

Introduction: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts

Something's doing (James 1996a, 161). That much we already know. Something's happening. Try as we might to gain an observer's remove, that's where we find ourselves: in the midst of it. There's happening doing. This is where philosophical thinking must begin: immediately in the middle (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21–23, 293).

What's middling in all immediacy is “an experience of *activity*” (James 1996a, 161). “The fundamental concepts are activity and process” (Whitehead 1968, 140). “Bare activity, as we may call it, means the bare fact of event or change” (James 1996a, 161).

In bare point of fact, that is where everything, not just philosophy, begins. “Activity and change” *are* “the matter of fact” (Whitehead 1968, 146). “‘Change taking place’ is a unique content of experience” (James 1996a, 161). *The* unique content of experience: “the sense of activity is in the broadest and vaguest way synonymous with life. . . . To be at all is to be active. . . . We are only as we are active” (James 1996a, 161–162). To begin to think life, we must begin in the middle with an activist sense of life at no remove: in the middling immediacy of its always “going on” (James 1996a, 161).¹

Whitehead's term for his own activist philosophy at no remove from life's immediacy is “process philosophy.” For Whitehead, activity, as event or change synonymous with life, entails a further concept. “The notion of *potentiality* is fundamental for the understanding of existence, as soon as the notion of process is admitted. . . . Immediacy is the realization of the potentialities of the past, and is the storehouse of the potentialities of the future” (Whitehead 1968, 99–100; emphasis added). To be at all is to be active in a “production of novelty” consisting in the “transformation of the potential into the actual” (Whitehead 1968, 151). The “principle of

unrest” from which an activist philosophy departs requires a concept of potential qualifying process as the production of the new: in a word, “becoming” (Whitehead 1978, 28).

“‘Creativity’ is the principle of novelty” (Whitehead 1978, 21). To be at all is to become, actively creative. “Process for its intelligibility involves the notion of a creative activity belonging to the very essence of the occasion.” The transformation of the potential into the actual is a “process of self-creation.” “Such transformation includes the immediacy of self-enjoyment” (Whitehead 1968, 151).

The simple gesture of starting again from the beginning—that is, in the midst—has led to a rapid cascade of concepts. From something doing to the bare fact of activity; from there to event and change; then on to potential and the production of the new; coming to process as becoming. Then, a major twist. The straight run encounters turbulence: process as becoming is not just creative activity, it turns out. It is *self-creation*. More than that, the self-creation is “enjoyed.” The principle of unrest eddies into something we would be forgiven for suspecting is not unlike an aesthetic appreciation: an enjoyment of creativity. How is this “at no remove”? How is this immediate? Doesn’t it imply self-reflection? Doesn’t self-reflection imply the luxury of the contemplative distance on the world? Isn’t that exactly what is excluded by the bare activist fact that we always find ourselves smack in the middle of its unrest? The paradox of an immediate “self-enjoyment” of experience, “belonging to the very essence” of its every occasion, is the complicating knot around which this approach to philosophy ties its concepts. It inscribes a certain duplicity into the very heart of its thinking and of the world.²

The duplicity is in fact an artifact of the immediacy. It is simply that each occasion of experience comes into itself amid activities that are not its own, already going on. The coming event takes a dose of the world’s surrounding “general activity” and selectively channels it into its own “special activity” (Whitehead 1967a, 176). Its special activity is its occurring in the singular way that it does, toward the novel change in which it will culminate. There is an inaugural moment of indecision between the already-going-on-around and the taking-in-to-new-effect, before the culmination of this occurrence has sorted out just what occasion it will have been. This “primary phase” of the occasion of experience is the middling moment of bare activity with which process philosophy is pivotally concerned. *Bare activity*: the just-

beginning-to-stir of the event coming into its newness out of the soon to be prior background activity it will have left creatively behind. The just-beginning is on the cusp of the “more” of the general activity of the world-ongoing turning into the singularity of the coming event. Every event is singular. It has an arc that carries it through its phases to a culmination all its own: a dynamic unity no other event can have in just this way. The unity of the occasion is the just-this-way in which the phases of the arced unfolding hold together as belonging to the same event.

All this is felt. Both the coming-into-its-own out of a prior moreness of the world’s general always-going-on, and the unity of the holding-together of phases arcing to a culmination in just this singular way, are felt. The general feeling of the world’s more-than of activity going on, and the singular feeling of that activity specifically coming to this, just so, are immediate dimensions of experience’s occurring. They are dual immediacies of process.

The first dimension—the experience’s just-beginning-to-stir in a more-than of its own coming activity—is the *relational* dimension of the event’s occurring. It is the event under the aspect of its immediate participation in a world of activity larger than its own. This bare activity of coming experience finding itself in the midst must, in some sense of the word, be perceived. Otherwise it would effectively come to nothing. To be a something-doing effectively is to be felt: to register (if only *in effect*). In what way bare activity is effective and felt, even though it lies at the very threshold of experience just coming into itself, is a major question which runs throughout this book. It is a question worrying every discussion, even where the term bare activity is not itself brought out. Everywhere it is already there, where it always is: at the cusp.

The second dimension—the experience coming out of bare activity into itself just so—is the *qualitative* dimension of the event’s occurring: its thusness. This registers as the event’s immediate enjoyment of the specialness of its holding itself together in just the way it comes to do. This cannot but be felt. Each phase of the event must in some way perceive the pertinence of the phase before it, in order to gather the prior phase’s momentum into its own unfolding. Even as it does this, it is already anticipating a subsequent phase, to which it will in turn relay the momentum of the event’s occurrence. The phases of occurrence overlap as they relay each other following an arc of felt becoming. In the overlap and relay, they

co-perceive their mutual inclusion in the same event. They co-feel their belonging to each other in co-occurrence. If this were not the case, their multiplicity would not make “an” event. The event would not hold together as one. It would lack dynamic unity. It would dissipate before it could singularly culminate.

The qualitative dimension of the event is the how it happens, co-felt, in the immediacy of its now unfolding. How-now. The qualitative how-now of the event is the feeling it has of participating in itself. It is the feeling of its unfolding *self-relation*. If this “self-enjoyment” by the event of its own becoming is a form of reflection, it is not only at no remove from the event; it is an essential factor in its occurrence. It is because an event “enjoys” itself in this arcingly immediate way that it is able to follow through with itself. And it is because it follows through with *itself* that it qualifies as self-creative.

The duplicity with which Whitehead’s process philosophy is pivotally concerned is this constitutive doubling of the event into co-occurrent relational and qualitative dimensions. William James’s own brand of activist philosophy—“radical empiricism”—is struck by the same duplicity. The basic tenet of *radical empiricism* is that everything that is experienced is real in some way and that everything real is in some way experienced. If “change taking place” is really the basic matter of fact of the world, then the radical empiricist must hold that “change itself is . . . immediately experienced” (James 1996a, 48). James discusses the experience of change in terms of relation. Disjunctive relations involve an experience actively “passing out” of the initial “quasi-chaos” to take a direction of its own, “terminating” its movement in a way all its own, to its own separate effect (James 1996a, 63). Disjunction is separative transition, across a threshold of becoming. Conjunctive relation is transitional continuity of becoming (62). Conjunctive relation is how the before and after of a threshold passed mutually include each other in the same event, as “pulses” of the same change. Conjunctive and disjunctive relations both concern change. For radical empiricism, they are both real and immediately experienced.

