

Attunement and the Inframince

by Edith Doove, March 2019

Attunement, by way of default, takes place at a small scale as it usually focusses on subtle differences in intonation. It is only with attention for the smallness in life, the small intertwining movements of the human and non-human, that we are able to properly attune to our surroundings. Basically, attunement comes down to being carefully aware of the 'process of the world' as advocated by Whitehead, Deleuze and Cage.

Attuning is sensing possibilities or presences (whether by ear, eye, or the full body) we are usually not aware of. Marcel Duchamp's concept of the *inframince* can therefore be turned into the perfect tool to do just that as one of his 'definitions' of the *inframince* is that of 'possibility'. He connects the *inframince* to various everyday observations the most famous of which is that of the intermingling of smoke and breath in a 'marriage' when smoking. In all cases it is the usually overlooked, the awry. In its attention for the minor it is possible to make a connection to the *becoming minor* of Deleuze as an integral part of affective emancipation and from there not only to Serres' observation of the *clinamen*, but also of the parasite as an inventor of cybernetics.

The parasite is a similar operator as the *clinamen* in that it causes havoc via a minor but important intervention. The parallel with the *inframince* becomes clear through its triple meaning that forms a 'parasite logic'. This is summed up by Brown as "*analyse* (take but do not give), *paralyse* (interrupt usual functioning), *catalyse* (force the host to act differently)"¹ Although the first meaning (taking but not giving) might be less apparent and might even be reversed (giving but not taking), the *inframince*, by calling attention to the minor, does interrupt normal functioning and is a force for acting differently and in that sense does *take*. Once being made aware of the minor it cannot be un-thought. It inevitably leads to the state of what Serres calls 'white multiplicity' caused by a minimal differentiation, which the *inframince* does by calling attention. As in 'white noise', which is of equal intensity, white multiplicity "does not (yet) approach a clearly ordered form. It is a kind of in-between state, neither pure noise nor pure order, a third position ranged between the two" that has

¹ Brown, S.D. (2002) 'Michel Serres - Science, Translation and the Logic of the Parasite', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 19(3), pp. 16.

“maximum information value” (Brown, 2002, p.16) as long as one recognizes it. It is in other words a pure state of becoming.

Through this operation it is thus possible to connect the inframince to an ecological awareness or attunement. In *The Parasite* (1980) Serres argues “that by being pests, minor groups can become major players in public dialogue – creating diversity and complexity vital to human life and thought.”² In thus equating the minor, and the inframince, with ‘trouble’ we inadvertently end up with Donna Haraway and her inspiring *Staying with the Trouble – Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) in which she argues for a practice of sym-poiesis or ‘making-with’ in the arts and science to combat the negativity that surrounds the Anthropocene, which is reminiscent of Whitehead’s ‘togetherness’.

When explored in relation to emerging literature discussing our dealings with the nonhuman and our damaged planet, the *inframince* can potentially play the mischievous jester that points to otherwise unnoticed elements that matter and require attention.

Edith Doove

(This text is partially taken from my PhD-research **Laughter, *inframince* and cybernetics** Exploring The Curatorial as Creative Act, Plymouth University, 2017).

² From the back flap of the 2007 edition of *The Parasite* published by Minnesota Press.