place 1 plane surface / precisely on another plane surface / you pass through some *infra thin moments*' (Duchamp in Perloff, 2002, p. 102, original emphasis). Beyond capture, the infrathin is a grasping at the singularity of an interval too thin to define as such and yet thick with the texture of lived relation.

3. PREHENSION

Prehension is the grasping-toward through which experience makes itself felt. The event—or the actual occasion, in Whitehead's terms—is pulled into experience, its force of actuation tied to what he calls the data of the occasion. These data are not objects or substances, but relational fields in the parsing.

But what of the share of the grasping that cannot quite be parsed, pulled into actuality? That continues to field? What of that which cannot quite be captured, yet makes a difference in the event? What of the share that cannot quite define itself and yet takes part in how the world is felt? How to articulate the prehension of the infrathin of experience in the making?

Whitehead has a concept for that which is not actualized but nonetheless affects experience. He calls it 'negative prehension'. Negative prehension is what must be actively excluded in order for the event to have consistency. To achieve consistency, there must be elimination. What cannot conform to the colour of this singular experience must be backgrounded in order that this experience be fully what it is.

Elimination is still participation, however. Excluded by necessity from what is foregrounded, negative prehension nonetheless lurks on the edge of appearance in the way all backgrounds do. It is not actualized as such in the event, but the event cannot but be infused with it. Every prehension, to a degree, encompasses what negative prehension has textured in.

It is not actualized as such in the event, but the event cannot but be infused with it.

What the infrathin makes palpable is that there is no occasion that does not, to some degree, pull the background into the foreground. The infrathin makes felt the tenuous quality of this both-and. The shift from sitting to standing that leaves something behind, a quality ungraspable yet felt, takes the background welter and moves it into the interval of lived experience. Infrathin.

The infrathin actively backgrounds what is perceived in order to foreground what is not quite within the register of the perceptible. The infrathin foregrounds this ungraspability in the grasping, affirming the witness of experience in the background-foregrounding. In doing so the infrathin directly prehends the potential of the more-than.

4. SUBJECTIVE FORM

In a philosophy of process, what is most important is movement, or change. In order for change to happen, however, there must be a moment when the occasion has become absolutely what it is. For without this absoluteness, there would be no difference between this and that—no ‘elbow room in the universe’ (Whitehead, 1967, p. 195).

Subjective form is the signature of *this* singular occasion. It is what has now emerged as the subject of the occasion, a subject borne of the process. In and of itself, this subject cannot change. In the context of *this* singular iteration, it will always have been what it now has become. And yet, as Whitehead emphasizes throughout, this actuation of the *it is* is brief, always on the edge of perishing, where the force and not the form-taking as such will be what contributes to future parsings. If what a subjective form does is mark this threshold between force and form, the active schism between what is and what comes to be, the operative question is to what extent the unactualized makes a difference in the passage from force to form, and to what degree this share of the unactualized can alter future comings-to-form.

This is where negative prehension comes in. Despite their not being included in the actual constellation of an event’s coming to be this or that, negative prehensions do have subjective form. ‘A negative prehension expresses a bond’, writes Whitehead. This bond ‘adds to the emotional complex, though not to the objective data’ (Whitehead, 1978, p. 41). That negative prehensions have subjective forms suggests that the unactualized too influences how the future comes to be felt.

5. AUTISTIC PERCEPTION

Negative prehension is negative only in the sense that it eliminates a certain field of data in order to enable the foregrounding of consistency in the actualization of what comes to be. As Whitehead makes clear, when this and not that is felt, 'that' has not been completely excised from the experience. Both play a part: it is the backgrounding of 'that' that makes 'this' stand out.

Both at once, actually experienced as foreground, risks confusion or chaos. And yet, to a degree, it is always 'both at once'. As those with hyper-sensitivities will attest, foreground-background can be painfully intermeshed. Autistics, for instance, often speak of the difficulty of parsing one kind of sensation or force from another, the environment painfully alive to the multiplicity of feeling.¹ This limit-case reminds us that it is a question of degree. How negative prehension eliminates is a question of practice as much as anything else. The goal need not be an absolute parsing or elimination, but a technique for achieving a manageable degree of consistency. This is the force of the concept of negative prehension: that it gives us the tools to consider a certain participation in experience of the background welter, a certain lived resonance of that which is nonetheless, to an always differing degree, eliminated from the occasion as it comes to actualization. The infrathin is one technique for giving resonance to the unparsed in experience.