Disjunctive relations are felt as a self-distancing coming out of an initial condition of participation in the quasi-chaotic something-doing that is the general condition of activity in the world. Conjunctive relations are felt as a “tendency” or “striving” (166–167) that continues across thresholds often marked by resistances and obstacles. “The word ‘activity’ has no imaginable

content whatever save these experiences of process, obstruction, striving, strain, or release." These are "ultimate qualia" (James 1996a, 166–167). It is artificial to oppose disjunctive relations to conjunctive relations. How could each occasion of experience not involve both: a disjunctive coming-out of prior participation, and a quality of continuing-across enabled by that separation? Strains, obstructions, and resistances mark the continued formative pressure of the quasi-chaotic manyness of the oceanic somethings-doings all around on the singular "drop" of experience in the self-creating (James 1996b, 231–232). Ingressions of bare-active relation pulse the event, modulating its onward phasing. Every event is a *qualitative-relational* economy of process, "full of both oneness and manyness" (James 1996a, 93–94):

The continuities and the discontinuities are absolutely co-ordinate matters of immediate feeling. The conjunctions are as primordial elements of "fact" as are the distinctions and disjunctions. In the same act by which I feel that this passing minute is a new pulse of my life, I feel that the old life continues into it, and the feeling of continuance in no wise jars upon the simultaneous feeling of a novelty. They, too, compenetrate harmoniously. (95)

The relational-qualitative duplicity at the heart of activist philosophy is a *differential*, not a dichotomy. It concerns coincident differences in manner of activity *between* which things happen. The coming-together of the differences *as such*—with no equalization or erasure of their differential—constitutes a formative force. It is this force that provides the impulse that the coming experience takes into its occurrence and appropriates as its own tendency. Although the activity differentials are never erased, they do "compenetrate" to "harmonious" result. Between them, they co-compose a singular effect of unity resulting from how it is that they come differently together. An integral of action and experience—a dynamic unity of self-enjoying occurrence—emerges from the energetic playing out of their impulsive difference.

Rather than a dichotomy, the relational-qualitative duplicity in the midst of which activist philosophy begins is a principle of co-composition between coincident manners of occurring. As a principle it is specifically designed to disable the traditional dichotomies haunting Western philosophy. The differential involved cannot, for example, be overlaid on the subject-object dichotomy. The duplicity concerns activity and the potential for the appearance of novelty *astir* in it. Neither potential nor activity is object-like. They are more energetic than object-like (provided that no

presuppositions are made as to the physicality of “energy” or the modes of causality involved in the energizing of events). For the basic category they suggest is just that: occurrence. Neither object nor subject: event.

Activist philosophy’s emphasis on the occurrent makes it a fundamentally *nonobject philosophy*. Deleuze enters the fold of activist philosophy when he says that “the event of alteration” is “one with the essence or the substance of a thing” (Deleuze 1988b, 32). This is another way of saying there is no essence or substance to things other than the novelty of their occurrence. “I have, it’s true, spent a lot of time writing about this notion of event: you see, I don’t believe in things” (Deleuze 1995, 160). He believes in the world—as process (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 2–5; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 20). Whitehead is on much the same page: “a well-marked object is not an inherent necessity for an event. Wherever and whenever something is going on, there is an event” (Whitehead 1964, 78). Nature itself, the world of process, “is a complex of passing events” (Whitehead 1964, 166). The world is not an aggregate of objects. To see it that way is to have participated in an abstraction reductive of the complexity of nature as passage (Whitehead 1964, 74–98). To “not believe in things” is to believe that objects are derivatives of process and that their emergence is the passing result of specific modes of abstractive activity. This means that objects’ reality does not exhaust the range of the real. The reality of the world exceeds that of objects, for the simple reason that where objects are, there has also been their becoming. And where becoming has been, there is already more to come. The being of an object is an abstraction from its becoming. The world is not a grab-bag of things. It’s an always-in-germ. To perceive the world in an object frame is to neglect the wider range of its germinal reality.

Activist philosophy is not a subjectivist philosophy either. It does not presuppose a subject, only “something” going on. Beginning with event-activity rather than the status of the subject makes activist philosophy a fundamentally *noncognitive philosophy*. Rather than asking what’s doing, cognitivist approaches ask what the subject can know of the world, as if the subject does not come to itself already in the midst but rather looked upon the world at a reflective remove that it is philosophy’s job to overcome. The cognitivist paradigm equates the subject with the knower, and the object with the known. Whitehead remarks that to begin there is to get off to a false start (Whitehead 1967a, 175). As James vigorously argues,

if you start by presupposing a subject-object divide, there is no way of preventing the separation from deepening into an abyss. How can the subject cross the divide to reattach itself to the objectivity “out there” on the other side? Doubt takes over. What if there is no other side? What if it’s all illusion? Descartes curls up into the safety of his stove, coming out only when his God is ready to vouchsafe a connection to reality for him (Descartes 1996, xxii). Less divinely baked philosophies invent ingenious ways of tightrope walking the abyss, or go through contortions to deny it is there. For James, these amount to so much acrobatics. An essential divide is presupposed the moment the categories of knower and known are overlaid upon the subject and the object, and no amount of subsequent maneuvering, however ingeniously contortionist, will smooth it over. The problem is that any way you twist it, the knowing is still in the subject and the known is still right where it was on the other side. What can guarantee that they correlate to each other? With all certainty, says James, nothing. Any purported solution is smoke and mirrors. Cognitivist philosophies may purport to walk a graceful line between the subject and the object, but what they really do is take a run at making a “self-transcending” magic leap across the chasm (James 1996a, 52). They are “saltatory”: desperate attempts to magically jump an abyss of their own assuming. Or failing that to make it disappear with a flourish of the metaphysical wand (James 1978, 233, 245–246).

From the perspective of activist philosophy, philosophy should not overcome the cognitivist problem. The best approach is: don’t go there. Not going cognitive requires only a slight displacement, James explains. Consider the subjective and the objective as ways in which portions of experience—pulses of process—relate to *each other* (James 1996a, 196). What cognitivist philosophy grapples with as an essential divide, activist philosophy sees as “successive *takings*” by experience, in experience, of itself (James 1996a, 105). Here there can be no fundamental doubt. Doubt as hard as you can, and all you have done is emphatically illustrate one of the ways experience is wont to take itself back up into itself, self-formatively. You have found yourself in doubt—no doubt a real event. Doubt took effect. A doubter you just effectively became. Activist philosophy is thoroughly realist. It affirms the reality of any and all takings-effect. Its question is not whether something is real or not. It is not out to disqualify, or eliminate. Rather, it asks what aspects of process an event’s

taking-effect exemplifies. This effective realism even applies to the subject and object distinction, the conventional formulations of which it is so wary.

Activist philosophy does not deny that there is a duplicity in process between subjective and objective. It accepts the reality of both. Rather than denying them, activist philosophy affirms them otherwise, reinterpreting them in terms of events and their taking-effect. Specifically, it understands them in terms of the relaying between events, in their “successive takings.” This makes the problem of the subjective and the objective fundamentally a question of time, as implicating a multiplicity of events. Grappling with the problem of the subject and object becomes a way of developing activist philosophy’s take on multiplicity and time, a concept whose centrality is implicit from the start in activist philosophy’s emphasis on change.

The way that activist philosophy affirms the subjective and objective as aspects of the process of change is to say that process exhibits a formative duplicity. This links the definition of objective and subjective to the relational-qualitative duplicity discussed earlier as co-composing dimensions of process. The distinction between separative/disjunctive and conjunctive/continuing aspects of process was another take on that duplicity of process, providing another angle of attack on the same problem. The subject/object distinction is yet another take on it.

Whitehead defines objectivity in terms of *activity* that has been left over in the world by previous events of change and that can be taken up by a next event for taking-in to its self-creation. The object is the “datum” in the etymological sense. It is the “given”: that which is actively found already in the world, to be taken for formative potential. The “subject” is what finds itself in the midst of these processual leavings, taking them up as the world’s gift of potential for its own taking-form. The “subjective” is not something preexisting to which an event occurs: it is the self-occurring form of the event. The dynamic unity of an occasion of experience is its “subjective form.” Actually, there is no “the” subject. *There is no subject separate from the event.* There is only the event as subject to its occurring to itself. The event itself is a subjective self-creation: the how-now of this singular self-enjoyment of change taking place. (For all these points, see Whitehead 1967a, 175–190, and 1978, 41, 52.)

This way of defining the objective and the subjective dimensions of the world of process places the objective at the cusp of the occasioning relation

of participation. The objectivity of an experience is that quantum of the surrounding activity that the coming occasion of experience selectively takes up into itself as it separates off to phase into the occasion of its own becoming. The object as such does not preexist this relay between occasions any more than the coming subject preexists its finding-itself-in-the-midst. It is *taken for* an object by the next occasion's becoming. Given potential is objectively determined by how it is effectively taken up, as a relay experience feels its way into its occurrence. The objective belongs to the immediate past of just this occasion. But it just as immediately belongs to that occasion's proximate future. The coming occasion's passing will bequeath the potential-grabbing change its own activity has created to successor experiences, for their self-creative taking. The subjective is the passing present, understood not as a point in metric time but rather as a qualitative duration—a dynamic mutual inclusion of phases of process in each other, composing a “span” of becoming (this is James's “specious present”) (Whitehead 1968, 89; on the durational span of an occasion, Whitehead 1978, 125 and James 1996a, 131; on the immediate past and the immediate future, Whitehead 1967a, 191–200).

This definition of the subjective and objective lays the groundwork for the processual definition of the knower and the known, but it does not map directly onto it. Technically speaking, for activist philosophy, the *end* of the experience knows its *beginning* (James 1996a, 57). All that a self-creating occasion of experience ultimately “knows” of the world's activity is how it has taken up a portion of it into its own becoming. “What” this will have been exactly retains a certain indeterminacy as long as the becoming is still in process. The “what” of an experience is only fully definite at its culmination. The knower, according to James, is the end of the experience's becoming. What it “knows” is its own beginning, retroactively. An experience determinately knows what it's been only as it peaks—which is also the instant of its “perishing” (Whitehead 1978, 29; Whitehead 1967a, 177). The only subject there is in the completed sense is a “superject”: the “final characterization of the unity of feeling” at an experience's peaking (Whitehead 1978, 166). The “creative advance into novelty” runs from the objective vagueness of a quasi-chaos of activity already going on, to a terminal definiteness of an experience subjectively “satisfying” its enjoyment of itself in a final fulfillment knowingly felt (on vagueness, see Whitehead 1968, 109).

Pure: The word will return throughout this book in a refrain, doubtless to the discomfort of many a reader schooled in the critique of its conventional associations of moral superiority, particularly as regards race. It is used here in an unconventional sense, borrowed from James. "Pure" is James's qualifier for the bare-active first flush of emergent experience. The just-emerging of experience is pure in the very specific sense that it is "virtually both subjective and objective" (James 1996a, 130). The general going-on of activity in the world has yet to sort itself out as what the special activity already brewing will determinately become. The dynamic unity of the coming event is still a work in progress. Since that forming dynamic unity will define the subjective form of the experience, what the subject will be is still an open question. As long as the subject lacks final definition, what its objects will have been in the end is also indeterminate. As is its objective bequest to subsequent experience. What is "given" is what will prove in the end to have been taken in. In the end, it is what will have passed on, potentially to be taken-in again. Pure in this context does not imply a hierarchy of value. It draws a question mark. It designates the open question of what experience's self-creative activity will yield in the dynamic pulse of its process. Pure here is not an eliminative concept either. It marks the processual co-presence of a self-creating subject of experience with what will prove to have been its objects, together in the making. "Pure" experience is not in the least reduced or impoverished. It is overfull. It is brimming "virtually or potentially" (23). It is the embarrassment of processual riches in which every experience finds itself in its incipiency. "It is a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho' ready to be all sorts of *whats*" (93). Whitehead's term for it is "pure feeling." Philosophy, for him, is nothing less than a "critique of pure feeling" (Whitehead 1978, 113). In the pages that follow, whenever the word pure is used, the reader should think of the displacement that activist philosophy effects in relation to the notions of subject and object and the paradigms of cognition within which they are normally embedded. The crucial point is that it does this out of respect for the richness of experience in the making. In this connection, it is especially important not to equate "pure" experience with "raw" experience.

"Raw" experience carries connotations of a state of precultural grace unsullied by language. A "prelinguistic" Eden uncomplicated by learning

and the “higher” cognitive functions it inculcates. This is not at all the concept here. The concept is rather that all “higher” cognitive functions come back through the middle. They are only active to the extent that they reactivate in the quasi-chaotic midst of something doing again. They come back through, bare-actively, in all immediacy, as recreative factors of experience rearing. They are “judgments” that come in all immediacy as *direct perceptions*. They concern, for example, causal relation, similarity, categorizations, qualitative evaluations, linguistic associations, and even symbolic figurings. Peirce calls them “perceptual judgments,” admitting that it is something of a misnomer because they occur without a separate act of judgment (Peirce 1997, 93–94, 242–247). They come, he says, “as if” there had been a judgment but too immediately for one to have actually been performed. They are judgments without the actual judgment: direct perceptions of the world’s acquired complexity, incoming, flush with the bare-active firstness of experience feeling its way into a next event. This “feedback of higher forms” back into and through pure experience is summed up in the formula *practice becomes perception* (Massumi 2002, 30, 189–190, 198–199, 293n17; see also Massumi 2010a on “priming”). Chapters 2 and 4 of this book deal extensively with this factor of pure experience, analyzed under the term *thinking-feeling*.