If that which is prehended, in the event, *includes elimination*, it follows that elimination is *affirmed*. Negative prehension is more like the negative of the image than negation as such. It is a contributory aspect of experience that eludes the actual as such even as it affects how it comes to expression.

The infrathin gestures toward this share of the event, looking for a way to make felt how that which never takes concrete form nonetheless makes a difference. This is why the infrathin can only ever be exemplary. To define it would be to give it the form that eludes it.

The infrathin: that most elusive of states where what is felt, in the briefest interval, is the lived co-composition of difference. Contrast.

The infrathin: the differential that marks the rhythm that is the oscillation between what is perceptible and what is imperceptible yet felt, in the event. The this-ness of this singular relation, as perceived from two directions at once.

The infrathin: a variation on lived experience, in the event.

6. VALUE

In Whiteheadian philosophy, an occasion of experience is never valued in advance of its coming to be. There is no inherent value to experience, nor is there a hierarchy of value. The human and the nonhuman, consciousness and the nonconscious are equally taken into account in this philosophy that refers to the body as a society of molecules. The question is not 'what has inherent value', but 'what are the conditions under which a shift in register expresses itself, and how does this alter lived experience?'

In the lower grade organisms, shifts in register are chiefly physical. Contrast is limited in these occasions to a narrow array of difference, and more

1 – I've explored this idea of autistic perception through the writings of Tito Mukhopadhyay, Amanda Baggs, D. J. Savarese, Larry Bissonnette and others. For more on the concept of autistic perception, and for an account of their incisive writing see 'An Ethics of Language in the Making' (Manning, 2013, pp. 149-183).

is eliminated from experience than is folded in. In the more complex organisms, feeling is more nuanced, as a result of which the occasion's subjective form is tinted in more complex ways by the negative prehensions it has positively eliminated.

7. ETERNAL OBJECTS

At both ends of the spectrum, it is eternal objects that promote contrast. Eternal objects are the pure potential of felt relation. They are what give the occasion its nuance. They are the thisness of the event's qualitative difference—*just this* quality of sound, *just this* colour tone, *just this* affective tonality.

The subjective form of an occasion feels the world in just this way. This feeling, as Whitehead says, 'has an origination not wholly traceable to the mere data. It conforms to the data, in that it feels the data. But the how of feeling, though it is germane to the data, is not fully determined by the data' (1978, p. 85). This is because there is always a push and pull, in the feeling, between givenness and potentiality. Givenness is necessary to the occasion's capacity to assert itself as this or that, while potentiality ensures that the more-than remain included, if only marginally in the case of the lower grade organisms.

The potential of the more-than enters into the occasion through the eternal object. 'The quality of feeling has to be definite in respect to the eternal objects with which feeling clothes itself in its selfdefinition' (Whitehead, 1978, p.86). What a feeling has felt always includes this share of speculative potential, this uncharted value.

Even negatively prehended, this uncharted value makes a difference:

Only a selection of eternal objects are 'felt' by a given subject, and these eternal objects are then said to have 'ingression' in that subject. But those eternal objects which are not felt are not therefore negligible. For each negative prehension has its own subjective form, however trivial and faint. (Whitehead, 1978, p.41)

Pure potential can be sidelined—'[t]he actualities have to be felt, while the pure potentials can be dismissed' (Whitehead, 1978, p. 239)—but the lure remains. The infrathin is haunted by this lure.

8. THE SPECULATIVE SHARE

To begin with elimination is to foreground what makes a difference in experience despite its exclusion from actualization. If, as is usually the case, the actual is the measure of use-value, it would follow that what is not actually included in the occasion has no value. For this unactualized share is not only indiscernible as such, it is unmeasurable, even after the fact. Yet it is this very ineffability at the heart of the occasion that gives experience its value, I would suggest. The value of this speculative share of experience is in its colouring of the event, in its making felt how else experience can be ascertained, beyond definition.