The displacement from cognition, with its Cartesian stovepipe dream of foundational clearness and distinctness, to the messy middling goings-on of pure experience in all its potential and complexity, has far-reaching pragmatic consequences. This is because the cognitive subject-object dichotomy itself has far-reaching consequences. It extends itself into a division between ways of knowing, and from there into a hierarchy between modes of practice. This is especially evident in the division between disciplines of knowledge that are in a position to make a claim to “objectivity” and those that are not. The traditional form this bifurcation of knowledge practices takes is the chasm between the “two cultures,” scientific and humanistic. The same division recurs within the disciplines on each side of that massive divide, between empirical methods (in a decidedly nonradical sense) and speculative or theoretical approaches (dismissed by the other side as “merely” subjective). This divide repeats as a distinction between modes of practices, even practices that do not define themselves primarily as knowledge practices, such as political practices. Here, the dichotomy

recurs as an opposition between “fact-based” or “commonsense” approaches and “experimental,” “idealistic,” or “utopian” approaches, with a clear implication of the superiority of the former.

Activist philosophy refuses to recognize these divisions as fundamental, or to accept the hierarchy they propagate. Its own fundamental duplicity, that of the relational/participative and the qualitative/creatively-self-enjoying, suggests a different schema. The relational/participatory aspect of process could fairly be called *political*, and the qualitative/creatively-self-enjoying aspect *aesthetic*. These aspects are not treated as in contradiction or opposition, but as co-occurring dimensions of every event’s relaying of formative potential. They do not parse out in a way that maps onto the existing disciplinary landscape and the associated ways of conventionally bifurcating practices. We saw earlier how the disjunctive/separative and conjunctive/continuing aspects of process played through this duplicity. Another spinoff distinction playing through it for activist philosophy is between the *pragmatic* and the *speculative*. Instead of denoting a parting of the ways, however, this distinction is used to express their coming together. Hyphens are in order: *aesthetico-political*, *speculative-pragmatic*.

The speculative aspect relates to the character of potential native to the world’s activity, as expressed eventfully in the taking place of change. The pragmatic aspect has to do with how, in the taking-definite-shape of potential in a singular becoming, the relational and qualitative poles co-compose as formative forces. Pragmatic doesn’t mean practical *as opposed to* speculative or theoretical. It is a synonym for composition: “how” processual differentials eventfully play out as co-composing formative forces. This pragmatic playing out is always speculative in the sense that what will come of the process is to some degree an open question until its “final characterization” of itself at its point of culmination. En route, it is speculatively anticipating what it will have been. That speculation is entirely active. It is the “how” of the experience getting where it’s ultimately going with itself. The co-composing of formative forces constitutes in each exercise of experience a novel *power of existence*: a power to become.

By this thinking, the discipline called art does not have a monopoly on creative composition. And the domain called politics does not have a monopoly on real existential change. There is no less an aesthetic side to politics than there is a political side to art. Practices we call doing politics and practices we call doing art are all integrally aesthetico-political, and

every aesthetico-political activity is integrally speculative-pragmatic. Every mode of practice, however its domain is conventionally classed, is aesthetico-political/speculative-pragmatic, each in its own inimitable way.

It is here that the constructive questioning begins. It consists in finding ways to understand any given mode of activity in these experiential terms, starting from an ontological primacy of the relational-qualitative and respecting the singularity of the activity's unfolding—although the word “ontological” no longer fits. Process is only perishingly about being. But it is everywhere and always about powers of existence in becoming. The concerns of activist philosophy are *ontogenetic* more than ontological (Simondon 2005, 24–26 and *passim*).

The speculative-pragmatic cast of activist philosophy gives it an in-built affinity with one conventional classification of practices, those sharing its name: “activism.” Activist philosophy, as it is explored in this book, addresses itself as much to activistisms in the familiar sense, in any domain in which they stir, as it does to art or philosophical practices in their existing disciplinary frames. The affinity is especially close with activist practices that see themselves as simultaneously cultural and political, as these are already grappling in their own way with the aesthetic-political/speculative-pragmatic polarities. This book in large part works from practices that according to traditional classifying schemes would fall into the domain of art or philosophy. But it does this to open art and philosophy to each other, and in a way that opens their opening onto to each other out into a wider activist understanding of the relational-qualitative processes moving through them. The ultimate speculative-pragmatic wager of the book is that if this opening-out succeeds, subsequent takings-up of its tendency might open out of its own practice, that of writing, into other activist arenas in the more usual sense of the word. If the book can be considered to have one central concern, it is this: the *politicality* of process, in whatever initial midst. The politicality of a pulse of process is the manner of potential it passes on for self-creative successor effect.

With this in view, the book at certain points suggests concepts specifically addressing the taking-up of process. If one exercise of experience bequeaths its activity in residual form for a successor's taking up, might not that taking up be anticipated, in a fostering way, by how the experience is determined to occur to itself? How can an occasion of experience so determine itself as to leave traces of its activity apt to provide propitious

conditions for the next exercise's arcing toward the production of its own novelty of successor self-enjoyment? How, from its just-beginnings in bare activity, can an experience modulate its own self-formative tendency's going beyond itself, toward a potentializing of other events? Since foundational clearness and distinctness are (fortunately for creativity) out of the equation, it is a given that no event can lay down the law in a way that essentially predefines its succession. But are there still ways in which an experience can *orient* what comes? In what way can an event constructively include formative potential for what lies beyond in its own constitution?

The question of how the beyond of an occasion's self-enjoyment is effectively included in its constitution is the question of *importance* so central to Whitehead's philosophy (Whitehead 1968, 1–19). The question of importance is also the question of *expression*, or what is effectively passed on by an occasion's passing (Whitehead 1968, 20–41). Importance and expression are not add-ons to experience. They are not “merely” subjective. They are what bridge the subjective and objective aspects of the world, in its rolling effectively on. They are fundamental categories of the world's becoming. They are ontogenetic factors, constitutive of the politicality of process.

In what follows, the question of how the makeup of an occasion of experience effectively and constructively includes its own beyond is approached through the concept of *techniques of existence*. A technique of existence is a technique that takes as its “object” process itself, as the speculative-pragmatic production of oriented events of change. Techniques of existence are dedicated to ontogenesis as such. They operate immediately qualitatively-relationally. They make no gesture of claiming “objectivity,” nor do they pride themselves on their grasp of common sense. At the same time, they reject being characterized as “merely” subjective. They are *inventive* of subjective forms in the activist sense: dynamic unities of events unfolding. So implicated are they with the politicality of event-formation that they qualify whatever domain in which their creativity is operative as an *occurrent art*.

The concept of the *diagram* is adopted from Peirce and Deleuze to think about what techniques of existence do pragmatically-speculatively. According to both Peirce and Deleuze, what they do is abstract. Diagramming is the procedure of abstraction when it is not concerned with reducing the world to an aggregate of objects but, quite the opposite, when it is

attending to their genesis. To abstract in this fuller sense is a technique of extracting the relational-qualitative arc of one occasion of experience—its subjective form—and systematically depositing it in the world for the next occasion to find, and to potentially take up into its own formation. The subjective form of an experience is the dynamic form of how the potentials for change initially found in the bare-active midst come to play out in its occasion. In addition to the initial conditions of given potential, recharges of potentials en route must also be factored in. These are chance intrusions: resistances, obstacles, and enablements. The event of experience self-modulates under pressure from these infusions of activity. To follow itself through to its culmination, the occasion under way must sense their potential on the fly, and creatively take it into its continued unfolding, as added impetus to its becoming.

The diagram as technique of existence is a way of informing the next occasion of these potentials for self-formation: “The greatest point of art consists in the introduction of suitable abstractions” (Peirce 1997, 226). It should not for a moment be forgotten that all of this concerns experience. In experience is to be found the *genesis of things*. By abstraction, Peirce writes, “I mean such a transformation of our diagrams that characters of one diagram may appear in another as things” (ibid.). What we call objects, considered in the ontogenetic fullness of process, are lived relations between the subjective forms of occasions abstractly nesting themselves in each other as passed-on potentials. They are the inter-given: the systematic form in which potential is relayed from one experience to another. “Objectification itself is abstraction” (Whitehead 1985, 25).

The abstract is lived experience. I would almost say that once you have reached lived experience, you reach the most fully living core of the abstract. . . . You can live nothing but the abstract and nobody has lived anything else but the abstract. (Deleuze 1978b)

This, then, is a book about *technologies of lived abstraction*.

Major issues will have to be left in suspense as this introduction completes its own short-lived arc. One is the concept of the virtual, much maligned in some quarters today. The other is the issue of experience as it applies to nonhuman forms of life—and even to matter itself.

The concept of the virtual is taken up at length in the course of the book under the guise of semblance. *Semblance* is another way of saying “the experience of a virtual reality.” Which is to say: “the experiential

reality of the virtual.” The virtual is abstract event potential. Semblance is the manner in which the virtual *actually appears*. It is the being of the virtual as lived abstraction. As used here, “semblance” is free of the connotations of “illusion” in Adorno’s and Lacan’s uses of the term.

The virtual cannot be understood as a “space” of potential—it is, after all, *event* potential. It cannot be treated as a realm apart without being entirely denatured as a speculatively-pragmatically useful concept. It is in no way an idealist concept. And it is in no way in opposition with actualism. The activist philosophy advanced here is in a way a thoroughgoing actualism, taking the term actual at its etymological word: “*in act*.” For activist philosophy, everything real gets into the act, and everything in the act is real according to its own mode of activity.

As taken up here, Deleuze’s “virtual” corresponds to Whitehead’s “pure potential.” The activity of pure potential for Whitehead is to make “ingress” into the occasion of experience, as an ontogenetic force collaborating in the dynamic taking-determinate-form of the experience (the event’s “con-crescence”). The activity of potential making ingress is “energizing” (Whitehead 1967a, 182–183). At ingress, the potential arcs through the experience’s energized tending toward an aimed-at fulfillment. The potential runs through the arc of the experience’s unfolding, infolded into it. It infolds in the form of a tendential direction, or vector of self-formation. At ingress, the potential is abstract in that it has yet fully to occur to the experience’s actual tending. As an aim, or, as James would say, a terminus, it is abstract again, because the moment of its fulfillment is the instant when all is processually said and done. The experience self-expires on reaching it, so that it actually will have experienced its potential only as an onward lure—a reaching-toward something that disappears between the closing fingers of the experience even as they grasp it. But it does remain a “*something*”: not entirely determinate to the end. It’s not over until it’s over, and what is tended-toward can inflect itself up until the final instant. Thus one of the roles of the concept of the virtual, or of pure potential, is to make *surprise* a universal, constitutive force in the world’s becoming. The universality of surprise as a constitutive force makes the process of the “actualization” through which potential runs an existential drama. Actualization, for Deleuze, is the existentializing “dramatization” of pure, abstract potential (the virtual “Idea”; Deleuze 2004a, 94–116).

The virtual is a limit-concept of process and experience. It comes once aboriginally with ingressive initiative, and again at the end, with the

perishing. It marks the outside limits of the in-act of process *and* dramatically runs through it limit to limit. The virtual limits are conjointly felt in the arcing of the experience toward the novelty of its taking final effect. The virtual is abstractly lived as the experience runs through itself, from one limit of its unfolding to the other.

Sometimes at the culmination of the experience, the drama appears for itself. It is *seen*. Not actually, if that means corresponding to a sense impression striking the body's visual apparatus. Actually: as in *in act*. This appearing of the drama of an experience's self-enjoyment in the act is the semblance. Say you catch sight of a mouse out of the corner of your eye. You don't so much see the mouse as you *feel* the arc of its movement with your eyes. You feel the movement continuing out of the immediate past when it was just outside your visual field, coming in. If the movement is felt to be toward you, the feeling of the immediate past includes the immediate future of *your* movement taking off in the opposite direction. You don't actually "see" the vector of the mouse's movement, or your own. You immediately experience the dynamic unity of the event—mouse incoming, you outgoing—phasing forward in the form of a felt line of approach. This direct perception of the arc of an event gathering up its immediate past and scurrying it forward toward an immediate postrodent future is an example of a semblance. If the arc of the event is seen, it is seen *nonsensuously*, as an abstract line (on nonsensuous perception, Whitehead 1967a, 180–183; on abstract line, Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9, 197, 280, 296, 496–498). It is seen as in an immediate abstraction in a specious present of fear.

The feeling of seeing the abstract line of the event is a vision-effect. It is an effect of the event-triggering tension inherent to the human-mouse differential. It expresses that differential in an abstract perception of the dynamic unity of the event, as you feel you saw it with your eyes, or perhaps eyed it into feeling. In other words, the dynamic form of the event is *perceptually felt*, not so much "in" vision as *with* vision or *through* vision: as a vision-effect. It is a lived abstraction: an effective virtual vision of the shape of the event, including in its arc the unseen dimensions of its immediate past and immediate future. The lived abstraction of the event is an *amodal* perception, in the nonsensuous shape of a line, of change taking place. It is direct perception of an event. (Deleuze's "time-image" is the prime example in his work of the appearing of the virtual in what would here be termed a semblance of an event; Deleuze 1989, 68–97 and *passim*).

Amodal, nonsensuous: these are ways of saying that the effective perception of the shape of the event was not actually in any particular mode of sensory perception. When a semblance is “seen,” it is virtually seen. How else could the virtual actually appear—if not *as* virtual? Seeing a semblance is having a virtual vision. It is a seeing-through to the virtual in an event of lived abstraction.

There is a curious excess of experience in the event. Since the semblance is amodal, in principle it could have been perceptually-felt in any mode. This means that when it is seen, its appearing virtually in vision betokens a potential variation on the experience as it could have appeared as an other than visual sense-effect, for example as a sound-effect. If you think about it, you probably “actually” heard more of the event than you saw, since a perceptible but as yet unattended-to scurrying preceded the animal’s entering your visual field. There is no reason why the continuing of the event into the immediate future could not have appeared avowedly as a sound-effect. In fact, for some people with a dominance of hearing, it would have. Thus the problem of the virtual is indissociable from the question of the *abstract composition of the senses*, in excess of their actual exercise. It is primarily in this connection that the concept of the virtual appears in this book: as a way of thinking about how techniques of existence, in co-composing powers of existence, recompose the senses; and in recomposing the senses, catch an excess reality of the virtual in the act, for diagrammatic relay toward new occasions of experience reinventing how lived abstraction can be felt in our embodied animal life. The aesthetico-political production of novelty is the excess invention of experiential *forms of life*.