This would be the first proposition for a pragmatics of the useless: when experience connects to the infrathin, what it is affirming is another way of thinking value. Beyond use-value, the valuation not

of what is given, but the capacity of transvaluation to perform a shift at the very heart of the process's incompleteness, of the process's inherent indeterminacy. In Nietzschean fashion, value here derives from the in-act of the process's own affirmation of its difference: 'creation takes the place of knowledge itself and affirmation takes the place of all negations' (Deleuze, 2002, p. 187). A pragmatics of the useless celebrates the share of experience that is affirmed not because of what it is, but because of how it affects experience in the making.

A pragmatics of the useless is pragmatic in the sense that it is wholly concerned with the *how* of the event's coming to be. *This* instance of the infrathin. *These* conditions for activating *this* interval of experience. The event cannot be generalized across iterations. It is always exemplary, always speculatively pragmatic.

A pragmatics of the useless is speculative in the sense that it is open to transformation by the potentializing force of what courses through the event, even when it cannot be fully actualized. Potential courses through the 'just like this' nature of the event, making it reverberate. The infrathin is felt in this reverberation, potentially singularizing.

9. POTENTIALLY SINGULARIZING

All actual occasions carry this quality of the infrathin. While on the one hand the event is singularly what it is—*this* plane surface—the event also includes in the reverberatory movement of this singularity an openness to difference. The infrathin's potentially singularizing force is its very capacity to be both-and.

To perceive at this interval of the both-and is to feel the bending of time in the occasion. It is to feel both the event's absolute time-signature — the pragmatism of what happens, here, now—and the potentiality of the event's capacity to make a difference. The making of a difference is always also a making of time. What is singularly potentialized by the infrathin is event-time, time felt in its differential quality, time less measure than fold.

What then of the 'intoleran[ce] of any addition' to the occasion? (Whitehead, 1978, p. 45). What of Whitehead's statement that '[a]n extra patch of red does not constitute a mere addition; it alters the whole balance? (Whitehead, 1978, p. 45). What of the occasion's necessity to eliminate that which does not conform to it?

The infrathin cuts across this necessity, slicing the occasion such that its perspective on conformity skews. Givenness and potentiality always work together—"givenness" refers to "potentiality", and "potentiality" to "givenness" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 45). A complexity of feeling is revealed at the differential of their overlapping. Perhaps this is what art can do.

10. TRANSVERSALITY

The infrathin is transversal. It cannot be thought as a state. It is the making-felt of a momentary skewing of experience in the moving. The infrathin feels experience in a way that reveals the occasion's background and allows it to dance in the foreground. It creates the conditions to emphasize what the feeling hasn't felt. It gives uneasy consistency, in the merest of intervals, to that which barely registers if it registers

at all. 'Infra thin separation between / the *detonation* noise of a gun / (very close) and the apparition of the bullet/ hole in the target.' (Duchamp in Perloff 2002, p. 101, original emphasis). 'The infra-thin separation is working at its maximum when it distinguishes the same from the same' (Thierry de Duve in Perloff, 2002, p. 103).

11. DOUBLE ARTICULATION

Distinguishing the same from the same, in the duration of the infrathin, what stands out is how all experience is actively engaged in a double articulation. The actual is always replete with the virtual, individuation with the preindividual, prehension with what is negatively prehended. What the infrathin contributes, as a concept, is a way of thinking the both-and of double articulation. That extra patch of red does make a difference: it creates a new world. The infrathin makes felt how both worlds might briefly coexist.

12. DURATION

This coexistence is beyond definition in large part because of the challenge of thinking time durationally. Two times thought together in the event is difficult to parse into a language that unfolds one subject, one noun, one verb at a time. Art can do this, but only when it resists defining itself solely according to how it takes form. What art can do is activate the infrathin of a potentializing force. It is art's very force to be able to compose worlds that activate a kind of geological event-time—a layered, composite time-felt. Elsewhere,

I've referred to this as the 'art of time', art's capacity to make felt, through the force of intuition, time's complexity.

When Duchamp writes (in Perloff, 2002, p. 102, original emphasis) '*just touching*. While trying to place 1 plane surface / precisely on another plane surface / you pass through some *infra thin moments*'—the sense is that there is a touching on the art of time. Something is felt—'you pass through some *infra thin moments*'—that cannot quite be attributed to the perceiver. For it is not 'you' who passes through, but the plane that feels itself in the passing, that feels the relational field of its co-composition with the adjacent plane, that feels layers of duration that cannot quite be distinguished either from its composite plane-ness or its adjacency.

Art can move you toward these planes of duration, making them intuitively felt such that a quality of existence is momentarily touched upon. This touching-upon has nothing to do with metaphor: it is a lived experience. This will fail if approached through mimicry. The infrathin must every time be activated anew; it cannot be reproduced, once and for all.

13. A PRAGMATICS OF THE USELESS

The second proposition for a pragmatics of the useless emerges: value must also be activated each time anew. Art that truly engages with what has not yet found its form intuitively steers away from the mimicry of reproduction. To be artful—actively engaged in the differential of experience in the making—art must never seek to define in advance its value. It must never claim to know how the infrathin will make itself felt. The negative prehension that haunts it must remain a haunting.

Taking form is art's risk. There is no getting around taking-form. Experience wouldn't be known without it. But the taking-form must not fall into the category of pre-valuation. It must not know in advance what its taking can do.

14. THE FOURTH DIMENSION

For Duchamp, the infrathin becomes a way of thinking time beyond the second dimension toward the third and even the fourth. The art of time, art's capacity to make felt the non-linear time of negative prehension, becomes his chief concern: 'The possible/implying/ the becoming—the passage from/ one to the other takes place/ in the infrathin.' (#1) (Duchamp, 1983, n.p.)

To make felt the fourth dimension is to take the fold as time's impossible measure. Here, in the folding of experience quadrupling onto itself, the infrathin touches on the limits of perceptibility. What Duchamp's infrathin makes clear is that we need a concept for the imperceptible within the perceptible:

2 forms cast in / the same mold (?) differ / from each other/ by an infra thin separative /amount— All 'identicals' as / identical as they may be, (and / the more identical they are) / move toward this / infra thin separative difference. Two men are not / an example of identity / and to the contrary / move away / from a determinable / infra thin difference—but (#35 recto). (Duchamp in Perloff, 2002, pp. 101-102)

15. THE DIFFERENTIAL

The imperceptible within the perceptible is experience's differential. The infrathin mobilizes the differential—that share of perception on the very edge of perceptibility where what is barely felt (or not felt at all) makes a difference. Two forms cast in the same mold carry the force of this difference despite their appearance of sameness; identicals persist in remaining qualitatively more-than identity. This qualitative difference that often escapes perceptibility is the more-than of experience in-forming; it is the edging into itself of a givenness full of potential. 'The infra-thin separation is working at its maximum when it distinguishes the same from the same' (de Duve in Perloff, 2002, p. 103).

16. THE UNTIMELY

Henri Focillon describes the edgings of perceptibility in the experience of the infrathin in terms of untimeliness (in Davila 2010, pp. 13-14). The untimeliness of the infrathin foregrounds what Whitehead calls 'the mutual sensitivity of feelings' (Whitehead 1978, p. 221). This mutual sensitivity includes the contribution of that which has been eliminated from the actual. It includes the subjective form of the negative prehension.

The negative prehensions have their own subjective forms which they contribute to the process. A feeling bears on itself the scars of its birth; it recollects as a subjective emotion its struggle for existence; it retains the impress of what it might have been, but is not. It is for this reason that what an actual

entity has avoided as a datum for feeling may yet be an important part of its equipment. The actual cannot be reduced to mere matter of fact in divorce from the potential (Whitehead, 1978, p. 226).

Feeling, in Whitehead, is the complex of experience: process philosophy is an account, not of pure reason, but of pure feeling:

The feelings are inseparable from the end at which they aim; and this end is the feeler. The feelings aim at the feeler, as their final cause. The feelings are what they are in order that their subject may be what it is. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 222)

An event is its affective tonality. An untimeliness is lived at this affective interstice where feeling and feeler live their mutual inclusion in the event. Too often, we separate these out, marking them as though one came before the other, in a hierarchy of value: the critique of pure reason prevails as we situate the feeler outside the event to judge the occasion from without. Process philosophy does not accept this account. There is nothing outside of feeling. How the occasion has been felt is the experience, it is its reason for becoming what it is.² The subject of the event—its superject—is the untimeliness of feeling folding on itself. This folding creates the nuances of experience that Duchamp gestures toward with his concept of the infrathin.

Mutual sensitivity of feeling highlights the fold between feeling and feeler, foregrounding the affective tonality of event-time. The infrathin grasps toward this difference of the same with the same in the untimeliness of the lived interval of feeling and feeler. The infrathin gives the briefest consistency to this experiential cluster.