The trick to the productive speculative-pragmatic use of the concept of the virtual is never to separate it from the in-act. It takes a fair bit of conceptual calisthenics to achieve this, but it’s well worth the exercise. The key is always to hold to the virtual as a coincident dimension of every event’s occurrence. Again: don’t take this as a dichotomy but as a creative differential, one essentially ingredient to every experience to the extent that every experience is an occasion of lived abstraction.

As a limit-concept, the virtual cannot be thought without paradox—and without working to make the paradox conceptually productive. There are a number of key junctures at which activist philosophy, like any metaphysics, must affirmatively make do with paradox. This is an essential moment

in a philosophy's self-formation. It is the moment a philosophical thought process verges upon the limit of what it can think. To make that limit-experience productive, the thinking must then turn back before it breaks apart like a spaceship entering a black hole. It must inscribe that self-saving inflection in itself, in the form of new concepts or new variations on old concepts. This must be done in a way that does *not* try to resolve or dismiss the paradox. It is done by taking the paradox seriously as a limit, turning back from it, and taking the necessity of turning back constructively to heart. The limit-experience of paradox turns around into an impulse for continuing the philosophy's self-creative advance. It has been taken-in as a self-modulation of the thinking-process. It is no longer worried over as a logical contradiction. It has been actively converted into a creative factor that is liminally immanent to the process. It has become a positive factor. This affirmation of *noncontradiction* as a self-formative necessity is an essential feature of a creative philosophy's signature activity.

The paradox of the virtual—that it is never actual but always in some way in-act—is closely associated with the paradox of immediate self-reflection entailed by the concept of self-enjoyment discussed earlier. The semblance is the event reflecting itself, directly and immediately, in lived abstraction. There are other paradoxes to be grappled with as well. There is, for example, a paradox of relation for activist philosophy.

Relationality was linked to the notion of the differential just alluded to. It was said that an effect was sparked *across* differences. The differences concern the mode of activity of what will have been the formative factors of the coming experience's occurring to itself. The effect comes *between* the different factors. The experience takes off from them, as it takes itself into its own event. The event shows itself, for the dynamic unity it has come to be. It does not show the differentials from which it has taken off into its own unfolding dynamic unity. But neither does it efface them. It resolves them into its own appearance. They recede into the flash of its occurrence. They are left behind by the event they condition, which takes off from, so that they show only in that take-off effect.

Take a flash of lightning. Its appearance is conditioned by an electromagnetic differential. The differential does not show. What shows is the dynamic unity of the differential's playing out. The flash comes of that playing-out, but shows for itself. The effect lifts off from its conditions into

its own appearance. It is an extra-effect: a dynamic unity that comes in self-exhibiting excess over its differential conditions. In the immediacy of its own event, the event of lightning is absolutely, self-enjoyingly absorbed in the singularity of its own occurrence, and that's what shows. All occasions of experience exhibit this "sheer individuality" amid diversity (Whitehead 1967a, 177). An event of experience is a "little absolute" of occurrent self-enjoyment, conditioned yet self-creating (James 1996b, 280).

The event transpires *between* the differential elements that set the conditions for it. The electromagnetic gradient field that resolves itself into the occurrence of lightning is a complex field phenomenon. The field envelops the distances between a multitude of elemental particles, bringing them into an energizing tension. The flash is the eventful resolution of the tension. It is how the field shows, in excess to itself, as an extra-effect. The exhibited extra-effect is an expression of that multitude of particles having come together just so, enveloped in tension. The intensive envelopment of the contributing elements constitutes a *relational field*—but only for the strike of this event. Had the lightning not occurred, it would have been because the contributing factors had not come together in just this way. The relation and the flash of eventful resolution are one. The flash is the *being of the relation* (Simondon 2005, 63). Had the flash not occurred, the relation would effectively not have been. It would not have resolved itself into an effect. In activist philosophy *to be is to be felt*: to effectively register. To be is to be in effect. To be is to get into the act, even though the act is the whole show, and what the performance resolves to show recedes.

The paradox of relation can be summed in the term *relation-of-nonrelation*. Elements contributing to an occurrence come into relation when they come into effect, and they come into effect in excess over themselves. In themselves, they are disparate. If they are in tension, it is precisely as a function of the differential between their positions. It is as a function of their distances from each other. The factors do not actually connect. Their distance is enveloped in a field effect that is one with the tension culminating in the strike of an event. The event effectively takes off from its elements' contribution to it. As an extra-effect, it does not connect to them as its "cause." It comes into its own sheer individuality of occurrence: its little-absoluteness. The phrase relation-of-nonrelation is a way of holding together, in the concept of the event, the differential status of its conditioning elements and the dynamic unity of their sheer occurrence as a little

absolute. It is a synonym of “conditioned by a disparate multitude *and* individually-absolutely self-creative” (on relation and disparateness see Simondon 2005, 31, 34–35, 205–209).

The main point to be derived from this is that relation in activist philosophical sense is *not connective*. The paradox of the relation-of-nonrelation excludes what is commonly called interaction or interactivity from qualifying as relational (see chapter 2). Extensive use of the concept of relation-of-nonrelation is made at various points in this book (for example, in the discussion of experiential “fusion,” also called synchresis, in chapters 2 and 4). There is also a related point about expression. Expression is always extra-effective. The subject is the subjective form, or dynamic unity, of the extra-effecting event. There is no subject prior to or outside the expression. The being of the subject is the *extra-being* of the occurrent relation (it is Whitehead’s superject; on extra-being, Deleuze 1990, 7).

If we apply this concept of the relation-of-nonrelation to what occurs between occasions of experience, we are led to treat the experiences themselves as differentials. The consequence is that occasions of experience *cannot be said to actually connect to each other*. They may be said to “come together” only in the sense of being mutually enveloped in a more encompassing event of change-taking-place that expresses their differential in the dynamic form of its own extra-being. That occasions of experience do not actually connect is Whitehead’s doctrine of “contemporary independence” (Whitehead 1967a, 195–196). It means that the relation between different experiences is purely effective: on the creative level of effect. Their relation is the creative playing out of a nonrelation effectively expressing the inexpressible difference between the sheer individuality of events of experience, by virtue of which each is a little absolute.³

This might sound lonely. It is certainly not touchy-feely. But Whitehead affirms it as a necessary condition for creativity. The nonrelation of relation is what makes “elbow room” in the world for an experience to come absolutely into its own production of novelty, uncramped by the constraint of connectively fitting in (Whitehead 1967a, 195). This preserves the emergence of novelty, rather than conformity to the present, as the principle of activity. It also makes all the world expressive. Purely self-expressive. It means the world of change is *made* of self-creative expression. This has obvious advantages for an aesthetico-political activist philosophy oriented toward a creative autonomy of forms of life.