17. EXPERIENTIAL CLUSTER

The experiential cluster where feeling and felt are one, like all occasions, ‘can only be felt once’ (Whitehead 1978, p. 231). Its untimeliness is the fact of its singular once-ness combined with its durational *mise-en-abyme*. The infrathin in this way makes felt the uneasiness of time in the making, time in the feeling, where time is at once the here-now and the not-quite-yet. This is the work art can do, Duchamp seems to say, to create the conditions through which the time of the event in all its untimely uneasiness can come to expression. To create the conditions for a material expression of duration at the limit.

This involves creating techniques for activating the clustering of experience where time is of the event. Perhaps this is what Robert Smithson means when he suggests that the artist creates at the interstices where ‘distant futures meet distant pasts’ (in Careri, 2001, p. 25), or when Duchamp writes that ‘in each fraction of duration are reproduced all fractions future and anterior’ (in Davila, 2010, p. 14).

18. A PIECE OF YOU

When experience becomes untimely, when event-time takes over experience, it becomes apparent how the subject cannot reside outside the event, looking in. Francis Alj's says:

After a while...you start oscillating yourself. You forget about the mechanics of the piece and you are entering this kind of lullaby space. You just take a back seat and that is where eventually you

2 – I give a more thorough account of reason in Whitehead (following his account in *The Function of Reason*) in ‘Against Method’ (Manning, 2015), a shorter version of which is translated into Norwegian in Ann Merete Oterstad and Anne B. Reinertsen (Eds.), (2015). *Metodefest og øyeblikksrealisme* (pp. 121-132). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

accede to that different time perception, which is in between two worlds of space. (Davies & Aljys, 2014, n.p.)

When it becomes about what the feeler has felt, in the event, ‘you’ have indeed taken a back seat. The infrathin of experience in the making carries the you you are becoming—for while the artist may create the conditions for the infrathin, it is the infrathin that ultimately does the carrying. ‘The role of artists is, in a sense, to continually examine what’s going on there’, writes Robert Irwin,

[a]nd so value is not neutral; once negotiated, it ultimately becomes a piece of you. It can reconstruct how you practice, or how you move in the world. In time, that has the implication of changing the structures around you. But it’s a long-term project. The real change that comes from feelings and values has to be seeded, in a sense, and then it begins to act on things—on you, and then on how you make decisions and judgments, and therefore on how you construct the world. (in Irwin & Eliasson, 2007, p. 56)

The artist’s work becomes to emergently attune, in the event, to the nuances activated in the infrathin of experience in the making.

19. CONSCIOUSNESS

It is common to give value to a conscious process over a nonconscious one. Whitehead insists: how an event feels its potential does not necessarily have to do with

consciousness. Consciousness is merely one aspect of the occasion’s capacity for eventuation.

The infrathin does not rely on consciousness to come to expression. And yet it does touch at the edges of an awareness in which the conscious and the nonconscious are in co-composition. Here, where degrees and scales of feeling are in act, we are in the midst of autistic perception, the active fielding of experience edging into itself. Elimination is included, the untimeliness of nonconscious tendings directly felt.

At this lively interstice between degrees of feltness, what is perceived is felt contrast. The differential is lived, at the verge of experience in-forming. When Irwin or Aljys speak about the feeling of the art moving you, it is from the perspective of the verge that they frame their experience. What art can do is create the conditions for another way of perceiving. ‘Actually I think that right now we’re wrestling with how to go from a three-dimensional model to a four-dimensional one. How do you actually do that? How do you deal with a four-dimensional way of seeing? And what kind of social practice or order will result?’ Irwin asks (in Irwin & Eliason, 2007, p. 58). Other ways of perceiving create other ways of living.

20. FOURTH-PERSON SINGULAR

Might the infrathin propose a fourth-dimensional way of seeing? And if so, might this call forth Gilles Deleuze’s ‘fourth-person singular’? The fourth person singular, the impersonal ‘il pleut’ in the French makes doing a kind of impersonal acting, in the event. Is this not similar to the way the infrathin foregrounds time

in its layered multiplication, a time not of the conscious external subject peering in, but of the lived differential of feeling and feeler co-composing? The fourth dimension not as 1+3 but as n+1—‘the many become one, and are increased by one’ (Whitehead 1978, p. 21). Time in the folding, perceiving itself.

21. ‘THE TENSION IN BETWEEN THINGS’

Doug Wheeler once stated: ‘That’s what I started playing with as an artist: not looking at things but the tension in between things.’ (Wheeler in Finkel, 2011, n. p.) The ‘tension in between things’ is the n+1 of the infrathin: the unquantifiable force of difference that creates an interlude in the time of the event. It is here, in the force of time’s folding, where use-value has not yet been determined and the pragmatic is at its most speculative, that what art can do is most palpable.

22. THE CREATIVE ADVANCE

When Whitehead writes of the creative advance as the push of what the event can do at its most creative edge, there is a sense of the force of the art of time. Creative advance is not about the creation of an art object, but a way of speaking of the lure for feeling, of the differential of experience in the making. This differential is called ‘contrast’ in process philosophy. What art can do, at its most pragmatically useless, is to make felt the differential force of the time of the event, the share, in the event, that is contrast. When Wheeler speaks of ‘the tension in between things’, he is speaking not of an empty space between objects but of the

untimely activity of the relational field. This untimely activity is replete with contrasts in germ that make uneasy the separation between feeler and felt.

23. CONTRAST

Contrast is always allied, in Whitehead, with conceptual feeling. A qualitative difference, in the event, is a conceptual feeling. Speaking of the event’s appetite to become, or what Whitehead calls ‘conrescence’, he writes:

In each conrescence there is a twofold aspect of the creative urge. In one aspect there is the origination of simple causal feelings; and in the other aspect there is the origination of conceptual feelings. These contrasted aspects will be called the physical and the mental poles of an actual entity. No actual entity is devoid of either pole; though their relative importance differs in different actual entities. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 239)

Conceptual feeling makes qualitative difference felt precisely because it is capable of holding, in the event, what remains actually excluded but is nonetheless immanently included, as contrast.

The ‘tension in between things’ is not about what is actually perceived. It is about foregrounding the very schism of perception. The ‘tension in between things’ is the relational field that holds difference in the event: ‘Difference between *the contact* / of water and *that* of / molten lead for ex, / or of cream. / with the walls of its / own container moved around the liquid...’. (Duchamp in Perloff, 2002, p. 101, original

emphasis) Infrathin is not a measure, it is a feeling: 'I purposefully chose the word *thin* that is a human and affective word and not a precise laboratory measure', writes Duchamp (in 'Passages', n.d., original emphasis, my translation). Negative prehension animates the relational field, agitating the edges of what it brings together in differential resonance. Conceptual feeling gives qualitative dissonance to this creative agitation.

24. CONCEPTUAL FEELINGS

Conceptual feelings are what give value to the event: they 'introduce the factor of "valuation", that is, "valuation up", or "valuation down"' (Whitehead, 1978, p. 247). This valuation, according to Whitehead, opens the event to 'creative purpose' (p. 248). The introduction of creative purpose happens in the untimeliness of the tension's creative agitation. 'Every actual entity is "in time" so far as its physical pole is concerned, and is 'out of time' so far as its mental pole is concerned. It is the union of two worlds, namely, the temporal world, and the world of autonomous valuation' (p. 248). The conceptual feeling, the event's mental pole, gives texture to that which does not properly actualize but is nonetheless felt in the folding of time.

That conceptual feelings are what give value to the event reminds us, once again, that it is not what actualizes that determines value. It is precisely that which cannot be said to fully become determined that moves the event toward its creative advance. Value cannot be known as such, it can only be experimented from the edges of a process too untimely to measure.

25. THE NON-OBJECT

In an essay entitled 'What Art Is and Where it Belongs', Paul Chan (2009, n.p.) writes: 'Art uses things to make its presence felt. But art is not itself a thing. In other words, art is more and less than a thing. And it is this simultaneous expression of *more-ness* and *less-ness* that makes what is made art.' What makes art art is not its capacity to become-object, but the way art can make felt the untimeliness of the tensions active in the relational field it calls forth. According to Chan:

What art ends up expressing is the irreconcilable tension that results from making something, while intentionally allowing the materials and things that make up that something to change the making in mind..., until it becomes something radically singular, something neither wholly of the mind that made it, nor fully the matter from which it was made. It is here that art incompletes itself, and appears. (Chan, 2009, n.p., original emphasis).