A further consequence of these considerations is that different occasions of experience relate only *immanently*: by their mutual participation in the world's bare activity, in which they all find themselves in their incoming potential, and into which they perish as they peak. The quasi-chaos of bare activity is immanent to each occasion in the sense that it inaugurally in-forms them of what potentials are astir for their creative taking-in. Bare activity wells up into the event's self-forming. This leads to another paradox, one concerning the notion of immanence. When an occasion of experience perishes into the world of bare-active potential from which it arose, it contributes its self-formative activity to the world, for potential uptake into a next occasion's unfolding. It transcends itself back into the immanence out of which it came (Whitehead 1967a, 237; Whitehead 1968, 167). It makes a bequest to process continuing beyond itself, in the form of its own self-fulfillment.

The notion of non-connective relation encapsulated in the phrase relation-of-nonrelation changes the meaning of "participation." While at first sight participation may seem to have evaporated, it has actually redoubled. It comes once in the fielding of the multiplicity of contributory elements. The multitude of atmospheric particles—each of which can be considered an occasion of experience in its own right—create the conditions for the strike of lightning by entering into a commotion of mutual interference and resonance. Each actively participates in the production of the whole-field effects that energize the night sky for the coming event. The whole-field effects are a dynamic expression of each contributory element's remote participation in every other's activity. The singularity of each element's activity is fused in the general field activity whose tension potentiates the event, and against which the added novelty of the flash stands out, in the contrasting brightness of its own special activity. The participation of the conditioning elements occurs *at a distance*: between the elements; across the intervals actually separating them. The event comes strikingly into itself against the background of what has now become its contrasting field of emergence. It sheers off from its field of emergence, into its own absolute individuality of occurrence. The event has partaken of the potential bequeathed it by the general background activity. This sheer partaking of potential is the second participation involved in the concept of the relation-of-nonrelation. Here, participation is partitive (disjunctive or separative), in occurrent answer to the fusional participation

of the fielding (which is conjunctive in the envelopmental sense of a dynamic mutual inclusion). The event, seen in this striking light, is doubly participatory—but nowhere connective. It is nonlocal. Its conditions are fielded at a distance, and the dazzle of its culmination distances itself from the field of its emergence, in striking contrast to it (on ontogenetic contrast, see chapter 3).

The concept of the relation-of-nonrelation is that of *nonlocality* of relation. Relation is nonlocal in two co-implicated senses, corresponding to the two modes of participation involved: 1) the fielding of potential comes of the intervals between elements and 2), the sheering away of the event into the unity of its own occurrence asserts a parturitional interval between itself, as extra-effective being, and the background of potential creating the conditions for its birth. What participation means must be rearticulated in light of the double nonlocality of relation. One of the stakes in that rearticulation will be the notion of causality. The flash of lightning is *conditioned*, more than it is *caused*. It self-causes, given its conditions. To say that it is caused would imply a genetic passivity. The paradigm of the relation-of-nonrelation finds activity everywhere, in different modes (in fielding and striking; in general activity and special activity; and most especially, in the bare activity hinging them).

Returning to the paradox of the virtual, that paradox is captured in the continuation of a phrase by James cited earlier: “full of both oneness and manyness, *in respects that don't appear*” (James 1996a, 93–94). If the world is made of expression, the implication of James' phrase is that there are aspects of the world that are expressed without actually appearing. The concept of the semblance is a way of making this paradox productive. It is designed to deal with the complication that, for example, what is seen with or through vision, without actually being seen in vision, is nevertheless perceptually felt, in effect. The semblance is the form in which what does not appear effectively expresses itself, in a way that must be counted as real. The example given above was the nonsensuous perception of the mouse-line. The mouse-line was composed by a differential participation of the senses in each other. The variety of the contributory sense modes went actively unseen in the abstract sight of the rodent-inflected vectoring of experience. But there is also semblance of sorts in the lightning, even though it is actually seen sensorially, in the sense that the appearance of its dynamic form is accompanied by an actual impingement of light rays

upon the retina. The visibility of the lightning brought the commotion of elemental activity filling the night sky into vision, without it actually showing. It got into the act, but was lost in the show. The flashiness of the lightning was the brilliant tip of an atmospheric iceberg full of both oneness and manyness, whose field respects showily disappeared into the ontogenetic background. The lightning is the appearing tip of a more expansive event that never shows in its entirety. The fullness of the event's conditioning and occurrence is perceptually felt, in the dynamic form of how what actually appears steals the show. Even if the event's conditioning elements and culmination are actual, the *entirety* of the event is virtual: doubly nonlocal, nonsensuously present, registering only in effect, and on all three counts really abstract.

In one semblant way or another, for lightning or for mice, a concept of the effective reality of what doesn't appear is essential to a philosophy oriented to a thinking of process. The reason is simple: the main things that don't actually appear—yet are always expressed in some way in that which does appear—are the past and the future. Atmospheric fielding of the elements was the immediate past of the lightning strike. The mouse-line abstractly continued into the immediate future of unwanted encounter or escape. Process—event, change, production of novelty, becoming—all imply duration. They are time concepts. Past, present, future are always co-implicating. They are mutually included in each other. But they include each other as different: as different dimensions of the dynamic unity of the experience's occurring, which by definition cannot appear with equal billing (that is to say, sensuously). A semblance expresses this essential disparity in the difference that it makes perceptually felt between sensuous experience and nonsensuous reality. A semblance is always an expression of time, though its nonsensuousness gives it an aftertaste of eternity. The classic example is the lived semblance of the world of childhood that Proust's madeleine triggered into appearing without actually appearing. Although actually unappearing, the semblance of the past was really felt, with a self-creating spontaneity that imposed it as a fact of experience. The semblance is a lived expression of the eternal matter-of-fact that is time's passing.

Paul Klee speaks of the task of composing semblances—making dimensions of experience that don't appear appear nevertheless in the dynamic unity of an expressive act—as what defines aesthetic activity:

It is not easy to arrive at a conception of a whole which is constructed from parts belonging to different dimensions. And not only nature, but also art . . . is such a whole. For . . . we lack the means of discussing in its constituent parts, an image which possesses simultaneously a number of dimensions. . . . But, in spite of all these difficulties, we must deal with the constituent parts in great detail. . . . Our courage may fail us when we find ourselves faced with a new part leading in a completely different direction, into new dimensions, perhaps into remoteness where the recollection of previously explored dimensions may easily fade. To each dimension, as, with the flight of time, it disappears from view, we should say: now you are becoming Past. But perhaps later at a critical—perhaps fortunate—moment we may meet again on a new dimension, and once again you may become Present. (Klee 1950, 15, 17)

To compose, we must deal with the “constituent parts”—contributory factors of activity—in great detail. But the more detail with which we grasp them, the more apt they are to fade into a remoteness where they recede into nonrelation. Yet they may also advance into new experiential dimensions, forwarding experience into new directions for composition. The diagram, as explained above, is a word that activist philosophy uses to name a speculative-pragmatic procedure for navigating this complexity of experience’s passing, taking special aim on the “critical” moments. These are the junctures where one moment of experience’s passing passes into another, informing it of (in-forming it with) the potential to become again: technique of existence. Klee’s reference to art *and* nature in this connection implies that they are both compositional realities, that their compositions involve a diagrammatic experience of becoming, and that this becoming of experience is aesthetic in its multidimensionality.