Art is not its final taking-form, but the very process of its incompleteness. This, which can only be felt and not defined, is its value.

In activating contrast, what art can do is give the force of form to that incompleteness. This, I have argued elsewhere, is the minor gesture that makes it artful (Manning, 2016). Ferreira Gullar, in his attempt to articulate this force of form, proposed the concept of the non-object, a concept directly influenced by the work of Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica, amongst others. For Gullar, the non-object might be defined as 'an almost-body, which is to say,

a being whose reality is not exhausted in the external relationships between its elements; a being that, while not decomposable into parts through analysis, only delivers itself up wholly through a direct, phenomenological approach' (Gullar in Amor, 2010, p. 28). A non-object as presentation, he argues, not representation.

For Gullar, what was at stake was finding a vocabulary for what he perceived as the important shift, mid twentieth century, in artists like Clark and Oiticica, toward another way of working with materiality. The non-object, he writes, 'bursts from the inside out, from non-meaning toward meaning' (Gullar, 1959, p. 19). It is 'pure appearance', 'pure phenomenon', 'without pre-conceptions of artistic categories, without reflected consciousness, but rather with the senses' (Gullar, 1959, p. 19).

26. THE RELATIONAL OBJECT

This vocabulary of the non-object does not quite do the work Lygia Clark seeks, however, and so, despite being seen by Gullar as the precursor to the non-object, she distances herself from the concept and proposes instead the relational object (see also Rolnik, 1999).³ She writes:

It is no longer the problem of feeling the poetic through a form. The structure exists there only as a support for the expressive gesture, the cut, and after it is finished, it has nothing to do with the traditional work of art. It is the state of 'art without art'. ... By presenting this type of idea, the artist in reality presents this 'empty-full' in which

all potentialities of the option that comes through the act take place. (Clark in Rolnik, 1999. Undated manuscript, probably from 1963–64, in the Lygia Clark archives.)

The difference between the relational object and the non-object is one of emphasis. What the relational object foregrounds is not the phenomenon but the relation. Despite her strong interest in the phenomenal, sensual world, what moves Clark's practice is the lived experience of the tension between, in the event. Hers is not a phenomenological approach, but a relational one. It is active in the infrathin of what Whitehead calls nonsensuous perception: the direct perception of time's uneasiness, in the event. By activating the infrathin of experience in the making, the relational object potentializes this tension where feeler and felt are at their most lively differential. It makes felt the event's contrast. In so doing, it creates the conditions for the kinds of conceptual feelings that allow the event to express its quality of more-than, its differential force.

27. THE VALUE OF THE INFRATHIN

This differential force is replete with potential. What art can do is make this potential felt. Chan writes:

...unlike things, art shapes matter—which gives substance to material reality—without ever dominating it. All matter absorbs the manifold forces that have influenced how it came to be, and the uses and values it has accrued—and emanates the presence of this history and its many meanings from within. In a sense, form is just another word for

3 – For more on Lygia Clark and how her concept of the relational object distances itself from Gullar's non-object, see Rolnik (1999).

the sedimented content that smolders in all matter. Art is made with sensitivity to and awareness of this content. And the more the making becomes attenuated, the more art binds itself to the way this content already determines the reality of how matter exists in the world. (Chan, 2009, n.p.)

Art's sensitivity to the takings-form of material tendencies is how it values experience. This valuation involves a decision-making process immanent to the event. No relational object is fully operative that cannot create a cut in the process: an object is relational precisely because of its capacity to activate the field such that certain qualities stand out more than others. How a contrast makes itself felt is precisely what makes art artful.

The artful creates fields of relation through which new modes of encounter are invented. These infrathin modes of encounter propose new ways of taking time, of making time. This can only happen if what is foregrounded, as art, is not its use-value, not its thing-ness, and, perhaps most pressingly, not its exchange-value. Art has no inherent value. It is not *something*. It cannot be generalized in a neutralizing of experience where feeler is excised from feeling. Art is exemplary, in the event where feeling and feeler are differentially one.

Art is the capacity to mobilize difference in the event, the capacity to make felt the force of form that undoes art of its hold on the very object that too often is said to represent it. A pragmatics of the useless takes this as its third proposition: that what art can do is always in excess of the object it leaves behind. A pragmatics of the useless: the value does not reside in the form, but in the infrathin of form's incompleteness.

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