This brings us to the final question, that of experience in nonhuman forms of life, and in nonliving matter itself. It was already asserted that the world was made of expression. In this context, this is the same as saying that the world is made of experience. If the world is made of experience, there is perception everywhere in it. For activist philosophy, the question of the nonhuman revolves around the question of nonhuman perception. In what way can we say that what we have a tendency to separate out as “dumb matter” in fact perceives and is therefore, by the precepts of activist philosophy, experientially self-creative?

This question is only tangentially touched on in this book (for more, see Massumi forthcoming). It will have to suffice to say that Whitehead defines perception as “taking account” (Whitehead 1967a, 234–235;

Whitehead 1967b, 69–70). Taking account means an event inflecting the arc of its becoming as a function of its feeling the influence of other events, either in its initial conditions or en route. An electron is an occasion of experience for Whitehead. It “takes account” of the electromagnetic field of the nucleus of the atom in the dynamic form of its orbit and in its quantum character (the unity of the dynamic form expressed as its orbit and energy level). The electron registers the “importance” of its fellow creatures of the nucleus, and expresses it in the dynamic unity of its own pathmaking. The trees along a river take account of the surrounding mountains in how they are able to take in the rain washing down from them, negotiating with their shadows for their growth, or availing themselves of the mountain’s protection from the wind. The life of a tree is a “society” of occasions of experience whose taking-account of other events—weather events, geological events, the earth’s gravitation, the sun’s rising and setting—contributes to a continuing growth pattern. Tree rings are one of the ways in which this growing lived abstraction is seen for itself. Our taking in the pattern at a glance is a semblance of a life. But even outside any encounter with human perception, the electron, the mountains, the tree involve perceptions. They *are* perceptions in themselves: they *are* how they take account, in their own self-formative activity, of the world of activity always and already going on around.⁴

Whenever we see, whenever we perceptually feel, whenever we live abstraction, we are taking in nonhuman occasions of experience. We are inheriting their activity, taking it into our own special activity as a *human* form of life: as a society of occasions of experience contributing to a continuing growth pattern it pleases us to call our human self. What we perceptually feel to be our “humanity” is a semblance of that life. Like all semblances, it is created through specific techniques of existence, in this case, of historic proportions. And like all semblances, it appears most for itself at the moment of its perishing (Foucault 1970, 422). The “human” is a singularly historical virtual reality appearing *through* the animal body it also pleases us to call human. “Humanity” is a growth ring expressing a certain episode in the historic route of the collective life of our animal body.

Like all animal forms of life, the human has a technique of existence whose role is to selectively channel the nonhuman activity always going on all around into its own special activity. That technique of existence is

the body itself. The senses are procedures of the body as technique of existence. The body is the seat of bare activity: the region of indistinction between the human and matter where something doing is always already just stirring, before it starts to take definitive experiential form. We do not see the electrons traveling down our optic nerve. We see what our body makes of their activity. We take their activity into our own, producing an event of seeing—certainly a novelty for an electron. In the arcing of the event toward the production of its novel outcome, physical matter, life matter in general, and human life-matter are actively indistinguishable. The body is the intensive milieu of active-matter indistinction in the midst of which a human experience comes to find itself.

Experience always invents. Every perception is a creative activity culminating in the production of an event of change. A perception is its own event. Its “content” is one with the dynamic form of its coming to fulfillment. What a perception invents is essentially itself. It is self-creative. There is nothing “outside” to which it corresponds or that it reflects or represents. All perception is immanent—in the case of animal life, to the bodily milieu of its own becoming. When we see an “object” “out there” we are seeing a semblance of our own life’s passing, immanent to its own occurrence. If we focus exclusively on the chunkiness of the object as it slothfully presents itself in the flow of change, we are living the abstraction that the world comes in fundamentally inertial chunks of what we are habitually tempted to call matter *as opposed to* life, or what we like to think of as the concrete as opposed to the abstract (Manning and Massumi, forthcoming a). This is Whitehead’s “fallacy of misplaced concreteness,” which he considers the bane not only of most approaches to philosophy, but also of classical science, not to mention common sense (Whitehead 1967b, 51–52, 58). Deleuze restates it in the following way: “The opposite of the concrete is not the abstract, it is the discrete” (Deleuze, 1978a). The discrete: the slothful just-being-there of an inactive chunk of matter.

“In truth, the notion of the self-contained particle of matter, self-sufficient within its local habitation, is an abstraction.” (Whitehead 1968, 138). There is, in bare matter of fact, “no possibility of a detached, self-contained local existence” (ibid.).

The doctrine I am maintaining is that neither physical nature nor life can be understood unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of “really

real” things whose interconnections and individual characters constitute the universe. . . . In conceiving the function of life in an occasion of experience, we must discriminate the actualized data presented by the antecedent world, and the non-actualized potentialities⁵ which lie ready to promote their fusion into a new unity of experience, and the immediacy of self-enjoyment which belongs to the creative fusion of these data with those potentialities. (Whitehead 1968, 150–151)

Such is lived abstraction. “Abstraction expresses nature’s mode of interaction and is not merely mental. When it abstracts, thought is merely conforming to nature—or rather, it is exhibiting itself as an element in nature” (Whitehead 1985, 26). As for the body, “it is part of the external world, continuous with it,” made of the same “matter” (or processual matter of fact). It partakes of the same general activity:

In fact, [the body] is just as much part of nature anything else there—a river, or a mountain, or a cloud. Also, if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends. Consider one definite molecule. It is part of nature. It has moved about for millions of years. Perhaps it started from a distant nebula. It enters the body; it may be as a factor in some edible vegetable; or it passes into the lungs as part of the air. At what exact point as it enters the mouth, or as it is absorbed through the skin, is it part of the body? At what exact moment, later on, does it cease to be part of the body? Exactness is out of the question. (Whitehead 1968, 21)

The only thing that is certain is that the body will have partaken. It will have taken something of the world’s general activity into its own special activity of expressing potential in life-advancing change taking place. Matter, “considered in abstraction of the notion of life,” leads to an impasse. “We are left with the notion of an activity in which nothing is effected” (Whitehead 1968, 148). Nothing doing. “Vacuous actuality” (Whitehead 1978, 29). Inactivist philosophy.

Ultimately, the thinking of speculative pragmatism that is activist philosophy belongs to nature. Its aesthetico-politics compose a nature philosophy. The occurrent arts in which it exhibits itself are politics of nature.

The one-word summary of its relational-qualitative goings on: *ecology*. Activist philosophy concerns the ecology of powers of existence. Becomings in the midst. Creative change taking place, self-enjoying, humanly or no, humanly and more (on the more-than-human, Manning forthcoming a).